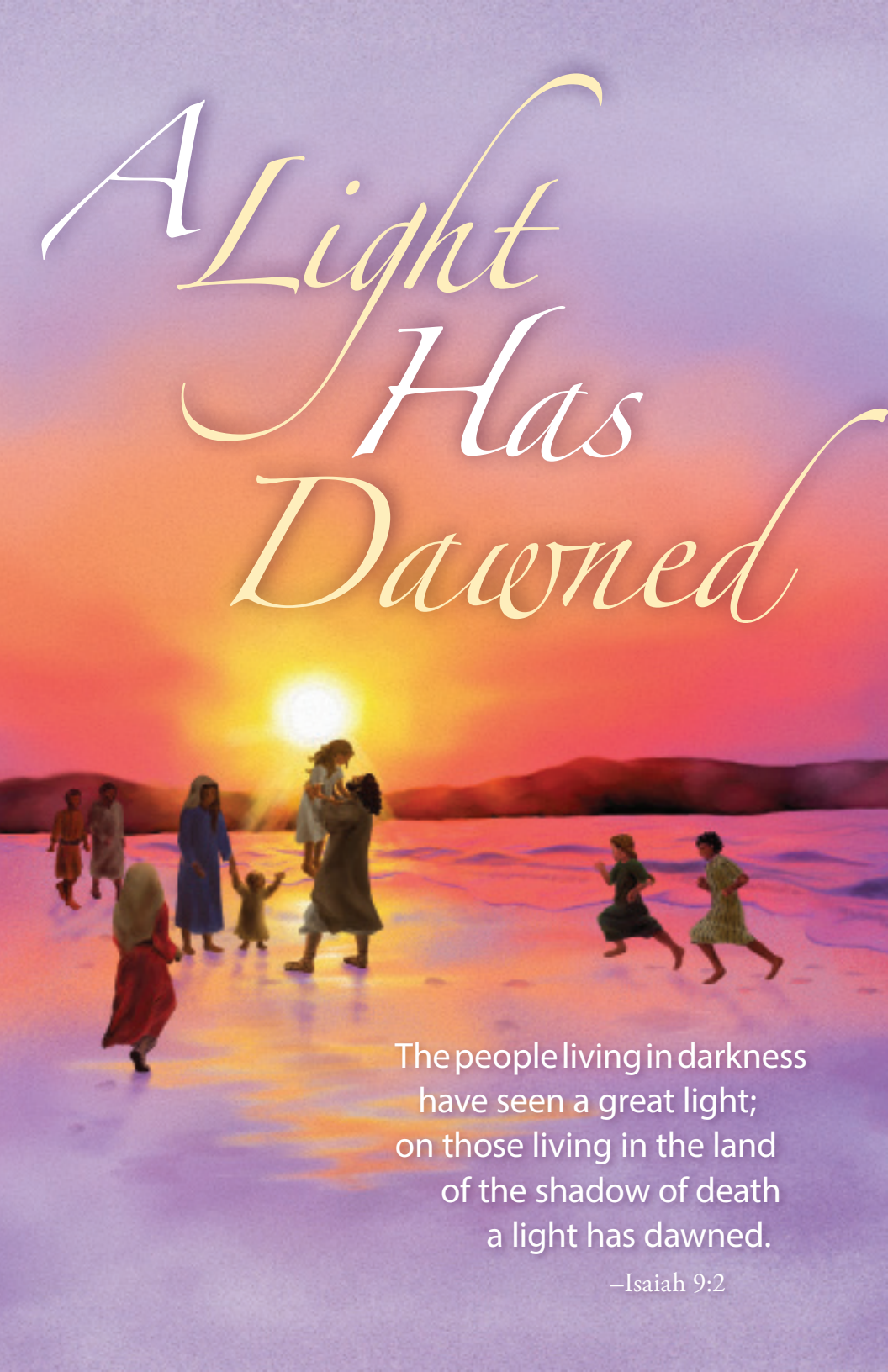


# A Light Has Dawned

A group of people, including men, women, and children, are walking across a vast, flat landscape towards a bright sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the top to a bright yellow near the sun. The ground is a mix of light and dark patches, suggesting a reflective or uneven surface. The overall mood is one of hope and renewal.

The people living in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land  
of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.

—Isaiah 9:2

As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at  
P.O. Box 68309, Indianapolis, IN 46268 USA.

**www.JesusLifeTogether.com**

Copyright © 2005, 2008 RealPeople@JesusLifeTogether.com

Copyright laws, as crazy as they are when we are talking about God's Word, require us to say the following: This material is copyrighted and may not be quoted and/or reproduced without its complete context (the entire document) except by the author's permission. You may, however, freely reproduce this in its entirety. And, of course, this publication is never to be "sold" for any price (2 Corinthians 2:17, Matthew 10:8).

*A Light  
Has  
Dawned*



*The people living in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land  
of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.*

—Isaiah 9:2

# *A Note to the Reader*

Our journey with Jesus today is much the same as for those of the first century. Despite the change in culture over two thousand years, we are just as complicated and confused, just as needy, and just as slow to grasp Who He really is. Needless to say, then, His work required to rewire us is just as radical. Will we be courageous enough to see ourselves, our families, and this world through His eyes?

This writing was intended to be a bit of a pathway—a tool—to discover more about Jesus, and that remarkable and dangerous journey sometimes referred to as “looking honestly in the mirror.” As humans we all tend to be numbed by the mundane of circumstances in our lives, the religious framework of familiar “bible verses” and “bible stories,” the sentimentality of cultural religion and tradition, and the prejudices that protect us from our sins and failings. From time to time, maybe it’s healthy to look at ourselves through others’ eyes. This writing is about that. We wanted to explore the lives of those first few humans, young and old, to know Him as He walked on this little planet of ours. We wanted to enter their experience of the One who holds the Galaxies in His hands, and touch and see and feel and struggle as they did—when the Messiah entered their lives. We wanted to enjoy, with them, all that amazed and drew them to Him. We wanted to encounter Yesu as they did....

The young ladies, you'll notice, chose to break some writing "conventions" in the pages that follow. They said they're still young, so they should get away with a LOT in writing style, and their helpers barely knew any better, either—so we just figured we'd all live through it, as is. ☺ Hopefully, though, if a disciple of Jesus had a lisp or a physical deformation, we would still "hear" without being distracted by the externals and get the Good of it all. Similarly, we hope that the certain "unusual qualities" you'll notice as you read these short pages won't prevent you from seeing Jesus afresh, and seeing how very much He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We desire for ourselves, and everyone, the experience of His wonder, and to encounter a forever-change by the Light of His presence.

A friend, on behalf of,

*Sally, Bek, Lizzy-b, Grace, Rebecca, and Dee*

# *Simon's Household*



*Simon Peter*



*Ashira*  
(ah she' ruh)  
15 year-old daughter



*Jared*  
(ja' red)  
17 year-old son



*Kitra*  
(ki' trah)  
5 year-old daughter



*Jedida*  
(je di' duh)  
Simon's wife



*Ezekiel*  
11 year-old son



*Rebekah*  
9 year-old daughter



*Ariel*  
13 year-old daughter



*Anna*  
Jedida's mother

---

*Friends and neighbors of Simon's household*



*Lemuel*  
(lēm'ūl)  
Jedida's brother



*Zivah*  
(zī'vuh)  
aunt of Ezra and Elizabeth



*Elizabeth*  
16 years old



*Ezra*  
19 years old



# The Day Dawns

---

*And we have the word of the prophets made more certain and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star arises in your hearts.*

2 Peter 1:19

Capernaum was waking. This was Ashira's favorite time of day, with the city poised on the very edge of peacefulness before the commotion surged into the usual flow of a day's work. She ran quickly down the twisted streets of packed earth. Though the winding tangle of roads often confused newcomers to the city, Ashira found her way with ease, having lived in this small, fertile corner of Galilee for every one of her fifteen years. Her friend, older by a year, trotted behind her with some difficulty. "Wait up, Ashira!" Elizabeth called, laughing. She stopped suddenly. "Ashira!"

Ashira reappeared from around a turn in the street. Her head cloth had slipped back in her haste, and a mound of wild, dark curls now framed the sharply cut lines of her face. "What is it?"

"Where is your jar?"

Ashira laughed—something she did often—and looked at her empty hands. "Oh, I completely forgot it! I was too eager to get out of the house this morning!"

Careful, responsible Elizabeth looked at her, bewildered for a moment. "It's no use going back; we're almost to the square. I brought two jars; you can use this one." Ashira unstrapped a jar from Elizabeth's back and lifted it to her own shoulder. Weaving their way again through the maze of streets, they turned right, left, and then left again. At the intersection of several roads, Elizabeth paused and

motioned down the street ahead. “Ezra warned that more Romans were recently posted down that direction. We’d better take a different way.” Ashira nodded in agreement, and they passed down a shaded side street. Before long the curving path opened onto the central square and the well. The girls greeted by name the several other women already gathered there, and joined in the cheerful conversation as each waited, jars in hand, for their turn with the rope and bucket.

As the leather bucket disappeared into the shadows of the well, Ashira leaned further over the stones and let the knots in the rope slip rhythmically through her fingers. She tipped her head back, scanning the paling sky.

“Oh, Elizabeth, look!” she touched her friend’s arm, and they craned their necks as the air was filled with the clatter of a hundred birds. The silhouetted shapes swooped low over the crowded, whitewashed houses, startling a pair of goats in a nearby courtyard. Then the cluster turned and diminished into a thread above the northern hills. Ashira let her breath out slowly, her brown eyes fixed on the empty sky.

“Elizabeth, don’t you wish you were a bird?” she asked.

Elizabeth stared wide-eyed at her friend. “I—I don’t know,” she stammered. “I can’t say I’ve ever really considered it before.”



“Good morning to you, girls.” Elizabeth’s aunt approached the well with her jar, her earrings jingling.

At the sound of Zivah’s voice, Ashira lost her grip on the rope she had been hauling up. The full bucket splashed loudly as it hit the water below. Sighing, she began to pull it up again. “Hello, Zivah,” she willed herself to say—but not warmly.

“Your father is at the Jordan again, isn’t he, Ashira?” Zivah questioned. The sharp-eyed woman always seemed to know, in an uncanny way, just what everyone else in Capernaum was up to.

Ashira nodded. “We’re expecting him back sometime today.”

Zivah shook her head disapprovingly. “It’s a shame you lost your uncle to the baptizer and his lot. And now your own father, too.”

Ashira felt a piercing pain in her tongue as her teeth came down on it forcefully. Zivah made it sound as though the men were thoughtlessly abandoning them...the woman could not be more incorrect. *Uncle Andrew is with the baptizer because he knows that John speaks the Truth.* Ashira had felt the fearlessness behind John’s words in many conversations with both her father and with her uncle. She knew it was the untainted desire to see God honored that had drawn Andrew away from his home and trade to be nearer to the Baptist. Her father *did* feel the responsibility of supporting their household and only left for short times. *If abba ever stays for long*—she swallowed the catch that rose in her throat at the thought—

But she only said, “We will see. Many think the Prophet’s words are important and trustworthy—a welcome light in our dark world.”

Zivah’s eyes narrowed into thin slits. “Hmmp!” She snatched up the rope and bucket and lowered it.

Elizabeth spoke quietly. “We’d better go now, Aunt; Ashira and I are going to work at the loom together this morning.”

Zivah straightened. “Oh, are you? I’ll stop by soon and check on you then. The loom is a fine one—left by your mother. Elizabeth, it’s not to be played with.”

“Ashira! Ashira!” a high voice echoed off the walls. Ashira’s tight face broke into a relieved smile as her younger brother Ezekiel tore

around the corner. “There you are! I have to get to the synagogue, but I came to tell you—”

“To the synagogue!? Look at your clothes, and your face! Young man, you must learn to wash up in the lake before you leave the shore. You can’t go to the synagogue like this.” Ashira rushed over to the panting boy. She splashed water on his hands and face and rubbed away the grime. Vigorously she brushed off his striped robe and cap, fussing at him. “Really, Ezekiel, I know you’re the son of a fisherman, but you can’t go to school smelling like fish! Whew!”

Zivah smirked. “Your little brother here isn’t exactly in the image of your older brother, eh?”

Ashira laughed. “Ezekiel, yes...he’s very different from Jared!” She stood up and straightened Ezekiel’s cap and smoothed his unruly hair, clucking her tongue. “Well, I’m afraid that’s the best I can do. Hurry to the synagogue, now!”

“But Ashira, I came to tell you that father returned just a little while ago—he was wondering where you were.”

Ashira’s face lit up. “Elizabeth, come on! My abba is home! Thank you, Ezekiel. Now run and don’t dawdle on the way. Goodbye, Zivah.” She disappeared down the street in a flutter of hurried steps.

“Ashira, your water!” Elizabeth called.

Ashira pounded back to the well. She retrieved her jar and raced away again, calling her friend to follow. Elizabeth moved down the street in as ladylike a run as she could muster, following the trail of spilled water.

Ashira’s sandals slapped the ground as she wove through the familiar streets. Just ahead she glimpsed the house. It was simple, like most of the other structures in this part of the town, but large enough for the ten members of her household. The gate in the wall surrounding the courtyard squawked as she opened it. She strode over to the large storage vessels near the back door and dumped her water into one of them. Elizabeth came to a stop behind Ashira, breathing hard. “I’m sorry for what Zivah said, Ashira. Are you all right?”

Ashira leaned against the house and nodded. “I think so; I just don’t understand how Zivah can have so little respect for John. He’s a prophet—I know he is!”

“You know Zivah is bitter about many things. She doesn’t always make much sense.” Elizabeth paused. “Well, my father is expecting me home. I’ll see you later about the weaving.” Picking up her jars, Elizabeth left through the gate.

“Goodbye,” Ashira called.

She stooped to lift a basket of food and skin of wine she had prepared earlier in hope of her father’s return. Setting off again, she now directed her quickening steps downhill towards the lake. Gradually, the houses around her became less closely packed. She crested the small hill that sloped to the water and could not help but pause. The field fell down from her feet like a robe, covering as far as she could see with red anemone flowers, beautiful against the rim of whitened stones where the water lapped at the shore. She filled her lungs with the sweet air, hung with the aroma of the spring blooms and lake water. The sun peeked over the eastern border of the darkly shadowed sea, throwing golden colors across the view in all directions. To the south, the hills of Gerasa glowed purple. She envisioned the other villages, nestled unseen on the distant shores. Somewhere in that direction was Magdala. Farther along the western shore was Tiberias, the new Roman city in which no Jew set foot. On the opposite side of the lake was Gergesa, and then close by, small Bethsaida. At the far south end of the lake and down the river would be Bethany, where her father had been for the past several days. He made trips to the Jordan often now.

Small voices behind Ashira caught her attention and she turned. Two girls ran from between the houses, their clothes flapping in the breeze: nine-year old Rebekah—practical, and one to act several years older than she actually was, followed closely by little Kitra—bright-eyed, talkative, yet always hiding behind her sisters’ skirts at the sight of a stranger.

Kitra pleaded, in her irresistible five-year-old lisp, “Can we come with you to thsee abba? Mama thsaid it would be all right if you take ush!”

“Of course.” Ashira bent down and grinned. “I’ll race you to the lake! Ready? Go!”

Both of her sisters let out a squeal and flung themselves down the hill, their arms spread back. Ashira ran after them, skillfully balancing the basket on her hip. They reached the water, and the clatter of a typical morning at Capernaum’s shore filled their ears. Men shouted to each other as they worked. Some mended sails, others sorted fish in baskets. The girls tiptoed around numerous racks where nets had been left to dry in the sun. Several fires were started, and flames gleamed off the scales of dozens of fish that lined the rotating spits. Scented smoke hung momentarily in the air, and then was rushed away with the cool, damp breeze off the lake. Ashira called for her abba, but her voice was lost in the ruckus. She searched the score of boats. Some were dragged up on the shore; others were secured to anchor stones and swayed in the water.

She made her way to a familiar vessel and the slender figure standing in the stern. “Hello, Jared!”

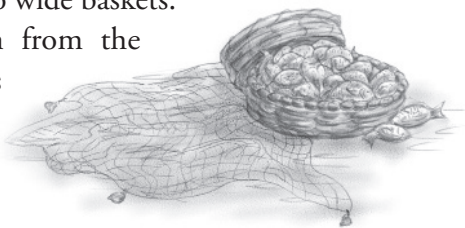
The seventeen-year-old, of medium height, brushed a thin lock of dark, sweat-soaked hair back from his equally sweaty forehead and grinned down at his sister. Ashira was always struck to see the usually tidy, thoughtful Jared such a mess after a fishing excursion.

“How was the trip?” she asked, leaning forward to observe the piled catch that he was scooping into wide baskets.

He grunted and swung down from the boat, heaving a heavy basket to his shoulder. “The time with the baptizer was great, if somewhat shorter than we might have liked.

His words sure have a way of capturing people.

His energy pervades your mind—as if it is not his at all! His words are strange, though hard to understand at times.” Jared paused and breathed a sigh. “But for the past couple days we’ve been fishing near Magdala and—well, you know how fishing usually goes for me.” He lifted his head and looked far out across the lake, motionless.



With a quick movement, she sent a sudden splash of cool water onto her brother. He sputtered and stared at her for a moment, shaking his head in shock. “You’re good for me, little sister!” he laughed, but she avoided his return spray with a quick spring towards the rocks.

A strong, familiar voice rang out behind them. “My Shira!” Her father’s broad figure appeared through a wisp of smoke. Kitra’s arms were wrapped around his neck as she rode on his back, and Rebekah’s small hand was clasped in his huge one.

“Abba!” Ashira hurried into his huge embrace. She caught the familiar scent of lake water and fish in his damp clothes and shaggy mop of tangled hair. She looked up into his leathered face and smiled. “I’ve brought you breakfast!” Simon accepted the food eagerly and tore into a small loaf with a sound of satisfaction.

“Jared!” he barked, looking over his shoulder, “Get some more fuel on that fire!” Ashira removed the skin of wine from her shoulder and offered it to him, along with the cheese and a handful of almonds. He threw up his hands as if he were amazed. “Your name means ‘prosperous,’ and so you are, Shira! Look! You’ve brought me a feast!” They both chuckled, and as he dropped to the ground the younger girls ran off giggling. Ashira sat down beside him, setting her chin on her knees. He swallowed several mouthfuls and swiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Tighten that line on the mooring stone, Jared! Your knot is slipping.” Under his breath, Simon muttered in exasperation, “What am I going to do with that boy?!”

Ashira lowered her head. Why was it always this way? She loved her brother. He was everything she was not: quiet, practical, sensible and steady. And her father—her adoration for him she had long stopped trying to put into words. She wished she could explain to someone what her abba was like—the life of their household, a blundering blaze of fervent passion, he rarely thought about anything for very long before diving into it. In the most joyous way, he was almost crazy. Ashira’s closeness to these two made the constant tension between her father and Jared all the more painful to her. But what could she do?

“Ah, Simon?”

Ashira looked up as James called out from a nearby boat. “What about the catch of three hundred you promised we’d come back with one of these days?” He grinned and motioned to the baskets of fish Jared had laid out neatly on the shore.

Simon wagged his finger at James playfully. “You just wait, my friend. If Andrew and your brother John get back before the coming rains, we’ll be hauling them in. You just wait and see!”

Ashira laughed. It was just like her father to aim for the impossible. “How many was it this time, abba?”

“Despite James’s disappointment, it *was* a good catch—I counted eighty-seven.”

Ashira dug her toes into the rocky soil. “Did you see Uncle Andrew and John when you went to the Jordan?”

Simon smiled slightly. “Yes, I saw them...still thinking and pondering and asking the Prophet questions.”

Ashira opened her mouth, but Simon caught her. “—And you want to know more of the Baptist?”

She nodded.

He leaned forward eagerly. “The crowds are large—more and more are being baptized.”

“Like you, Andrew, and the others were.”

Simon nodded thoughtfully. “But the prophet John keeps saying over and over that another is coming after him. He said that one is coming who won’t baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit, and with *fire*.” Simon put emphasis on the last word. “What do you think he’s talking about, Ashira? I can’t understand it all. When I was down in Bethany, he said that one stands among us who we do not know. John said, ‘I’m not worthy even to untie his sandals.’”

“Abba, do you think He is really here in Israel?”

“I’ve not met such a Man, Shira, but it has to be true—all these signs, and John’s prophecy—the Messiah is here. He’s alive; we just don’t know where or when we’ll find Him.”

“Can you tell me again what happened—was it thirty years ago?”

“Yes. It was the year of the census, and several strange happenings stirred the hearts, or at least the conversations, of the people. There was a great star, never seen before or since, that hung in the sky. Some say it was only a rumor, but a few shepherds near Bethlehem spread the tale of a child, born at that time. An angel, they said, had promised this was the Savior. And then there are the prophecies of old. The song your grandmother sings, from the words of Isaiah, is one.”

Ashira knew it well and repeated the words.

*“A child is born,  
A son is given to you  
And all the world is under His reign.  
Listen! At His coming, you will call Him this:  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
The expansion of His kingdom  
And the increase of His peace  
Will not end.  
He will sit on David’s throne  
and rule over His kingdom,  
Building it on a firm foundation  
And upholding it  
With wisdom, justice, and righteousness.  
Beyond time, through kings and nations,  
Though they rise and fall  
His House will be forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
Will bring this to pass.”*

It was quiet for a moment. James called about something related to salting the fish and Simon stood. “Shira, you can tell your mother I’ll be finished before noon. It won’t be long before I can come home.”

Ashira grinned as she nodded. She knew well enough by now that, after a successful fishing trip, “before the noon meal” meant “close to sunset.”

Moving off towards James, Simon rumbled further directions to Jared. “When the fish are unloaded, spend some time mending the net you tore.”

A sudden movement in the corner of Ashira’s eye caught her attention. A man down the beach was running towards them. She stood quickly and stared as the figure drew closer.

“Uncle Andrew!” she shouted in astonishment.

Simon whirled. “Little brother! What are you doing here?”

Andrew stumbled to a stop, panting. “Simon! We have found Him!”

“Who? What do you mean?”

“The Messiah, Simon! His name is Jesus—this man must be the Messiah!”

Simon drew in his breath sharply and blinked several times, as though the wind had been knocked out of him. “What?”

Andrew struggled to catch his breath. “Simon, when John baptized Him, he said that he saw the Spirit, like a dove, come and remain on Him. Later, when he saw the man again, John called Him the Lamb of God. Then he turned to us and said ‘This is the one I have been telling you about for so long. I have been baptizing so that *He* may be revealed.’” Andrew pleaded, “Will you come with me?”

“Andrew, I’ve been away for days already!”

Ashira glanced at her father. His voice was weighted with responsibility and a measure of hesitation, but she caught in his eyes a spark of fervor.

“You have to meet him, Simon. I have spent some time with Him, and I...come! Come see for yourself!”

Simon turned and called, “Jared, mind the fish—roast those large ones, and sort out some of the smaller ones for the market.” With that, he ran down the shore after Andrew, towards Bethsaida.

Ashira watched them, breathless. “But, abba...”

Simon stopped and turned back to face her. “Don’t worry, Shira,” he called. “Tell your mother that I will be back soon, maybe in a few more days.” The smile that flew across his face melted her lingering uncertainty in an instant. Then he was gone.

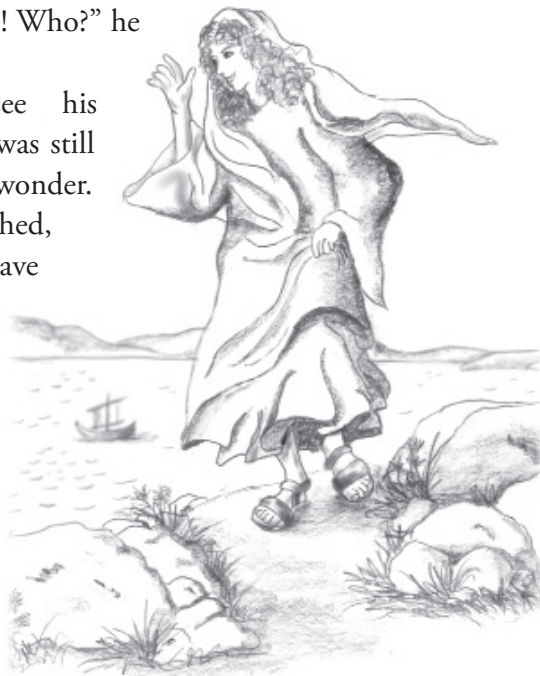
Jared’s confused voice called out from the boat at the shore behind her. “Ashira, what happened? Where’s father going?”

Ashira fumbled for words, shouting back toward her brother. “He—he left—to the, uh, Jordan! He went to see—*could it be Him?!?*”

“What do you mean?! Who?” he cried out.

Ashira could see his bewildered face but she was still lost in her own world of wonder.

“Oh, Jared!” she laughed, unable to answer him. “I have to go tell Mother what happened!” Picking up her skirts, she bounded up the slope. Her thoughts whirled with excitement. *The Messiah, possibly here? Now? After so many years...could it be? In my lifetime?!*



She practically flew through the streets, whipping around corners as fast as her legs would carry her. She apologized hurriedly as she collided with a vendor on his way to the market. Finally, the house was near. She clattered through the front gate. “Mother! Abba left again!”



# Good Tidings

---

*You who bring good tidings...  
lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up!*

Isaiah 40:9

Jedida's slender, delicate frame was quite the contrast to that of her husband, Simon. Kneeling gracefully, she bent over a kneading trough, silently working in the large, well-shaded courtyard. The stillness around her was broken only by the whisper of the fresh sea breeze and an occasional fisherman's call in the distance. She sighed contentedly. Ezekiel had brought the word of his abba's return to the shore earlier that morning, and she would be happy to see him again. She certainly had missed Simon while he was gone and looked forward to the spark he always brought with him. But the quiet was pleasant for the moment in contrast to the normal bustling of their busy house. She was grateful that life was good for them even in these troubled times—even though the fishing wasn't always prosperous, even though Rome seemed to be tightening its grip and spreading its influence all through Israel. Still, there was hope. Hope in this prophet of the wilderness, John. Perhaps some with something to hide or protect would call it "bondage." But, there was great hope in his message of repentance, of the kingdom, of the One to come. "Soon, Adonai," she whispered aloud at the thought of the Messiah. She looked forward to what news Simon would bring from the Jordan.

Push, fold, push, fold, push. The bread yielded to her smooth, strong hands. She lifted her hand and neatly tucked a stray wisp of

straight black hair behind her ear. High on the roof she heard her baby's sweet giggle as he called aloud "Nana!" Jedida smiled again at the thought of her own mother tending the baby. The children adored their Nana, and her quick, warm laugh was often heard throughout the house. Jedida smiled to herself. *Mother is such a help. How could I ever keep up everything without her?*

Yes, there was so much to do. Seven children to keep track of was plenty, not to mention the endless chores in the many-roomed, maze-like house that had grown with each generation. The many tasks to finish before the noon meal systematically filtered through her mind. *We need to bake the bread and finish the lentil stew. This courtyard must be swept. But maybe there's still time to make some fig cakes for Simon and Jared?*



"Mother!" A loud bang followed shortly after the earnest shout. Startled, Jedida looked up from her kneading. Though Ashira bursting through the gate was not totally out of the ordinary, something in her daughter's voice made Jedida tense, unsure that this was just an "abba's home" announcement.

"Ashira! What's the matter?!" Jedida uncharacteristically wiped her hands on her garment as she quickly rose, "Is everyone all right?"

“Oh, Mother!” Ashira laughed. “Abba just left! *Again!*”

“Left? What do you mean *left?*” Jedida asked, puzzled over her daughter’s excitement. “Why, he’s only just come home!” Even as she asked, thoughts flew through Jedida’s mind. *Every time Simon and James have returned to their fishing from those trips to see the Baptist their passion and energy for the Kingdom burns even more intensely. And I’m glad! But what has happened now?* Jedida slowed her thoughts, and calmly asked, “What happened, Ashira?”

Ashira took in a deep breath to prepare herself for the words she could hardly hold back. “Uncle Andrew returned and he came to get father! He said they’ve met a man—the Baptist says He is the Messiah! The *Messiah*, Mother!”

Jedida gasped in astonishment over the immensity of what her daughter had said. The question over Simon’s departure was suddenly swept aside by this news they had all longed for. This *wondrous* news—*The Promised One of Israel!* Tears brimmed in her eyes. “Now?” she whispered. “Has He finally revealed Himself? Out of so many generations in Israel might *we* see the *Messiah*, Ashira?”

Ashira continued in a new surge of elation. “Abba and I were talking by the boat, Jared was cleaning up the nets, and suddenly Uncle Andrew was rushing toward us along the shore. The prophet John, the baptizer, had introduced Uncle Andrew to the Messiah! His name is *Yesu*. Oh, Mother! If the Prophet says this man is the Messiah, then he *must be*, right?? I mean, thousands upon thousands of people have been baptized by John and trust him to show them the One who is to come. He wouldn’t be wrong, would he??” Ashira sat down on a wobbly bench by the courtyard wall, breathing hard and marveling at the news.

Jedida continued to ponder incredulously. “Ashira, we all *knew* that the Messiah must be alive; there were so many signs!” She paused. Then, carefully and intentionally Jedida said aloud the name her heart had waited so long to know. “*Jesus*.” She looked at Ashira, her face radiant. Though now completely at a loss for words, her mind still overflowed with thoughts and implications. *Andrew, James,*

*John, and Simon—my Simon—meeting the future King of Israel, the Restorer of the Kingdom of David!*

Yet somehow in the marvel of it all, Jedida suddenly felt uneasy. *If this really is the Messiah, our lives and the lives of everyone around us are about to change FOREVER! Am I really ready for this?* Then she silently chided herself for so quickly turning her concerns inward. But still, warring thoughts continued to clamor within her.

Drawing in a deep breath, Jedida spoke with intentional stability. “Ashira, tell me more! Did your abba give any idea of when he might return?”

“He said something to Jared about a few days. Oh, *Mother*. I hardly know what to think! My mind seems to be jumping to a thousand unrelated things.” Ashira stared intently across the courtyard wall, where in the distance she could catch a glimpse of the Sea of Galilee that they all loved so dearly. “When abba first said good-bye, and I knew he was going to meet the One who John says is the future King, I was so excited,” Ashira said. “But in a way, it is also—frightening!” Ashira suddenly stood and whirled around to face her mother, distress creeping onto her face with a realization, “Do you think abba would really leave us for long, like Uncle Andrew? Will he stay? Might he never come back?!” Her eyes welled with tears.

Jedida looked at Ashira in astonishment. She could see, reflected, visible, and magnified in her daughter, her own overwhelming feelings. “Oh, child!” she said, finding relief in her own laughter. “In one moment you somehow expose your mother’s silly doubts with changes of emotion that would compete even with your father’s. Whatever will I do with you!” Jedida again laughed aloud, drawing her daughter into her arms. “Let’s not let our love for your abba lower the eyes of our hearts.” With new enthusiasm, she expressed what she knew was right and true. “Ashira, Israel has been praying for the coming Messiah for hundreds of years. If this man is the Promised One, we have nothing to fear, even for your abba!”

# *They Loved to Think of Him*

---

*Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other and the Lord listened to what they said. In His presence a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared Him and loved to think of Him.*

Malachi 3:16

Voices chimed behind them as the courtyard gate again swung open, and Jedida turned, “Why, Ezra! What brings you here?!”

Sauntering in through the gate was their tall young neighbor, darkened by the sun of nineteen summers and damp from a long morning of hard labor. His dark eyes glowed merrily as one corner of his mouth lifted in amusement. He nodded respectfully to Jedida, “Good morning!” Little Kitra was riding high on his strong shoulders, her loose braids flung across her rosy cheeks. Her hands grasped fistfuls of his dark hair as she swayed high above the surrounding world. Rebekah, a basket in her arms, was beaming at their side. Ezra laughed heartily as he swooped Kitra to the ground. “Well, it seems that Ashira left her basket of food at the lake—along with a few other valuables.”

Ashira’s deep brown eyes widened. “Oh! Oh! Mother,” she cried, “I—I didn’t mean to leave them...I’m so sorry!”

“Ashira, you left ush!” Kitra chided playfully, placing her hands on her hips in an emphatic and exaggerated gesture.

“Sorry that your work was interrupted, Ezra. Thank you for bringing the girls home.”

Ezra waved away Jedida’s apology. “I was coming up, anyway, to help with my father.” He winked at Rebekah.

Grandma Anna's cheerful voice came from the roof. "Jedida! What's all the ruckus?" Soon she was stepping gingerly down the stairs, with the baby on her hip. Thirteen-year-old Ariel trailed behind her with wilted flowers in her braid. The story of Ezra's find was shared, and everyone broke into fresh laughter, even Ashira, now blushing brightly.

Ezra turned to go, and then paused, looking toward Jedida. "If it would be any help to you, I told Jared I could help him with the fishing while Simon's gone back to see the baptizer again. He has enough work for three men."

Jedida laughed softly, as the momentarily forgotten wonder of the morning's news broke anew upon her thoughts. *The Messiah*. The name of hope rekindled expectation in her heavily pounding heart. "Oh, did Jared not hear? Simon left again, but this time not to see the Baptist."

Anna moved closer and put her hand on Jedida's arm. "What's this, Daughter? Where has he gone now?"

Jedida seated herself on the small bench, pulling Kitra into her lap. "Mother! Andrew came to find Simon—he had news from the Jordan. He had met a man...named *Jesus*."

She continued, the momentum of her eagerness carrying her on. "The Prophet said that this man was the awaited one. The baptizer called him the Messiah of Israel! Andrew has taken Simon to go meet Him." Jedida laughed. In the corner of her eye Jedida could see Ashira nearly bursting with elation. "You tell them, Ashira. Tell them what your uncle said!"



Ashira repeated the phrases she had heard during those fleeting moments on the shore as her grandmother, Ezra, and her siblings listened with rapt attention. “John called Him ‘the Lamb of God.’ He said something about Jesus baptizing with fire and that He would ‘take away the sins of the world!’ And then Andrew said he had followed Jesus to the house where He was staying...” How she wished she knew more details! She broke off, looking at those around, all captivated by words they had longed to hear for so long and yet, like her, could hardly comprehend. “I also heard from Uncle Andrew that the prophet John said, ‘This Man who comes after me is greater than me because He was before me.’”

“What does he mean by that?” Anna asked, completely enthralled.

Ashira threw up her hands—she had been wondering the same thing. “Uncle Andrew didn’t explain—that’s all I heard.”

Ezra looked up, his eyes pleading for more. “What is He like? Does anyone else know of these things? What will Jesus do next?” His voice was excited, but neither Ashira nor Jedida had any more to tell him.

Anna sat down and put a trembling hand to her lips. She spoke, half to herself. “I never thought I might live to see the day. Jedida, after so many generations who deliberately forgot Jehovah’s goodness and rebelled against His way, Yahweh chooses now to reveal His Savior, the Messiah?”

Kitra suddenly straightened up and peered quizzically into her grandmother’s face. “Nana, what’s a Mesthiah?”

Anna’s voice was shaky, and her eyes glistened. “Ah, child...the Messiah is the True King.”

Ariel brightened. “Will He be like King David?”

Anna shook her head. “If this is the Messiah, He will be greater than any other king, even King David.”

A wind rushed through the courtyard and rustled the leaves of the acacia tree in the corner.

“I shouldn’t keep my father waiting,” Ezra said, “and I told Jared I’d be back before long. Jedida, may I tell him what has happened?”

“Oh, yes, please do, and thank you again, Ezra.”

Kitra jumped down from her mother's lap and followed the young man to the gate, calling goodbye and waving until he was out of sight around the corner.

Ashira snapped her fingers as a thought came to her remembrance. "Oh! Mother, Elizabeth and I were going to work on the loom together this morning."

"Ah, good! Why don't you go on over now. While she and Ezra take care of their father, you can get started."

As she neared the gate, Ashira winced suddenly and turned. "Mother, Zivah was going to come help—we saw her at the well earlier, and—"

Jedida gave her a knowing look. "I'll come in a few minutes. You go ahead."

Anna sent Ariel and Rebekah up to the roof to gather the clothes she had been mending earlier, and Kitra hurried after them, running along at Rebekah's heels as usual. The older woman stooped and set the baby on the ground. He toddled over to the corner and stretched up on tiptoe, reaching for a leaf that dangled just above his pudgy fingers.

"Jedida," Anna said softly, reaching up to smooth her daughter's hair, "you don't quite seem yourself."

Jedida smiled. "It's nothing. I just...it feels like the day Andrew left. Every bit of news about the coming Messiah is so marvelous—*yet so hard to grasp!* And now, if this one John speaks of *is* the Messiah, I wouldn't want Simon to be anywhere but at His side. But it will be so much different with Simon gone. How long will he be? There are so many mouths to feed, and Jared is still young..." Her voice trailed off.

Anna thought for a moment, "Well, we'll trust that it will all be made clear soon enough. I'm sure Simon will bring us news quickly."

*His Name is Yesu*

*Jedida's Psalm*

*Oh, the wonder,  
Oh, the joy,  
Oh, the marvel of it all!  
Could it be the Hope of Israel has come?*

*His name is Yesu.  
What's He like?  
Does He laugh or cry at all?  
This man Jesus, could it be? Is He the One?*

*Jesus! What a name!  
No longer just a hope to which we cling.  
Jesus! He Who Saves.  
Has He really come fulfilling all our dreams?*

*A light has dawned  
In the form of man!  
But right amongst us? Here and now?  
Walking, talking under this same sky?*

*Will we see Him?  
Will we hear Him?  
Can we look into His eyes?  
Can we touch the One of whom men prophesied?*

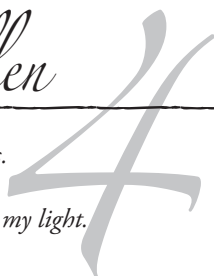
*Yesu! What a name!  
No longer just a hope to which we cling.  
Jesus! He Who Saves.  
Have you really come fulfilling all our dreams?*



# Though I Have Fallen

---

Do not gloat over me, my enemies.  
Though I have fallen, I will rise.  
Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.  
Micah 7:8



Whistling softly an old tune of celebration, Ashira approached the house of Jesse. The exhilaration of this morning's news still ran strong through her and could not be contained. With a little skip, she reached the side entrance of their home—and froze, her hand reaching for the half-open door.

“Elizabeth! When will you learn?!” The shrill voice rang out from within the dimly lit house, alarming and painful in Ashira's ears. “Just look at these loaves! You left them too long again—and they're ruined!”

Zivah had already arrived! Ashira shivered. In a flicker, her jubilation was gone. *Uuugh!* she sighed. *Another Zivah storm!* At the peak of summer one of the most dreaded Galilean phenomena was the *sharkia*—it came furiously and without warning. The most tranquil day could be transformed in a matter of minutes to icy torrents of rain and a vicious wind that laid crops flat and sunk fishing boats caught in the havoc. Ashira always felt a similar impact from Zivah's presence.

All thoughts of the Messiah and her father fled her mind. The only thing to do was brace herself and head into whatever was to come.

Elizabeth and Zivah looked up from where they stood, close to the fire. Both faces were flushed, one from the heat and embarrassment, the other from temper. The hazy air was choked with the scent of

badly burnt bread. Ashira greeted them quietly and fell into awkward silence. Zivah hardly paused in her barrage.

“Do you know how much work has now been wasted by your carelessness? The entire morning’s labor has resulted in *this!*” She aimed a finger at the crisp, darkened flat loaves laid across the stones encircling the fire pit, where dying embers glowed faintly. “Go and tell your father that he’ll have to wait a while longer for his meal. I’m going to fetch more fuel.” Zivah whirled and stomped off towards the door through which Ashira had entered. Glimpsing Ashira’s pained, silent face, she stopped, hands on her hips. “Well?! You didn’t come here to stand and glower. Did it occur to you to help?” Without waiting for an answer, she slammed the door behind her.

Ashira’s face reddened and the familiar waves of anger broke upon her thoughts. She threw her head up. “Elizabeth, how long has she been here?!”

Elizabeth fingered her tunic. “She came in just before you did.”

Ashira slapped her hand against her leg, fuming. “That woman is a pure expert at stirring up trouble—will she ever stop?!”

“Ashira, don’t be bitter. There’s more than enough of that in this world. We should have compassion, not bitterness. Don’t let your heart be ruined.”

Ashira shut her mouth hard, her knuckles whitening as she clenched first one hand, then the other. She knew deeply that Elizabeth was right, but she could find in herself no other feeling for Zivah than furious annoyance. She thought suddenly of her father, and knew he would be erupting with the same anger if he were in this situation. Countless times, Ashira had been told how she had her father’s temper, and she was beginning to believe it. She knew it needed to change.

She glanced at the courtyard beyond the open front door. Ezra appeared, carrying a small and weary man in his arms. She caught Elizabeth’s eyes and forced a stiff smile. “I’ll tidy things here, Elizabeth. It looks like Ezra could use some help with your father.” Elizabeth brushed a hand across her cheek and nodded. Ashira dropped to

her knees and began swatting the burnt loaves into a basket, and tossed the old ashes into a pot. Snatching the broom from a corner she swept the floor with swift, jerky motions. She paused from her irritated flurry of activity and peered through the door.

Together, Elizabeth and Ezra lowered their father to a mat in the shade of a tamarisk tree that hung over the wall of the courtyard. They propped up his weak body among some cushions, each movement made with utmost care and gentleness. Across his withered and twisted legs, Elizabeth spread a blanket she had woven, while Ezra brought him water. Jesse said something that Ashira could not quite hear and the three laughed together.

Ashira shook her head in wonder. Since the death of their mother years ago, Jesse's two children had looked after their invalid father, caring for his every need. The burden of responsibility Ezra and Elizabeth carried, though it had absorbed a large piece of their



childhood, was swallowed up by their utter love for their father. It had effected a maturity in them beyond their years.

*I can't imagine it, Ashira thought. Enduring all that they must, including Zivah's constant criticism, with such patience.*

"Oh, Ashira, thank you—you wouldn't know by the looks of this house the mess I made this morning!" Elizabeth awakened Ashira from her musing as she reentered the room.

"A few burnt loaves isn't that tragic." Ashira remarked, with lingering resentment. "Zivah would never see it this way, but most of the trouble aroused is her own fault. She makes it look like the blame belongs to everyone but herself. I, for one, have a hard time getting anything done right when she is around."

Elizabeth brought out the kneading trough and together the girls began working water into the flour for a new batch of dough. "No, it was careless of me. I was so intent on preparing the loom correctly that I simply forgot about my baking."

"You see?" Ashira whispered almost triumphantly. "Even the possibility of her presence creates confusion!"

Elizabeth was silent.

In that silence, Ashira felt unclean about her quiet tirade. She quickly pushed her energy into preparing the bread with her friend, smothering the scraping of her conscience.

"Girls, why are you not at the loom?" Zivah strolled in, her headcloth was looped under her arm and filled with brush and kindling. She kicked the door shut. "You two were supposed to be hard at work on that cloth by now. Go on! I'll handle things in here. Wait—why so much dough?" Zivah dumped her load of fuel and stooped over the kneading trough, scrutinizing the dough. "Ashira, you're making enough bread to feed your entire household. We only need half this amount!"

Ashira's quickening pulse throbbed in her temples. She tried to protest. "We were wanting to help..."

"And what do you know of help? Oh, go on before you make more trouble. I'll take care of the bread." Zivah sat down and worked the dough.

Ashira rose to her feet. Her breath came heavily, and inside she was churning with agony. Elizabeth motioned towards the back room, knowing better than to persist with her aunt—it would only fan the flame. “The loom is all ready; back here, Ashira.” Ashira moved over towards the doorway.

“Oh, and Ashira,” Zivah said. “I heard a bit of news while I was out. Your father is off again, this time to see some ‘messiah!’”

Ashira wilted and she stopped, stone still. *Oh, no. Not this, too.*

Zivah went on. “What did I tell you this morning? Once your father’s sight is set, you won’t be getting him back! Who knows what he’ll do next? No one has even heard of this newest *messiah* yet. None of the leaders have even once mentioned him—but your father just had to be the first to go investigate! It’s foolery. If you ask me, it will all come to nothing and he will have wasted his time. And leaving his household—how will you manage with so many mouths to feed? Jared doesn’t know how to handle the fishing—”

Ashira put her foot down and whirled to face Zivah. She could not restrain the stream of words. “Zivah!” She nearly shouted. “You don’t know my father! You don’t understand him! Do you think you know what you are saying?! My father isn’t like that! He is kind and he is loving. You are interpreting his passion for God as irresponsibility, and you are *wrong!* Abba loves God, and he loves *us*. You, on the other hand, you—” She stopped herself, at a loss for words. Ashira looked up, panting. She could feel the redness in her own face. Her mother stood in the doorway. Jedida had heard the whole thing, and her eyes were wide—filled with alarm and dismay.

“Well!” Zivah said in exaggerated offense. “Jedida, is this how you raise your daughter? Why, if these were the days of Moses, this child would be taken out and stoned for disrespect such as this!”

Ashira’s hands dropped to her side, and she stood unmoving, averting her eyes from her mother’s gaze. Jedida set down her basket and stepped over to her daughter. Pulling her by the elbow over to a corner, they exchanged urgent whispers. Snippets floated over to Zivah as she hummed and kneaded the dough before her.

“Ashira, you may never speak so! You must soften your heart and take responsibility for your own failings, too!”

“Mother, you heard—I *couldn't* let her go on like that. I didn't mean....”

“...You must...Now!”

Ashira scuffled over towards Zivah. She did not look at her. “I'm sorry.” Her sullen voice and taut face meant everything but sorrow.

“Hmmm...” Zivah shook her head. With a few swift movements she arranged freshly-shaped loaves around the fire pit to bake. She drew herself up to her full height. “Well, Jedida, since you are here, I suppose it is possible the household will be adequately cared for. I must leave for now. Goodbye.”

The tall woman passed through the door in an abrupt swish of embroidered robes. Ashira made a small moaning sound.

“Come, Ashira,” Elizabeth said, her heart aching and her forehead furrowed in concern. “Shall we get back to the loom?”

# Who Has Believed?

---

*Who has believed our message, and to whom  
has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

Isaiah 53:1

Jedida and Ashira left Elizabeth's house and approached their own courtyard gate in silence. Jedida spotted her older brother Lemuel sitting on a bench with her children around his feet. Her heart began to lighten. Her brother always had a way to make her problems seem smaller, and she loved to see him. Always, he was the spunky one. As she came closer, she could see him gesturing wildly as he described his latest escapade with the Arabians. Ashira, following closely behind Jedida, saw her Uncle Lem as well, and took in a deep breath as if to flush out the remnants of pain and frustration associated with the encounter with Zivah. She, too, brightened at the welcome sight of her favorite uncle.

Jedida opened the gate and let Ashira and herself through. Lemuel caught sight of Jedida and stood up with a broad smile, extending his arms to her. Jedida surveyed her tall older brother. In his early forties, his jet-black hair was neatly trimmed, reaching down to his beard. His handsome face was weathered and tanned by years of traveling across dusty deserts. Smile lines surrounded his sharp, black merchant's eyes. He had always been the dependable one, this brother of hers. When he was young, Lemuel had become an apprentice to Nadab, a wealthy merchant. His keen mind caught on quickly, and soon he was a merchant in his own right. And now, though one of the richest and busiest men in all of Galilee, he never failed to visit his mother,

Anna, and sister, Jedida, often. He loved both of them very much, and they knew it.

Lemuel's deep voice rumbled as he picked his way around the children, "Jedida! It is so good to see you, little sister! And Ashira! My, she'll be as tall as me next time I visit!" Ashira, one of the shortest members of the family, cocked her head playfully at him. Jedida chuckled and gave her brother a hug.

"Yes, she is growing—in *many* ways," she added with a knowing look toward Ashira. "Ashira, why don't you go on inside, and we'll talk later."

Ashira quietly obeyed. Glancing sheepishly at her uncle, she slipped into the house.

Always knowing how to ease an awkward moment, Lemuel turned and announced to the other children with a dramatic sweep of his hand, "And so I escaped miraculously with all of my goods from those bandits and here I stand now to tell you of it! The end." The children pleaded for more. Laughing, Lemuel waved them off, and seeing that they were not going to get any more stories for the time being, the little ones scattered throughout the house and courtyards.



Lemuel took Jedida by the arm and they strolled to the shade of the acacia tree. “So, little sister, how is it going with your household? Everyone managing all right in the weeks that I’ve been gone?”

Jedida paused a moment. “It depends on what you call ‘all right.’ Ashira just lost her temper with Elizabeth’s aunt, Zivah—”

“A character trait she got directly from Simon, no doubt,” Lemuel playfully chided.

Choosing to ignore his remark, Jedida continued, “. . .and Ariel seems to get more quiet every day. She spends more and more time on the roof, as if she finds more pleasure in being by herself than with others.”

“Ah, but at least she has the quiet, sweet disposition of her mother, if not yet your passion for caring for others,” Lemuel said with a wink and a smile. “Come, come. Tell me about the others!”

Jedida went on. “Ezekiel is a constant bundle of energy. As for the younger children, yes, I suppose everyone is all right. *I* wouldn’t be all right if it weren’t for Mother. She is such a wonderful help, and I think she has more energy than all of us put together!” Lemuel and Jedida softly laughed together.

“And what of Simon? Surely he should be home by now?” Lemuel asked.

Jedida gave a barely visible grin. She turned to her older brother. “No,” she paused a moment, suddenly unsure of how Lemuel might respond to the news. “I was just getting to that part.” Jedida somehow didn’t get the impression Lemuel would consider it the Good News that the rest of them had felt. “He left just today. Andrew returned this morning to tell him about a man they believe is the Messiah!” Jedida looked hopefully to her brother, “Lemuel, the *Messiah!* They say his name is *Yesu!*” Again, she looked into Lemuel’s eyes, hoping to see even a trace of something positive in his reaction. “As soon as Simon heard, he left with Andrew. I don’t know how long he will be gone, but Lem, this might truly be the One we’ve been waiting for!”

Lemuel looked thoughtful for a moment, “So Simon has gone to check this man out. Well, Simon and I have our differences, but if he

believes so strongly about his calling to find a Messiah...well, I can at least say I admire that in a man.”

Jedida nodded slightly as she sat down onto the nearby bench, doubting his words. Lemuel and Simon were as different as two men could be. Lemuel was refined, cultured, and had a passion for being “responsible”. In her brother’s eyes, Simon was as uncultured and unimpressive as they come. Lemuel was rich and successful; and Simon, well, Jedida always thought his heart made up for any wealth he might ever lack. His passion was certainly more about things of God, figuring that if that was in order, then the household would be as well. Yes, the two men were quite different. As she was about to speak, Anna called from the kitchen, “Lemuel? Come inside and get something to eat. You must be starving!”

Lemuel winked at his sister and, laying his hand on her shoulder gently kissed the top of her head. Then he acquiesced to his mother’s call and swept across the courtyard into the house as Jedida turned her attention to the children.

Once inside the house, Lemuel grabbed a handful of dates from the bowl Anna offered, as he immediately began fuming about Simon. He was clearly not as supportive as he had implied earlier. In fact, he was angry.

“But, Mother,” he said in a trying-to-be-hushed voice, “He left his entire family—seven children and two women—to follow some man no one’s ever heard of and whom he’s never seen, who his *brother* tells him is the Messiah? It is the height of absurdity! Jedida’s beginning to wear down. It is clear she is not only tending to this household, but taking it upon herself to see that Jesse’s household is provided for as well. And as a matter of fact, you don’t look as you used to yourself! Nine mouths plus neighbors to feed is a lot. Who is going to take care of the fishing business? Jared?! He is not made for fishing!”

Anna, who had been busily working in the cooking area, looked at him, “Wait a minute, son. Fishing is a prosperous enough business. And Jared will adjust. Jedida is as economical as they come!” She emptied a basket of dates into a roughly-woven sack. “We’ll be fine.” She pulled the drawstring closed with a firm tug. “And what do you

mean calling Simon's pursuit of the Messiah, 'the height of absurdity'? Haven't our People always longed for Messiah? Our entire nation is built around such a moment, such an era. Why do you mock? Why *not* now? Why *not* us? Everyone who has heard of Him has been awed and excited. Even Ezra, Lem, and you know *he* knows the Scriptures." She sighed, exasperated, and added, "The prophet John singled out this man Jesus. Can you not even consider the *possibility* that He may be the Messiah?"

Lemuel grabbed another handful of dates. His eyes grew big as he saw a wriggling worm in his hand. He threw the handful into the trash pile and continued pacing around the room. "Mother, there are some facts of life you don't seem to understand. First, dreams about a Messiah do not feed a family. And, of course I am longing for the Messiah just as much as you are. Of course, as you said, all of Israel is longing for a Deliverer. But we both know how many false deliverers have risen and FALLEN, and how many people have been hurt. They are proven false over time. It is dangerous and unnecessary for Simon to risk his family this way. Too many Galileans rushing off after every man who claims to be the Messiah only—"

Anna held up her hand authoritatively, "Lemuel, you are my son. As such, you must at least hear me out. Surely you remember what the prophet Isaiah declared:

*In the past Adonai humbled the land of Zebulun and  
Naphtali, but in the future He will honor the  
Galilee of the Gentiles, the way along the sea..."*

Lemuel was pacing again, still listening, but too agitated to stand still. Seeing she still had his attention, Anna kept speaking. "The Prophet was speaking of us, Lemuel! Here, this land, Galilee, Zebulun's land! You know the other promises as well as I do...we could go on and on. What is more, Jesus has been declared by the baptizer John to be the Lamb of God and Savior of the world. I believe that that makes this man *very* different. Ten thousand counterfeits can never steal the Truth, if we are courageous."

“Perhaps...” Lemuel muttered reluctantly.

Anna continued. “I appreciate that Simon was willing to at least go and find out, in spite of the potential cost to his household. And, my son, you know Jedida and I are perfectly capable of raising a family, even when things are a little difficult. But,” she said, as Lemuel tried again to interject, “I know we will need help. Maybe you’re here as Adonai’s way of providing for us.”

Jedida, working in the courtyard, overheard bits and pieces of the conversation between her brother and mother. On the one hand, some of what Lemuel had said was correct. Simon *had* dropped everything, and with him even missing a few days of fishing she would certainly be challenged in her ability to feed and care for the household. On the other hand, if Adonai Elohim Himself had ordained this Jesus to be his king, shouldn’t Simon follow him? After this time of hardship might come the time of great prosperity that all Israel hoped for. And besides, her mother was one of the wisest people she knew. If Anna believed everything would turn out all right, then it must....Mustn’t it?

*Ashira's thoughts raced as she settled down for the evening. Was it really just this morning that abba and I spoke of Isaiah's prophecy? It seems as though days have passed since we were talking at the shore. That phrase, that wonderful name: Prince of Peace... That's definitely what I need—a Prince of Peace. The Promised One is to be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father...and Prince of Peace. Is that who this Yesu is? Everything in me longs for that!*



*But everything is such a mess. I'm a mess. I'm not sure what I hate more: Zivah, or my reactions to her. I definitely need peace where she's concerned. But so far, Jesus has ushered in everything but peace. My abba is gone again—everything feels unsettled and shaken by that. Even Uncle Lem, who can wear a smile in the worst circumstances, is clearly disturbed by the mention of the man, Yesu. Not even a full day has passed since the “coming” of this Messiah, and everything in my world has been thrown into upheaval. What could this possibly mean?*

*I don't know...Maybe the peace that has been prophesied is more related to the realm of national affairs—tossing off Roman dominion and restoring the nation of Israel? I know that's certainly what some people think...*



# *He Will Reign*

---

*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from  
that time on and forever. The zeal of the  
Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

Isaiah 9:7

The door opened with a loud mournful creak, and closed with a thunderous bang. "I'm home!" Ezekiel shouted.

Jedida strode quietly into the room. "Hello, Ezekiel!" she said with a bright smile. "Go on down to the shore to help Jared for a little while. After that, you may go play with your friends, if you want to. I'm heading next door to help Elizabeth."

"Yes, Mother, but after I help Jared clean up at the lake, may I stay inside? I'm going to make something!" he said, his dark brown eyes twinkling. Jedida gave a slight nod and he was off. He started to rush out the gate towards the lake, but Ashira, on her way in from the garden, stopped him.

"Hello, Ezekiel. Where might you be going in such a hurry? Perhaps you do have the fisherman in your blood. Why, you just can't wait to feel the wind in your hair and the sea air in your lungs, can you? Oh! Maybe it's back to the synagogue you're rushing?!" Ashira smiled, knowing how her little brother was always much more excited out of the synagogue than in it. Ezekiel grinned back at her. Ashira continued, in a much more serious tone of voice. "How were lessons at the synagogue today? Has the rabbi had anything to say about the Messiah...I know all of Capernaum has been buzzing with talk."

"Yep, he says a lot, but nothing about the man Jesus—mostly just the general "These are the questions we must all ask ourselves

about this Messiah.’ He says that if ever Israel needed a redeemer, it is now. The rabbi says if this is the true Messiah, God will probably—I mean *maybe*—give Him a mighty army like those of old so He can overthrow the Romans.”

“And what do you say?” Ashira asked him.

“I say that I want to be with father and see the Messiah when he comes through. I want to see his mighty army!”

Ashira smiled at him and shook her head, “And I suppose you’ll want to join, too!”

“He probably wouldn’t accept a boy of eleven in his army,” Ezekiel said solemnly.

“Probably not,” Ashira said, putting on a serious face to match his. She turned around, smiling secretly to herself, and went into the house. Ezekiel dashed down the hillside to join his brother at the shore.



Later, when all the day’s work at the shore had been completed, Ezekiel ran back up to the house, and called out in a sing-song voice, “Ariel! Where are you? I need to tell you something!”

“Here!” Ariel called back from the stable, where she was milking the goats.

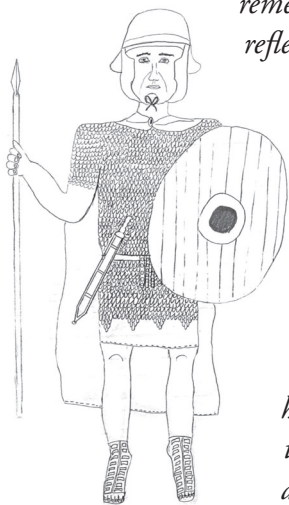
Ezekiel rushed over. “Ah,” he said in a very self-satisfied way, “You are in just the right place to hear my performance! I made up a song just for you when I was cleaning up the nets by the lake. Here goes!” And with Ariel watching him, a very amused look on her face, he began to sing.

*“Silly, silly, silly goats,  
No brains, no brains.  
When they eat their belly bloats,  
They stink when it rains.  
Their milk, however, is quite good,  
I always drink all that I should.”*

When he finished, Ariel clapped politely, and Ezekiel made a low bow. “Now I can make that sword,” he said, leaving the stable. “Let’s see, where did I put that carving knife?” He looked around the courtyard for a few minutes. “Aha, here it is!” Finding the knife on a shelf right inside the door, he pulled out a long piece of driftwood held in his rope belt. He sat down on the wobbly bench in the courtyard and began carving a “sword.” As he chiseled at the wood, his mind drifted to what had happened a few days before. Ezekiel remembered running down the street that led to synagogue.

*“Glad to get away from those smelly, salty fish! Now, here we go,” he had said aloud to himself. “Past Shemuel’s house, past Daniel’s house, past the tanner—whoa, that stinks! Almost there, almost there, the rabbi’s house, okay—hey!” He stopped so suddenly he almost fell over. “A century is marching! One hundred soldiers! And one man, the centurion, commands all of them! Okay, is that centurion the ugly one with the big eyebrows? No, no. The one who never smiles? No, I think this is a new century, the centurion fresh from Rome!”*

*Ezekiel had let out a long whistle and continued whispering to himself. “Just look at that horse! Jet black with a single star. A saddle with the markings of Caesar on it. And the legionaries!” Ezekiel remembered blinking as the sun had suddenly reflected off a legionary’s breastplate. “All of them have brand new armor, and their dagger belts look so perfect and shiny. They’re all marching perfectly, not one out of step.” He straightened his own rope belt, “Hmmp, someday we will have an army like that.” Ezekiel had put his shoulders back, and began marching in time with the soldiers. Careful not to betray in his eyes the defiance his young heart had been trained to feel toward these pagan overseers, he put his mouth into a single straight line, his eyebrows slanting*



*towards his nose. His face looked so serious, and he was completely caught off guard when he glanced back at the centurion on the black horse, and he thought the officer had winked at him.*

Ezekiel sighed and said aloud, “That was so amazing. But it made me be late to the synagogue...again.”

Ezekiel was suddenly awakened from his daydream when Rebekah came skipping into the courtyard and stopped to watch him. “Watcha doin’, Zeke?” she inquired.

“I am making,” he said, proudly holding up the wood, “a sword!” A grin spread across his face.

Rebekah giggled, “What do you need a sword for?”

Keeping his eyes on what he was doing, Ezekiel said sheepishly, “Well, I want to pretend that I’m a part of the Messiah’s mighty army, and I’m going to help free Israel! The Messiah’s going to raise an army, and I wish I could be a part of it. As glorious as the Roman soldiers are, it would be even more glorious to defeat them forever!”

Rebekah looked at him quizzically. “Uh-huh,” she said, no longer interested, and went off skipping and humming to herself.

Anna, who had been listening to the conversation from the house, stepped out into the courtyard and sat down beside Ezekiel. He was glad she came over. Grandma Nana was always longing for the Messiah. He knew she’d surely like his creation. Anna spoke, “So, you’re making a sword to defeat the enemies of Israel?”

“Uh-huh,” Ezekiel nodded enthusiastically, without looking up.

“Well, how did David overcome Goliath? Did he wear Saul’s armor and go out with a sharp sword and shield? Indeed, no! He went out onto the field, equipped only with a humble sling and—”

“Great idea!” Ezekiel interrupted. “I’ll make a new sling instead—better than my old one!”

Anna chuckled softly to herself. “Ah, but let me finish, Ezekiel. David went out to fight the giant with only a sling, his stones, and his



faith in God. He was passionate for the God of Israel. God honored this, and helped David conquer Goliath. Can the Lord not do the same today?"

"Yes, Nana," Ezekiel said, puzzled by her words, and ventured to ask, "But it seems like everyone talks about the Anointed One restoring Israel. How will He do that without an army?"

Anna replied thoughtfully, "Oh, He may still gather an army, Ezekiel. The prophet Isaiah does speak of the coming King *shattering the yoke that burdens Israel, the bar across our shoulders, the rod of our oppressors*. But it has always been true that Adonai looks to men's hearts NOT their weapons. Perhaps that's why the baptist speaks so much of repentance. Child, make your *heart* ready for the King."

Ezekiel soberly considered his grandmother's words. "Yeah, I do want to make my heart ready." Then he brightened. "And my sword!"

## *Anna's Prayer*

*Oh, Redeemer, we have so longed for You!!*

*Is it NOW true?  
That our Redeemer lives and  
NOW stands upon the earth? (Job 19:25)*

*O Lord, Our Rock, Our Redeemer,  
O Mighty One of Jacob,  
You made a way through the sea,  
A path through the mighty waters,  
You drew out that army  
And lay them there  
Never to rise again. (Is. 43:14)  
Will You rescue us once again?*

*O Lord, Our Rock, Our Redeemer,  
Contend with those who contend with Your chosen one,  
Save us, save our children, (Is. 49:24)  
Come down to make Your Name  
Known to Your enemies,  
Do not remember our sins forever,  
Look on us, we pray, (Is. 64:2-9).*

*O Lord, Our Maker, Our Redeemer,  
Bring us back with deep compassion, (Is. 54:6)  
Come to us, O Redeemer,  
To those who repent of their sins, (Is. 59:26)  
Let Your glory rise on us, (Is. 60:2)  
Let all who despise us bow down  
And call us the City of the LORD.*

*Is it now time  
For the new thing You promised?  
O Lord, Our Rock, Our Redeemer,  
Make a way in the desert,  
Give drink to Your people, Your chosen. (Is. 44:24)  
Restore the ruins,  
Rebuild us again,  
Teach us what is best,  
Direct us in the way we should go. (Is. 48:17)*

*Then all will know  
The LORD is Our Savior,  
The LORD is Our Redeemer,  
The Mighty One of Jacob. (Is. 60:13)*



# Invited!

---

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.*

John 2:1-2

Ariel came dashing down the steps from the roof, “Zeke, Shira, Mother...it’s abba! Abba’s coming up from the shore!”

Ezekiel hurriedly set down the carving knife. “Abba’s home? Great! Did you see if the man Jesus might be with him?”

“I don’t know,” Ariel called back as she reached the courtyard gate. Already Rebekah and Kitra were at her heels trying to catch a glimpse of their daddy. “It looked like just father coming.”

Simon crested the last little rise on the path leading to their house and was swarmed with the hugs and clutches of his three youngest daughters.

“Abba!” Rebekah exclaimed. “We’ve missed you so much!”

Ezekiel was close behind the girls. “Hello, father!” He hardly paused before launching into what really excited him. “Is the Messiah with you? Is He here in Capernaum? Is He gathering His mighty army to conquer the Romans? I can’t wait to see Him!” Ezekiel pranced around his father enthusiastically.

Simon let out a confused laugh, “Well now, Zeke! I don’t know anything about an army at this point. We’re going to a wedding—in Cana.” Simon worked his way eagerly toward the house with the smaller children still clinging to him. But not Ezekiel. Ezekiel had stopped cold in his tracks, incredulous. *No army? No war? Isn’t he going to defeat the Romans? He’s going to a wedding instead?*



“Ashira, my daughter!” Simon bellowed joyfully. “I have so much to tell you! But, I only have a short time. Come to me!” He gave her a hug.

“Oh, abba, I’ve missed you! I was beginning to wonder if—” Ashira stopped herself.

Simon momentarily pondered her hesitation, but spun around when he heard other familiar voices. He warmly drew his mother-in-law and wife into his powerful arms. “Anna! And my dear Jedida. If it were only possible to tell you all that has happened in these last few days. I—”

Simon was interrupted by gleeful, squirming children once again climbing onto him. He tickled a squirming Kitra off of him and swooped up the baby. He gave him one more scruffy kiss before handing him to his mother.

“Abba,” Rebekah said eagerly, “when will you come back with the Messiah?”

“I—I don’t know. I ...”

“But...” Ezekiel started, still a little shaken over his dream of an army being replaced by a wedding trip. “But I thought... Isn’t He going to conquer the—”

“I tell you, Zeke, I just don’t know. I’ve heard of no army. Nothing about Romans.”

Ashira had never heard her abba say the words “I don’t know” so often. *He’s not as confident as when he left. I wonder why.*

“Simon,” Anna said, “surely you’re hungry after all that traveling; let me get you something to eat.” She started towards the kitchen.

“Thank you so much, Anna. I’m famished!”

“Shira!” he shouted over the endless flow of questions, “Where’d your mother go? JEDIDA!” he roared, only to realize that she was standing right behind him, thoroughly enjoying the whole escapade. “Oh, uh...there you are! Hey, can you tell me where my best clothes are, and Andrew’s, too?”

“They should be in that old chest,” she answered. “Simon, what is He like, this Jesus?”

Simon paused. He looked at Jedida with eyes searching for an answer. “I don’t know how to describe Him. He’s, well—I—You’ll just have to see Him for yourself!”

“Is He the Promised One by God to redeem Israel?” she asked. “Is He the Messiah?”

“Well, I think so—I—I imagine so...He’s not really what we’ve been expecting all this time.” Looking at Ezekiel he added, “He hasn’t talked about defeating the Romans or anything. But we all feel such an attraction to Him...He’s amazing and wonderful...and challenging...He is so hard to *decipher*, and yet somehow, I think, in Him lay all the answers. I do find myself confused a lot.”

Simon gave up his attempt to explain. He thundered into the common room, the children running after him. He grunted as he pulled out a dusty chest with a lid hanging half off its hinges. He propped it open. “Ah-ha! Here they are. Just what is needed for the wedding!”

“Abba, abba!” Kitra said as she jumped up and down. “Isth the Mesthiah getting married?”

Simon burst into laughter. “Well, I *do* know the answer to that! No, no, sweet one. Jesus’ *mother* was invited to a wedding in Cana, and she asked Jesus to come with all His disciples. Andrew, John, James and I are all going with Jesus. Even Philip and Nathanael are coming.”

“Are you a disthiple?” Kitra asked innocently.

“I—uh—well, I suppose—I never really thought—I, yeah, I guess I—” Simon said, baffled by his daughter’s simple question.

The baby grabbed Simon’s leg and tugged. “Ah, my little one, abba has missed you!” Simon picked up his youngest son again. “Are you being a good little boy?” Simon said softly, tickling the baby.

He finally pulled the clothes out of the chest.

Jared entered the house, his nets slung over his shoulder. He stopped suddenly. “Father, you’re back!” Simon’s face lit up to see his eldest son. Walking toward Jared in big strides, Simon embraced him. Jared was stunned by his father’s rare warmth.

“How’s the fishing been, Son?” Simon asked.

“Uh—I’m sorry, father,” Jared admitted with a little trepidation. “Not so good.”

“Oh, that’s okay. You’ll get the hang of it.” Simon struggled for a moment, “I’ll come home as soon as I can, but do you think you could manage for a few more nights?”

“Yes, Ezra has been helping me.” Jared was still bewildered. *Since when has bad fishing been okay with father?*

Intrigued, Ashira watched her father and Jared. *Abba definitely seems different.* Aloud, Ashira persisted with the questions they all had burning within them, “Abba, what’s Jesus like? What has He talked about? What is He going to do?”

“When I get back from the wedding, I’ll try to answer as many of your questions as I can. But, you must understand, I still have many of my own. You’ll see. I hope you’ll meet Him very soon.”

Ezekiel piped up hopefully, “Father, when you leave for the wedding, can I come with you? I’ll be good and not lag behind!”

Simon smiled and looked at Ezekiel. “Indeed, you wouldn’t lag behind; you are more likely to lag ahead! But, no, Son, you need to stay here and help Jared fish and take care of your mother and sisters. Don’t worry, though; Jesus and the rest of us will come back into Capernaum soon.”

*I wonder, Jedida thought to herself, I wonder what it is that Jesus does and says? In this short time, I can see that Simon is changing. He is just as loud, just as abrupt, but—not so—self-assured! He’s certainly softer toward Jared, and after only a few days with this man he is following! It’s not just an accident, or a coincidence. There is a reason for it. There must be something special about this man Jesus.*

Simon looked at his wife. *She sees exactly what I’m thinking—as usual. This time she knows I know—nothing.* He met her gaze sheepishly. Then, not sure what else to do, he shrugged his shoulders and once again tackled the children.



# Seems Right!

*There is a way that seems right to a man....*

Proverbs 16:25

“Whew! Must be a full one!” Jared said, hauling in a catch. He pushed wet black hair away from his eyes. Ezra struggled with another net beside him. Fresh beads of sweat formed on their foreheads, despite the chill of the early morning air.

“Think we should cast in one more time before heading back?” Ezra asked, watching for his net to break the surface of the water.

“Nah, we’ve been working all night—” Just then, Jared’s net popped out of the water—so suddenly, that he fell back into the boat. The vessel rocked from side to side.

“Whoa!” Ezra shouted. The resin torch mounted at one end of the boat—a fish lure as well as work light—came loose. It fell with a plop into the water and sizzled out. Jared groaned and reached up to steady Ezra. Trying to keep his balance, Ezra’s ropes slipped from his hand. As fish rapidly escaped from the loosened net, Ezra dove for the rope—grabbing it just before it flew over the side of the boat. In the next moment, he lay across one of Jared’s legs, with his face very near a pile of fish. They both sat motionless. Then Ezra burst out laughing. Jared slumped dejectedly, but looking at the scene, he gave in to a little smile.

“Well, it won’t take so long to sort the fish this morning,” he said, eyeing his own half-filled net and Ezra’s empty one. “Sorry.”

Ezra, still laughing in exasperation, picked himself up. He grabbed the meager catch of fish and sat opposite Jared. “I’ll sort; you row,” he said with mock reproach.

Jared grinned and took up the oars. He watched as Ezra began plucking fish from the net. It was a small, circular hand net, about the diameter of a man’s arm span. Weights around the perimeter pulled it down when tossed into the water. When a rope, attached at the center, was pulled, the net closed in around the fish.

The fish wriggled between Ezra’s fingers as he tossed them onto the floor of the small wooden boat. Jared didn’t mind letting Ezra sort them. Of all the things he hated about fishing, that was the worst. Still, it had to be done. Tilapia and sardines were separated out—a few to keep, and some for Jewish customers. The catfish and lamprey would be sold to Gentiles.

As he rowed, Jared’s mind began to wander far from their little fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. His Uncle Lemuel had told him about monstrous trading ships with hundreds of oars on the Great Sea. He had never seen the Great Sea—which stretched from the borders of Israel to Greece, Rome, and beyond—but as a boy, he had promised himself that he would someday. Lemuel had also been east on dangerous camel caravans. His ventures had paid handsomely; Lemuel was the richest person Jared knew.

“If only...” Jared sighed.

“What?” Ezra looked up.

“Oh, I was just thinking about my uncle.”

“You really want to be a merchant, don’t you?” Ezra asked. Jared stared, eyebrows furrowed, at the few fish on the floor of the boat as he pulled the oars close to his chest.

“I can’t fish, Ezra. I’m terrible at it! That’s always been obvious. Why can’t I use my mind—not my muscles?” He looked down at his arms and they both laughed. Jared had obviously inherited his mother’s slender build, and he had long stopped challenging Ezra at arm wrestling. Then, again serious, Jared continued. “Uncle Lem has told my father that I’m more suited to work with numbers. He wants

to take me on as his record keeper. He claims I'd make twice as much in trading as in fishing. Twice as much, Ezra!"

"Your father won't allow it, will he?" Ezra asked quietly.

Jared sighed. "No. Not yet, at least." Then he brightened. "But I haven't given it up. It just seems right. And why not?" His hands tightened their grip as he rowed. "Last week, my uncle invited me on his next venture to Greece. I'm going to ask father about it when he comes home—whenever that is!"

"He's at a wedding in Cana, isn't he?" Ezra said curiously.

Jared returned a helpless look. "He came home a few days ago bellowing that he was so hungry he could eat half the fish in the sea. I expected him to get onto me for leaving them safely there. But this time, father was... I don't know... different. Softer, I guess. Then, instead of heading out to fish, he announced he was off to a wedding!" Jared paused, looking at Ezra. "Know what? Father told me Jesus gave him a new name!"

Ezra interrupted, "A new name?"

"Yeah," Jared said, shaking his head. "Peter—means a rock."



“Rock, huh?” Ezra smiled, intrigued. The Simon he knew was impulsive, unpredictable, explosive—with a fascination for fishing that Jared would never understand. *Rock?*

“Yeah, and now I can’t figure him out,” Jared said, almost to himself. “Ever since father heard about Jesus, he’s hardly been home. And now he has gone to a wedding. Why would they be going to a wedding, anyway? In Cana? We don’t even know anyone in Cana!”

After a silence Ezra spoke up. “To tell you the truth, I would have gone with them. I’d like to see Jesus myself!”

“And where would I be if you had left me, too?” Jared demanded, playfully shooting a fish at Ezra.

Ezra ducked. “But what if He is the Promised One, Jared?” Jared didn’t have an answer to that. For a while, the only sound was the rhythmical splash of the oars.

“I can see the shore from here,” Ezra said, finally. “Why don’t you let me take a turn rowing.”

“Sure, I could use a break!” They switched places and Jared leaned against the stern of the boat. He crossed his arms behind his head and gazed at the brightening sky. “So, what do the rabbis and Pharisees think of Jesus?” Jared asked.

“I don’t know,” Ezra said. “They weren’t impressed with John—although my heart burned at his words. There was Jairus, though, a synagogue ruler here in Galilee. He was certainly struck by what John said.”

Jared agreed. He, too, had been touched by the Prophet’s words. He and Ezra had spoken of them many times, and Ezra repeatedly reminded him of what they had heard. With talk of the Messiah, Ezra’s enthusiasm only intensified.

Jared had always wished he could be as zealous as his friend. He admired Ezra’s passion for the law and for God’s people. Jared had always tried to care, to pay attention at the synagogue and at home when Moses’ laws or the coming Messiah were talked about. However, he couldn’t deny his lack of fervor compared to his friend’s. *Maybe I’m just not that type*, he thought. *I want to serve God. I want my life and my trade to honor Him. Why, Uncle Lemuel is a great example of that.*

*He is devoted to his trade and at the same time generously contributes toward and regularly attends the synagogue.*

Jared looked up, suddenly. “Whoa! We’re closer to shore than I thought!”

Ezra rowed carefully, now. They were heading into a jumble of fishing boats also bringing in their catch. The orange glow of several small fires dotted the pebbled shore, where women helped spread fish out on racks. The pungent smell of roasting fish already filled the air.

The young men jumped from the boat, splashing into the water, and pushed it ashore. From somewhere behind him, Jared heard his name. He turned and saw Ezekiel leaping wildly down the hill toward the lake. Jared grinned as he watched Ashira bounding closely behind him.

“Jared! Jared!” Ezekiel shouted as he and Ashira neared. “Did you hear? Jesus turned water into wine! Did you hear?”

“What’s this all about, Ashira?” Jared asked. He noticed Ezra, over his right shoulder, listening eagerly.

“It’s true! It was a miracle!” she said breathlessly. “They ran out of wine at the wedding in Cana, and Jesus told the servants to fill up some jars with water, and then He turned it into wine!” She paused, panting. “And they’re coming back to Capernaum—all of them!”

“Did you hear that?” Ezra said, grabbing Jared’s arm. “We’re going to see Him! We’re going to see Jesus!” Ezra’s face was glowing.

Jared felt his own heart beat with excitement. *Water to wine! Amazing!* “Will they be here soon?”

“I don’t know,” Ashira said. “Some traveling merchants brought the news ahead of Jesus and abba. They’re on their way!”

“Come on, Ezra! Let’s get this catch taken care of!” Jared glanced at the bottom of the boat. “Uh, this shouldn’t take us long.”

As he and Ezra tossed their few fish into a basket, Jared thought about the merchants who Ashira said had brought the news. A pang of urgency flashed through him. *Maybe I can ask father again about joining Uncle Lemuel. He may be willing to listen, now. And finally, I’ll get to see the man who has captivated my father.*



# A Fire Kindled

---

*I have come to bring fire on the earth,  
and how I wish it were already kindled.  
Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?  
No, I tell you, but division.*

Luke 12:49, 51

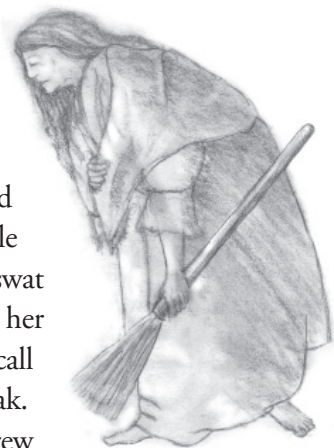
Anna swept the cooking area, humming an old Jewish tune. She collected the piles of dust left by Rebekah and Kitra as they had “swept” earlier in the day. She smiled, remembering the frenzy with which they had plowed through their chores, eager to get out of the house and play. Her stomach suddenly started churning in subtle but increasing pain. She shrugged it off, thinking, *Surely this will pass as it has before.* Going to the corner of the room, she got her mantle and wrapped it around her shoulders—more for the comfort than for warmth.

As she swept, Anna thought about the man called Jesus and smiled wryly. *He has caused quite a stir around here, considering He has yet to set foot in Capernaum. What will He do once He's here?* Reports were spreading of the new Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who had recently been installed—he was rumored to be a cold, cruel man. *Will Jesus overthrow this Roman overlord? If He is really the coming King, will Jesus install Simon to a place of height and power once His kingdom is established?* She smiled, trying to imagine the huge, brawny fisherman in a place of power over Judea—then she cringed. *No... Perhaps a smaller province?* She shook her head, still shuddering at the thought. *I don't think so!*

Simon. What a character. Despite her confident words to Lemuel earlier, she still struggled at times with the thought of him being gone

for long. And Jared...her heart went out to him—trying so hard to rise to the task of providing for them. She wondered at the possibility of Jared working with Lemuel. *Hmmm, we'll just have to see about that.* She didn't understand her uneasiness about the idea; it just had never quite sat right with her.

Still mulling over the questions in her mind, Anna worked her way over to the fireplace in the center of the small room where a pot of stew was simmering. Suddenly, a burning pain swept through her abdomen. She gasped, stumbling to the floor. The broom clattered into the fire as she bent over double, crumpling to the ground. She felt paralyzed and helpless as waves of pain continued to grip her. And yet she had her wits about her enough to realize the straw head of the broom had caught fire and her mantle was lying across it. She reached feebly to swat at the flames, but the movement only made her seize up more with pain. She struggled to call for Jedida, but her voice was helplessly weak. A rising panic grew in her as the flames drew nearer and nearer.



Suddenly, the door flew open, and Lemuel stood in the doorway.

“Mother! What’s going on? Did I hear you call—” Lemuel cut himself short as he saw his mother curled on the floor, the flames getting out of control and dangerously near. With three swift steps, he rushed over to her, ripped off her flaming mantle, scooped her up in his strong arms and carried her to safety on the other side of the small room. As he sprinted back, he tore off his own brilliant purple cloak. Reaching the flames, he beat them relentlessly until every last spark was out.

The stew was filled with ashes, completely ruined. Lemuel, his face streaked with sweat and soot, whirled around to return to Anna. Her silver hair fell across her face, covering it almost completely. Lemuel tenderly brushed it off, revealing closed eyes and tightly-pressed lips.

“Mother? Mother, are you all right? Mother!” Anna opened her eyes.

“Y—yes. I’m fine. I just dropped the broom, but I’m fine.”

“Mother, what happened? I came in and you were on the floor—what happened?” His voice rose in pitch and intensity, and his normally controlled face was clearly anxious as he spoke.

Anna pressed her hand to her forehead. “I’ll be fine. Just give me a moment. Occasionally I have pains like these. This one surprised me!” Anna took a deep breath. “It’s nothing. Really!”

“Nothing! Mother, what are you talking about? I’ve never seen you in so much pain. You must rest! I’ll find you the best doctor in Galilee!”

“Oh, Lem,” Anna tried to speak with a strength she didn’t quite yet feel, “I understand your concern, but this sort of thing passes very quickly. I don’t have time for a doctor. There’s simply too much to be done. I can’t—”

“No. Rest! I don’t care what you think you have to do. I’ll get Jedida or Ashira to do it for you. Here.” Lemuel unrolled a bedroll for her, then helped her to it.

Anna tried to protest once more. “Lemuel, it’s happened many times before—” She stopped herself, but it was too late. Lemuel had caught on.

“Happened many times before?! Mother, why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t anyone else tell me? I don’t believe this!”

Anna drew in a deep breath, and, with determination, she tried changing the subject. “Son, you didn’t tell me why you stopped by—we weren’t expecting you today!”

Lemuel heaved a sigh and ran his fingers through his hair. “Well, I wasn’t planning to stop, but it’s a good thing I did.” He looked up as Jedida entered.

Alarmed to see her mother lying on the mat, Jedida cried, “Mother? Are you all right?”

Lemuel couldn’t contain himself. “Jedida, where were *you*?!” He broke off in frustration. “She was in a heap on the floor calling for help! The broom, even her mantle, was on fire. She could have been

seriously hurt, notwithstanding whatever ails her in the first place! And she says these pains have happened *many times!* Why didn't you tell me?"

Jedida's eyes widened. She hadn't seen her brother like this in a very long time. She tried to find something to say, but found she couldn't come up with anything that sounded reasonable. "I—I—"

Lemuel snorted in disgust.

Jedida and Anna sensed a full-blown crisis ensuing, and were perplexed over his disposition. *He is unhappy about far more than my pain,* Anna thought.

With uncharacteristic cynicism, Lemuel added, "Oh, and just to let you know, Jedida, the one person who is supposed to be taking care of everything here is almost back from his romp around Galilee. That's what I came by to tell you. Simon, Andrew, that man Jesus, and several others traveling with them are supposedly heading to the synagogue." His words hinted at his disapproval.

There was an awkward silence.

Jedida ventured, "Lem, what *do* you think of Jesus?"

Lemuel bristled. Then he said, his words dripping with resentment, "I know nothing about him except that he has dragged the irresponsible head of this house off to who knows where for who knows how long for no one knows what reason. He has encouraged irresponsibility and incivility, he has proclaimed himself Messiah, and he has given Simon, Andrew, James, John—and others, I'm sure—an excuse to go cavorting across the countryside with complete abandon and not even a shred of accountability. And they call him the Messiah!" he spat out.

"But what if He is?" Jedida asked. "Wouldn't you be glad then that Simon and Andrew pursued Him?"

"But what if he isn't?" Lemuel countered. "Wouldn't you be upset *then* that Simon and Andrew had wasted all this time chasing after a false Messiah?"

From her mat, Anna finally spoke. "Whoever Jesus is, we *do* know that Simon and Andrew are following their hearts in pursuing Him. And for that I am glad."

Lemuel said nothing, but his scowl spoke well enough.

Jedida and Anna glanced at each other uncertainly.

Anna broke the silence. "They will all surely be hungry after journeying for so long. If they are at our synagogue this afternoon, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Simon brings them here this evening." She brightened at the thought, but sobered quickly when she caught sight of Lemuel. She said matter-of-factly, "We must get busy preparing some food."

"Get busy?!!" Lemuel was incredulous, his irritation and frustration again worsened by his fears for his mother. "What are you thinking? Mother, don't forget I found you in a heap on the floor a few minutes ago."

"Lem is right, Mother," Jedida agreed. She looked around at the ashes and at the burnt cloak and broom. "You must rest. The girls and I can clean up and prepare food."

Anna asked, "Can you send Ariel off to the well for fresh water?"

"Yes! And perhaps we can get meat from the butcher. We can make a fresh stew, and perhaps prepare a bit of lamb and some fresh barley loaves."

"A lot of fresh barley loaves!" Anna said, smiling. She shook her head in wide-eyed wonder at the thought of what the evening might hold.

Realizing that he was now being ignored, and sensing no one shared his opinions of the latest Messiah, Lemuel abruptly took his leave.

The firm sound of the door closing dampened Jedida's and Anna's spirits for a moment. They looked at each other, not knowing what to say.

"Can I get you anything?" Jedida asked softly.

"No, thank you. I'll be fine." Anna watched her daughter leave to begin preparations and then lay back on her mat and took in another deep breath. She had never felt so torn over joy and sorrow. *The Messiah is coming!* Yet she was deeply troubled over Lemuel. He had left so resolutely. Had he closed a door in his heart, as well? She feared it had been shut permanently. Tears welled up in her eyes

as she looked toward the ashes, still barely smoldering. She recalled King David's words in the Psalms:

*Our God comes and will not be silent;  
A fire devours before Him,  
and around Him a tempest rages.  
He summons the heavens above and the earth,  
that He may judge His people.*

“Oh, Lord,” she whispered quietly. “I can handle the pain in my body. And if a foolish fire destroys our home, it doesn't matter. Only soften my son's heart. Don't let the fire of Your wrath devour him in his stubbornness. Help him to see his own weaknesses.” Tears welled up in her eyes as she realized how much she loved Lemuel, and how painful it would be if he were gone.

# He Took Away My Fears

---

*I sought the LORD, and he answered me;  
He took away all my fears.  
Those who look to him are radiant.  
Their faces are never covered with shame.*

Psalm 34:4-5

Thirteen-year-old Ariel was glad for a chance to be outside, away from the hustle and bustle inside her house. She felt so unlike her family. Most of them seemed to thrive on the noise and activity, but she didn't like it at all. She tried to do most of her chores up on the roof, where it was quiet and she didn't have to figure out what to say to anyone. Ariel dashed outside. Well, it *would* have been a dash, but for the large water jar she was balancing awkwardly on her hip. She hadn't really been released from her normal chores; with the exciting possibility of abba and many others coming soon, her mother had sent her to the well. Usually when Ariel went to the well, she walked along slowly, absorbing every sight, sound, and smell. She loved to stop, to feel the wind on her face, smell the fish down by the lake. But today, today was different. Her mother had admonished her not to stop at all. She recalled her mother's words. *There is a large crowd gathering at synagogue today, and where there's a crowd there are bound to be Roman soldiers. I don't want you to be stopped by one, so get water and return quickly.*

When she reached the square, she carefully surveyed it. There were a few women drawing water, and a vendor near the edge of the square. Two soldiers were standing next to their horses and conversing with one another in the far corner. Judging it safe, Ariel walked up to

the well just as the other ladies finished drawing their water and left the square. She lowered the leather bucket into the deep, dark hole.

Suddenly she heard the sound of a horse approaching her from behind. “You there, at the well! Draw water for this horse—now.”

Ariel froze, her hands gripping the rope tightly. *It’s here*, she thought. *The moment I have dreaded my entire life*. She had never met a Roman soldier before and now she would have to face one by herself. She stood, paralyzed. She knew she needed to obey him, but in her fear, she could not get herself to move.

Suddenly an unfamiliar man approached the well. He wasn’t a soldier. He was dressed as any other Galilean man, but his clothes looked dusty and travel-worn.

“Daughter of Israel, may I help you?” he asked, and Ariel realized he was asking *her*. Still gripped by fear she turned her head to look at him. His hands were outstretched, and she got the idea that he was offering to draw the water for the soldier’s beast. As his hands grasped the leather bucket, she saw that they were calloused and work-worn. Trembling, Ariel moved from her spot at the well, and the kind stranger purposely moved between her and the soldier.

Ariel watched him with growing wonder as he quickly and confidently, with no sign of contempt, filled the bucket time after time until a water trough was filled. As he did so, he stroked the tired animal. “This horse is overheated,” he commented fearlessly to the soldier. “He shouldn’t drink too quickly.”

“What are you trying to do, educate me about my own horse?” the soldier blasted. “I am a Roman. You are nothing but a Galilean,” he spat with disgust. The soldier raised his hand and was about to slap the stranger when a higher officer stepped up leading a black horse with a white star on its nose.

*He must be the new centurion Ezekiel told me about.* Ariel stared. The legionary dropped his hand.

The centurion addressed the stranger. “You know horses well, it would seem.”

The man gave a small, knowing smile. “I’ve learned some about them,” was his reply.

“And you,” the centurion looked at his soldier, “you should not have let your horse fall into this condition. The man is right. Your horse is both overworked and overheated.” The centurion mounted his own well-kept steed. He nodded toward the stranger, turned, and rode out of the square. The soldier, shamed and irritated, mounted his own horse in a huff and followed the centurion.

Unknowingly, Ariel sighed with relief. She had watched the whole ordeal with wonder at the stranger’s calm through the entire situation, and she felt secure in his presence. *He didn’t even flinch when the soldier nearly struck him*, she thought.

“Now may I help you with your jar?” he asked.

Ariel just looked into his face, as though his words didn’t register. It was odd for a man, and one she did not know, to offer to draw water—a woman’s chore. She searched her memory, but knew she had never seen him before. She would have been wary, this being a complete stranger, but something welcoming in his gaze put her at ease. Then she noticed again his dusty clothes and she saw his weariness. *He is a traveler. He is probably extremely thirsty.*



“Um—well, yes—I mean, thank you,” she stammered, finding her voice. “I mean, may *I* draw some water for *you*?”

A grin spread across his face. “Thank you,” he said gratefully. He sat on the low wall of the well and stretched his tired feet for a moment. Ariel gave him the water from her partially filled clay jar.

Though many thoughts and questions filled her mind about this intriguing man, Ariel blurted out the only words she could find to express her gratitude, “You must come home with me. I know my mother will want to thank you for what you’ve done for me. We are expecting my abba home tonight, and guests as well. I’m sure you would be welcome, too,” Ariel pleaded.

“What a wonderful offer,” he replied. “But I have another place I’ll need to be.” He finished his drink, smiled at Ariel, and left.

Ariel walked away from the square, her mind overflowing with a hundred thoughts. *That is the way I want to be. Confident, secure, and not one bit afraid. He knew just what to say. I’m not that peaceful even around my own family! But maybe I can change. Maybe one day I can be filled with peace that way, too.*

# *He Gladdens the Hearts*

---

*He makes...  
wine that gladdens the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine,  
and bread that sustains his heart.*

Psalms 104:15

Rebekah and Kitra held the hands of their toddling brother as they made their way down to a shallow part of the shore. Their mother had asked Rebekah to find a safe and quiet place to play with the little ones as the rest of them busily prepared a meal for those who would inevitably be coming for dinner.

Settling with her siblings under the shade of one of the few trees dotting the rocky shore, she set her brother down, and the children began to play. Rebekah began rummaging through her “things-too-pretty-to-throw-away” basket. “Hmmm...where’s that cup I brought?” She pulled out a long strip of cloth—an old sash of her mother’s. Next came a ragged piece of fishing net, a bluish-gray feather, and a shiny stone. “Ah ha! Here it is!” She triumphantly pulled out a gray and white streaked clamshell.

“Isth that sthupposed to be a *cup*?” Kitra asked.

“Oh, we’re only playing that it’s a cup. C’mon, we need to go fill it with water so we can change it into wine.” She stood up, brushed off her sandy robe, and set off for the water’s edge with Kitra at her heels holding the baby’s hand.

“From water into what?” asked Kitra.

“Into wine! You see, in Cana just a few days ago—”

“Where’sth Cana?” Kitra interrupted sweetly.

Rebekah shook her head, smiling at her sister. “That’s where abba is.” She tucked a wild curl behind her ear. “Anyway, at a wedding, Jesus...”

“Who’sth he?” asked Kitra. Now lost in the story, she let go of the baby’s hand.

“Well, I’m not sure, but abba’s with him. At this wedding, they ran out of wine and they asked Jesus to help. He told the servants to fill up some b-i-i-i-i-g jars with water.”

Kitra giggled. “With *water*?!?”

“Mmhmm. And then he told the servant to take some to the bridegroom.”

“What’sth the....bride-groom?” Kitra looked quizzically at Rebekah, slowly emphasizing the word.

Rebekah laughed. “The person who’s getting married to the bride.”

“Anyway, when they took some water out of the jar... Oh!” Rebekah gasped, dropping the shell at the sight of the baby toddling



toward the water. She ran over to him, heaved him onto her hip, and walking rather awkwardly, she returned to the tree.

“Here, you dropped the cup,” Kitra said, handing Rebekah the shell. “And then did the water turn into wine?”

“Yep.”

“How did Jesthuth do that?”

“I have *no* idea, but you should ask him if you see him,” Rebekah said, setting the baby down on the ground.

“Have you ever stheen Jesthuth?”

“I haven’t, but I want to.”

“I didn’t sthee him either, but you sthaid that he’sth with abba, stho we’ll have to sthee him sthometime.”

“Yes—maybe even today!” Rebekah said happily. “Okay, now you sit down and pretend to be the bride, Kitra. And you,” she said, retrieving the baby, “can be the bridegroom.” She set him next to Kitra. “You have to be still, though.” Rebekah looked at him a little hopelessly.

The girls heard a chuckle and looked up as Ariel appeared from up the slope. “The baby is the bridegroom?” she asked, kneeling down beside the younger children.

“Yesth,” Kitra said and then motioned to Rebekah. “More wine, pleasthe!”

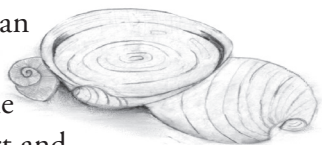
Now it was Rebekah’s turn to giggle. She ran lightly to the shallows and scooped up some clear lake water into the shell. “Here, this is the water. Hmmm. How can we make it into wine?”

“I know!” Kitra said, jumping up. She filled her cupped hands with sand and dirt and carefully poured it into the shell. “There!” Kitra smiled hopefully at Rebekah who was peering skeptically at the mud.

“Um, I guess that’ll do for now.”

She bowed and handed the shell to Kitra, who lifted it to her mouth.

“Don’t really drink it!” Rebekah cried.



Kitra started laughing, “I knew you would sthay that! I was justht pretending to drink it!”

“Hello. What’cha playing?” A deep male voice startled the girls. They fell silent and looked up.

Ariel gasped. “You’re the stranger who helped me at the well!”

“And, therefore, I’m no stranger at all, now am I?” A warm grin spread across the man’s face. “Did I interrupt your party?” he asked, looking at the children and the seashells filled with muddy water.

“Oh, no,” Rebekah began shyly, “We’re just...”

“We’re playing about the time when Jesthuth changed the water into wine at Canaan!” Kitra piped in. Catching the look on Rebekah’s face, she corrected herself. “I mean Cana!” Then, holding up the cup of muddy water, she offered, “Want sthome?”

“Sure.” He laughed, taking the shell carefully. “And I think I’m beginning to figure out who you all are.” The man turned to Ariel. “You, my sweet young lady-of-the-well, must be *Ariel?*”

Ariel laughed. “How did you know?” The man smiled and turned to Kitra.

“*You* must be Kitra! Your daddy talks about you all the time.”

“You know my abba?”

“And *you* must be the quiet one—Rebekah?”

She nodded, asking timidly, “Who are you?”

“I’m Jesus.”

“Your name is *Jesus?!*” Ariel’s heart felt as if it would burst. “You are no stranger at all! You never were! You are Jesus!”

Kitra let out a squeal of delight. “*You* changed the water into wine.” she chattered, prancing around him. Then she stopped in her tracks and looked up at him. “How’d you *do* that?!”

Jesus laughed, winking at Ariel and Rebekah.

Rebekah’s eyes widened with a sudden thought. “Is abba with you?”

“Yes! See, he’s coming down the beach now.”

Rebekah yelled. “Oh, Kitra, Ariel! Look! It’s abba!”

Kitra didn’t hear. She had grabbed onto Jesus’ ankle and was hanging on for her life while he whirled her around. Jesus hobbled

over to rejoin Andrew, Peter, and several other men hurrying towards them. Rebekah and Ariel ran into their father's arms.

“Abba!” Kitra called from Jesus' leg.

“I'll rescue you!” Peter said as he laughed and swooped her up. She buried her face in his bushy hair. Then she looked up into his eyes, puzzled.

“Abba, why don't you sthmell like fish anymore?”



# Choose For Yourselfes

---

*But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you,  
then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...*

Joshua 24:15

As the afternoon passed and Anna had begun to feel a little better, she joined in the preparations going on around the house. She thought about what Jesus would look like, how He would act, and above all, what He would say. She knew somehow that recognizing Him as Messiah wouldn't have anything to do with how He looked. It would be through His words. She wondered what other people's reactions had been to Him. As she mulled over the various questions in her mind, she heard Ashira gasp as she shouted across the courtyard, "Abba!" *That must be them*, Anna thought in eager anticipation. She grinned at how her hands were trembling, and wiped them on a cloth as she stepped out into the courtyard with Ashira and Jedida. Rebekah and Kitra came flying to her through the open gate.

"Nana! Mother! Come sthee! Abba'sth home! He'ths *home!* And *Jesthusth* is with him!"

Rebekah joined in gleefully, "*Jesus!* Remember?! The man who changed the water into wine! Come see!"

The girls grabbed their grandmother by the hand, pulling her toward the arriving group. She saw Simon and Andrew, each on one side of a man she did not know but instantly recognized as Jesus.

Ariel appeared from behind them, "Nana! *THIS* is the stranger who helped me at the well! It was Jesus—only I didn't know it." Anna had never seen Ariel so excited.

Kitra ran back to Jesus and He swooped her up into His arms. Simon looked up and made a beeline straight toward Jedida. Jesus smiled warmly at Jedida, graciously introduced Himself to a flushed Ashira and then walked over to Anna.

“You must be Jedida’s mother! My name is Jesus.”

Anna blushed slightly and smiled. *It is just as I thought. He certainly does not look like a Messiah!* But her joy knew no bounds. *This is Jesus!* “Jesus,” she said aloud, “I am so, so happy to meet you.”

Simon left Jedida for the moment as Andrew greeted her. He made his way over and wrapped Anna in a bear hug. “I’ve missed you, too!” With a wry grin he added, “*And your cooking!*”

Anna, forgetting her awkwardness, laughed at him. “Yes, dear. There’s a big pot of stew just waiting to be eaten. It won’t be long until it is ready!”

Simon grinned broadly, “I was hoping you would say that.”

The greetings all around among their old friends James and John, as well as meeting other followers, had delayed the meal even more. Everyone had had much to say before hunger surpassed their eagerness to talk. Then Jedida scurried out the door, eager to tell Elizabeth and her household the news of the arrival of Jesus, Simon, Andrew, and the others.

The weary and hungry travelers reclined at the low dining table. James, John, Andrew and Simon were all naturally quite familiar with the room and therefore were careful to not actually lean on the table. Jesus, who apparently hadn’t caught on yet, put His elbow on the table and jumped as the table rocked violently, lurching away from His elbow. His disciples laughed.

“Oh, Master! Simon forgot to tell you about his table!” James said, still laughing. “The table isn’t supposed to be touched; it’s only for strategically placed food.” Simon pretended not to notice, but with the others goading him, he finally gave in.

“Yes, Master, I’m afraid it’s true. I suppose it’s a good thing the fish that are put on it are dead, otherwise even they would get seasick!” All the disciples burst out laughing.

After a while, unable to restrain himself any longer, Jesus called to Anna, “Do you mind if I fix this table of yours?”

Anna turned around, startled. “Why, yes, that would be very kind of You. That table has been wobbling for as long as I can remember!” She could hardly stifle a laugh. *Is the Messiah going to fix my table?!*

Jesus started by taking off all the bowls she had put on the table and setting them carefully to the side. Then, as the men pulled back from the table, Jesus flipped it over with expert ease and peered at the offending table leg. He wobbled it more to the side and peered in the joint where it was loose, as if He could see something in there. Simon peered along with Him a little sheepishly, knowing what was about to be discovered. The other disciples laughed and teased Simon for his lack of carpentry skills. Finally, Jesus fished out a small ball of what looked like string. He unwrapped it to reveal a tattered piece of what once had been a fishing net. He looked at Simon.

Simon tried to explain. “Well, you see, Master, I thought it needed a wedge, and I saw this ripped net down at the shore, so I—”

Jesus cut him off, laughing. “Simon, there are many, *many* things you must learn. One of them is that a fishing net does not solve all problems. To fish, you use a net. To fix a loose leg of a wooden table with a wooden leg standing on three other wooden legs, you use—a wooden *shim!*” Simon laughed.

“Yes, Master. As you can see, though, fishing has solved a great many problems for me. So I thought—”

Jesus cut him off again, clearly enjoying Himself. “Yes, Simon, it is clear that you think *too much* sometimes, and other times you *don’t think quite enough!* You have to learn the right timing for each.” He winked at the others, then continued. “Now, is there anywhere in this fishing house that I can find a piece of *wood* and a knife?”

“Zeke!” Simon roared. “Where’s your carving knife?”

Ezekiel had been happily glued to his uncle Andrew’s side since his arrival but had never taken his eyes off of Jesus. Thrilled with being able to contribute to the task at hand, he leapt up and grabbed his knife from the window ledge.

“Thanks, Son,” Simon said, receiving the knife. “Now go find Jesus some wood.”

It took Ezekiel only a moment to find wood he had stashed for his carving projects. He proudly handed a piece over to Jesus. Jesus carefully whittled, occasionally holding it over the empty space next to the leg to check for size. Finally, when He was sure it was right, He squeezed the shim into the joint and used the knife handle to hammer it into place. After it was just right, He tried to wobble the table leg, but it was stuck fast. Satisfied, He flipped the table over and tried to rock it, but again, it was solid. Jesus smiled and looked over at Simon. “And *that* is how you fix a table leg, my friend.”

Simon bowed in exaggerated gratitude. “Thank you, Sir.”

Jesus began to reset the table the way Anna had had it.

John piped in, “Master! Don’t put away that knife yet! Did you notice Simon’s gate when we walked in? Herod Antipas, all the way in Sephorris, must have heard that squawk!” The men laughed.



James chimed in, “And what about the wobbly bench? And the rickety ladder? Yes, Master, it’s a good thing you came! Simon’s house is falling apart!”

Anna set some dates and nuts on the table as Jesus, Simon, and the others settled around the table once again.

Suddenly the room grew strangely quiet as a figure familiar to many of them appeared in the doorway.

“Did I hear someone say Simon’s house is falling apart?”

It was Lemuel.

“I’m surprised anyone noticed that besides me.” He started to say something directly to Simon and stopped short when he saw the unfamiliar face of Jesus. He chose to continue as if the crowd at the table were an everyday occurrence. Aloud, he said, “Mother, here is a new broom to replace the one that was—burned. And by the way, what are you doing up?! You were supposed to be lying down!”

Anna’s joy could not be dimmed by anyone. “I did, Lemuel. And I feel fine now. Thank you for the broom. Really, Son, you shouldn’t have brought me more firewood!” She laughed. “I can find firewood on my own, but I do promise not to use my new broom!” She didn’t want to let Lemuel’s sourness ruin this happy time.

Lemuel did not laugh. He turned around and greeted Jesus cordially, sitting down at the table. Anna sighed. She could tell that he would rather be in some remote corner of the Far East right now. But formalities dictated otherwise. Lemuel popped a nut into his mouth, trying to appear relaxed.

Jesus nodded a greeting to Lemuel. He was about to say something when Jedida entered swiftly, quietly trying to get Ezekiel’s attention. “The goat’s gotten loose again!” Ezekiel ran out to chase the maverick animal.

Lemuel looked over his shoulder to watch Simon run out to help as well. Realizing an opportunity with Simon out of the room, Lemuel turned back to Jesus.

“Have you met Jared yet? He’s Simon’s oldest son. Nah, you wouldn’t have met Jared yet. He’s still *working*. He’s had responsibility for the fishing business now that his father has—abandoned it.” The disciples at the table stiffened.

Lemuel was clearly challenging Jesus. Anna knew that, and she felt her knees buckle at the rudeness as well as the audacity. Jesus recognized the challenge as well. But He did a strange thing. Instead of answering Lemuel directly, He looked straight into Anna’s eyes. His piercing gaze held her spellbound.

“Peter has chosen the right path.”



# Shine in Our Hearts

---

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"  
made His light shine in our hearts to give us  
the light of the knowledge of the glory of God  
in the face of Christ.*

2 Corinthians 4:6

Anna peered out the small side window of the house. The dawn was a moist, gray one. The sky felt strangely close, and a misty fog obscured the distant houses. Everything seemed exceptionally quiet and subdued. What a contrast to the beating of her heart as she thought of the Messiah having slept in their home! A low murmur of voices caught her attention. She turned and stepped through the doorway. Her house was surrounded by people!

It was not a large group, but certainly numerous enough to be out of the ordinary. A crowd didn't gather around the house of Simon the fisherman for no reason. People milled around the courtyard walls, peering curiously at the open door behind Anna, walking about, and talking to each other in hushed, eager tones. She caught sight of a group of robed, austere men off to one side. She noticed that Zivah was there, too. Most of the rest were simple farmers, fishermen, carpenters, potters, and other local townspeople—but all were brimming with quiet expectation and excitement. Anna smiled and marveled at the sight. She knew why they had come. They were looking for Jesus.

He was not here. Something had awakened her earlier in the morning, and she had seen Him slip out of the courtyard, taking the road that led to the lake. Even in the few hours Jesus had stayed with them, Anna found herself constantly watching this man. She had

become unconsciously sensitive to His every move. When He got up or laid down, came or left, ate, spoke, or laughed, she took notice. Anna chuckled at herself.

Even now, she could not stop thinking of the previous evening—one thing rolled over and over in her heart and mind. Jesus had broken the bread as they did every evening and thanked God for the food, but the *way* in which He had done it took her breath away. Jesus called the Almighty “*Abba*”—the affectionate term children gave their fathers! And He spoke, not in the sing-song monotone way of the synagogue elders, but as though He were talking to another person there in the same room. His face was filled with gladness, completely comfortable and at ease. The scene flashed through her mind again and again.

She shook herself back to the strange moment before her now. More people had joined the crowd, many faces that were unfamiliar to her. She shivered and bent to start a fire. The travel-weary men sleeping inside her house would need a good breakfast before long. A pile of wood stood stacked neatly near the door where last night there had been none. *Hmmm*, Anna wondered, *Did Jesus do that before He left so early?*

Jedida and the younger girls emerged from the house, staring. Kitra tugged at her grandmother. “Why are all thothse people here, Nana?”

Anna smiled and patted the girl’s hand. “They’re here to see Jesus. But for now let’s concentrate on our work. We must get busy! There is porridge to make!” She looked to Ariel. “Dear, run to the rooftop and get three measures of barley.” Wide-eyed at the crowd, Ariel was relieved to have been sent to the roof.

Ashira slipped out of the house, her face beaming, and brought a jug of water to pour into the pot over the fire. She hugged her mother in her joyful anticipation of what surely lay ahead when Jesus returned. Jedida quickly made batter and began pouring some onto the hot cooking stone. She would make plenty of flatbread this day.

The number outside the courtyard grew. Anna and Jedida found themselves cooking under the curious eyes of nearly a hundred

people. Anna tried to focus her attention on the fire, coaxing the flames to get the water boiling, and yet to observe the crowd was almost amusing. Newcomers arrived every few minutes, standing around, talking and laughing, all eyeing the few women fixing food. She wondered if Lemuel would show up, though he couldn't seem to get away fast enough last night.

And Ezra—she knew he would be intensely interested and expected him any minute. *Ah!* Ariel had arrived with the grain. Anna carefully added it to the pot of boiling water and turned to help Jedida with the bread.



A short time later, Jesus came down the path, whistling. Arms swinging at his side, he walked through the crowd, unintimidated. Whispers rippled through the people.

“It’s Jesus!”

“Surely not.”

“That man?!”

“Yes, it’s him alright!”

Skeptical and hopeful looks, cast toward Jesus and each other, told their inner thoughts. *This man? The Messiah?*

Jesus pushed the gate open. It screeched shut and the throng of people hovered just outside. “Good morning, Anna. Good morning, Jedida!” the Master said warmly.

Anna looked up and melted at his smile. She greeted him and offered him a bowl of porridge. Jedida, having pulled flatbread off of the stone in the fire, tore off a large chunk for him. He accepted, obviously quite hungry. Many of the disciples were already seated on the ground, their backs against the wall of the house or courtyard wall, eating enthusiastically and talking together. Those who hadn't yet been awakened appeared at the sound of Jesus' voice. Jesus sat down against the wall among them and stretched out his dusty legs. The swarm of onlookers surged to the spot, leaning over the wall, talking and watching. Jesus scooped into the bowl.

The men within the courtyard wall fell silent, observing the scene with interest, waiting and wondering if Jesus would do anything, say anything. The crowd evidently expected that he should.

Simon stomped out of the house, yawned loudly and stretched. “Oh!” He looked at Jesus, then at the people. “Good morning, everyone!” he bellowed, smiling broadly.

Jesus and the others laughed, teasing the late-riser. Simon dropped down near Jesus, and Kitra squeezed into the tiny space between them.

The Master resumed eating, stopping to wipe a spot where the hot gruel had dripped from his bowl onto his robe. James restarted his story of a recent fishing disaster, and the others listened and joined in laughter. Anna watched from near the doorway, marveling again.

Jesus turned and spoke to Ezekiel, who had been sitting in the same spot nearby for some time, whittling intently on his long piece of cypress. “Hey, Zeke. What are you carving?”

Ezekiel looked up, a huge grin spreading across his face. Anna could see he was thrilled that Jesus had taken an interest in his work.

“I’ve been making a sword! It’ll help Israel defeat the Romans! It *would* be amazing to throw them out of Israel, wouldn’t it?”

Ezekiel suddenly remembered how Jesus had seemingly not said or done anything about the Romans. He looked up at Jesus, his brow furrowed in concern. “Jesus? What *do* you think about the Romans?”

Anna listened closely, wondering what he would answer. The crowd suddenly quieted as well.

Jesus licked his lips and set his bowl down. “What do you think of the Romans, Zeke?”

“Well, they’re our enemies, aren’t they? Father says they rule over our nation like they own it. They think we’re nothing, and they punish us when we don’t obey their pagan laws. And the rabbi at the synagogue says the Romans even control the temple, including the High Priest. So we should throw them off! Right? We should have a King like King David who is a true Israelite, and be our own people again!”



Anna could see that Ezekiel was excited. *I wonder what Jesus will say to that!* she thought, intrigued.

Anna turned as the gate squawked. It was Ezra, entering the courtyard, carrying his father. Elizabeth was close behind. Anna rushed over to welcome them in. She helped them find a place to set Jesse. Simon glanced up, and beckoned into his courtyard the rest of the people who stood hopefully at the gate. Some of the crowd flowed in, finding seats on the ground, the stairs, on the wall.

Jesus was quiet for a moment, then asked so that all could hear. “What does the law of Moses say?”

“Love your neighbors and hate your enemies!” someone boldly answered.

“But listen to the truth. I say love your enemies. To love only when love will be returned to you—that’s the way of mere men, not of your Father in Heaven. Think of the way He does things...” Jesus went on, leaning forward, his voice carrying to those gathered on the roof, and the ones huddled outside the wall. Anna saw, as he spoke more, how he searched the faces before him intently. “God’s thoughts are not like your thoughts, His ways are not like your ways. His kingdom is very near and unless you repent, you’ll miss it.”

Anna found herself captivated by Jesus’ words and, at the same time, aware of the crowd’s many different reactions to this man.

“The Kingdom,” he went on, “is like a tiny seed—like a mustard seed. It’s so small and seems so insignificant, but don’t overlook it—you’ve seen how great a tree grows from a mustard seed.”

Anna puzzled over his words.

As he continued, some left. Others stayed—some out of lingering hope, some out of curiosity, and some just because they had nothing better to do. Over the course of the day, Anna saw some people enraged, offended. She saw the uncomfortable shifting movements of the robed elders outside the gate. And she saw little children leaning in, listening, delighted and intrigued. Anna wondered what else was going on behind these many faces...

## Ashira...

The brightness of hearing, seeing, being near Jesus this morning is dimmed by only one thing for me: Zivah is here. Why did she have to show up? Just to scoff!?

I can hardly bear it. I feel so distant and it's hard to concentrate on what Jesus is saying, until I hear Him say, "Don't judge others. You'll be judged in the same way you pass judgment on others. Peacemakers will be blessed and called children of my Father."



Well, I hope Zivah heard that! I wonder if she's even listening, standing so resolutely there with her arms folded. Does she even care? I'll just try not to look at her. I gaze up at the murky sky, straining to pull my thoughts away from her and to focus on what the Master is saying. And then, a streak of light streams out across the gray, erupting through a crack in the clouds. Oh...I cover my eyes with my hands. These words are for ME. I accuse Zivah in my heart, but I am the one acting as judge. I am the one scoffing. Oh, my Lord, who can tame this beast in ME? Who can heal this disease?

## Ariel...

I feel so jumpy and restless this morning. Crowds of people are all around our house, with more arriving every minute. I can't seem to find any place in the whole courtyard where I won't be seen, where I won't have to look at all those people. But I want so much to be with Jesus! *The roof! I can watch and listen from the roof!* I hurry up the stairs on the outside of the house and decide to look at Jesus one more time. I turn and see Him sitting there, not intimidated by the crowd, just as the Romans hadn't intimidated Him. *He is so full of peace, giving Himself so freely.*

As I look at Him, I hear His words. “God’s thoughts are not like your thoughts. He sees things in a completely different way than you do.”



I see how much I have been thinking of myself and my desire to be in my own comfortable place. Can I care about these people, just as Jesus does? I long to be like Him, so free and secure. I sit down right where I am, halfway up the stairs, next to a woman I’ve never seen before. *I’m sitting by someone I don’t know. This is so hard!* With these thoughts still running through my head, I stare intently at Jesus and whisper, “How can you be so full of peace and freedom and security?”

Suddenly the woman next to me leans over to speak to me! I nearly fall off the stairs! “I heard your question,” she says. “He is like that because He is full of love for these people. He doesn’t worry about what they think about Him, only that they need Him.”

I am astonished that she heard AND answered my question, but I manage to stammer out, “How—how do you know that? Have you ever talked to Him before?”

The woman laughs softly. “Oh, we have talked many times. You see, He is my son. We came here from Cana with several of His new followers.”

This does nothing to ease my astonishment. *I am so glad that I chose not to sit on the roof.* “Do—do you think, I could ever be like Jesus?” I ask aloud.

“The best way to answer that, I think, is to ask Him yourself,” the kind woman says.

“I will,” I say directly to Jesus’ mother, as I determine to look right into her eyes. “I will do that as soon as I can.”

## Jared...

I plodded up the slope to our house this morning, brooding. I was angry. I had been so relieved when father returned yesterday. I guess I assumed he was back to stay—at least for a while. But then I learned that they're going to Jerusalem for Passover in just a day or two, and he needs me to stay back and do the fishing. *Fishing!* And Ezra just told me he's going, too! Why am I left with this job? If I'm going to be the one providing for this family, I ought to be able to choose how I do it.

I was surprised by the crowd as I made my way to the gate. But then Jesus' words grab my attention. "Unless you repent, you cannot enter the Kingdom."

*Repent?* What do I have to repent about? I have always lived for God. Or have I? I guess I've never really considered God's specific direction for my life. I've always known what I've wanted and had all the answers. I can tell that these people around me don't feel that way. Look at them! They're pitiful. They almost look—starved. Do they think Jesus can give them what they need?

I see Jesus teaching. He seems clear-minded, focused—like *He* knows what life's about. He's a strong man. His eyes are sharp, searching. When He looks my way, I find myself glancing down. I don't want Jesus to see me—who I am, how small my goals have been. I thought I loved God, but this man really does. It shows in everything He says, in every action.



The realization almost chokes me—I don't have a clue about what it means to seek God. I've been such a fool! *Do I want to know the God of Heaven like Jesus does? Do I want to live my life God's way? Or, do I want life my way? Is success all I want?* Jesus' words hit me again. *Unless you repent, you'll miss it.*

## Zivah...

Hmmph! Nonsense! His words are such nonsense. Who can understand anything this man says? And all these people crowded into Simon's courtyard seeming to hang on his every word. So ridiculous. What a laughable sight!

But, there is something...something intriguing, compelling about this person. He seems to actually—*like everyone*—even *love* them! But how could he love people he's never even seen before this morning?

Ha! Maybe that is why. If he really knew them, he'd know that they are a bunch of fools. These people need to be straightened out. And I don't think love will do the trick. How will they change if we don't tell them outright what they're doing wrong?

Then I realize Jesus is looking at me. *How kind his eyes are!*

"Repent!" he is saying.

Repent? Now there is straight talk. But why is he still looking at me? His eyes lock on to mine. Oh... I can't face that. Oh, Jesus, who are you? Do you see who I am? My anger. My bitterness. And yet, why don't you disdain me? I am not like you, Jesus.

I can't love—*fools*. I shudder, seeing for the first time who I really am.

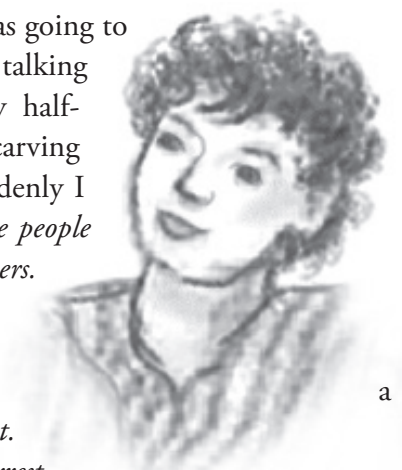


## Ezekiel...

I'm confused. I thought Jesus was going to answer my question, but now He's talking about other things. I pick up my half-finished wooden sword and start carving it more into the shape I want. Suddenly I notice movement in the crowd. *The people are making room for some newcomers.*

*Hey! Those are soldiers!* I gasp out loud when I recognize the centurion leading them. Close to his side is a boy about my age. *Must be his servant. Why have the soldiers come? To arrest someone? To make Jesus stop talking?* But they just stand there. They are listening to Jesus!

I shake my head and bend again to work more on my sword. Then I realize something. *Wait. I haven't even been listening to Jesus! He IS answering my question and I'm not even paying attention!* I think of all the times recently Nana has told me I need to be more serious about things. "It's time to grow up," she told me. Mother and Shira have said it, too. "Life's not about your little games, Ezekiel." I look down at my sword again. *Is this just one more of my little games?* I had wanted to fight with a real sword in a real battle and destroy the Romans. But—I look up at the centurion. His face seems peaceful. He is even smiling. If Jesus loves him—and maybe even all the Romans—then I can, too. I look at my sword and then drop it over the courtyard wall. It lands with a plunk on the ground as I turn to face Jesus. *Now, I am really ready to listen!*



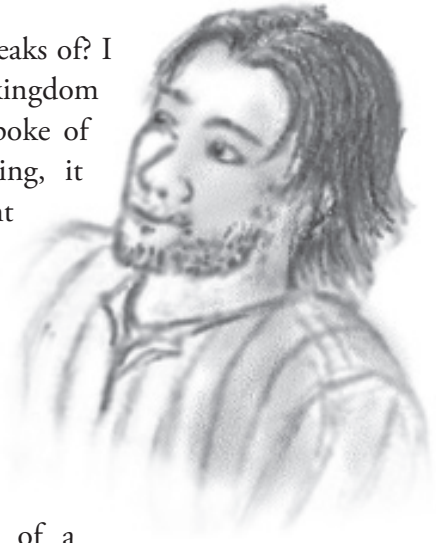
a

## Esra...

What is this kingdom He speaks of? I mean, I know what I thought the kingdom was. When John the baptizer spoke of God's kingdom and of repenting, it somehow fit in with all we thought of ourselves as God's chosen people and all the promises God would fulfill through us, if we changed our ways.

Jesus' message of the kingdom doesn't contradict John's message. And yet, it seems so very different. Jesus speaks of a kingdom that is not here at all, and yet, it is near. And it cannot be seen apart from repentance. Can you imagine that? A kingdom that you can't be a part of, or even see, without repenting. What kind of kingdom is this? A kingdom that loves its enemies? I just can't grasp it.

*God's thoughts are not like my thoughts.* Now that is something I *do* understand. Yahweh, help me to See in a larger way. The things You are revealing cover all we've hoped for for our little nation and ourselves, but it also goes so far beyond. What Jesus says seems to encompass ALL hearts, and all nations—the whole world. And yet it comes right home to ME—to me personally and something Jehovah God intends for MY life as well!



# *He Causes Men to Stumble*

---

*He will be a stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.*

Isaiah 8:14

Thoughts churned within Ezra as he pondered all the intriguing things he had seen of Jesus in just the few days He had been in Capernaum. *What will Jesus do next? So much conviction seems to ring in His every word and action—and yet He is not what we expected.* Jesus, His mother and brothers, Simon, and several others had left for the Passover celebration in Jerusalem a few days before. Ezra's father, Jesse, had insisted that Ezra go this year, as well. Ezra had decided to remain for just one more night of fishing before leaving. He wanted to be sure his father and sister were well provided for during his absence. Finally, his father's urgings had ushered him out the door and toward Jerusalem in the company of Jairus, a trusted friend and synagogue ruler. "You must go, Son!" his father had said. "See if the leaders of our nation confirm this Jesus as the true Messiah."

Suddenly, loud shouts coming from behind interrupted Ezra's thoughts.

"Move to the left!"

"Watch out!" barked another.

"Ezra! Quickly! Over here!" Jairus urgently motioned Ezra to the side of the road. Then Jairus ran ahead to help an older man move out of harm's way.

With protest and irritation, the whole caravan of people, beasts, and supplies bent to the left. Ezra looked to see what was causing

the commotion. It was just what he expected. Roman legionaries on horseback rode by, stirring up clouds of dust and disappearing in the distance.

“How long, O Lord, until you deliver us from these arrogant pagans?” someone near Ezra cried out.

“Maybe the man Jesus will be the one to save us from these vile invaders and oppressors,” chimed another.

A voice farther into the crowd cried out, “From what I’ve seen and heard, he’s all words. One ‘miracle’ of water to wine—but what help is that to us? Doesn’t look like he’s going to move a finger to save us from Rome. He says we should treat those pagans as friends!”

Something sparked in Ezra. He wanted to defend Jesus somehow, but he held his tongue. *I know that voice.* He jerked his head up when he suddenly saw the speaker. *Why, that is our rabbi from the synagogue in Capernaum!* He shuddered at the thought of himself standing against one of his own leaders.

Rumblings continued to filter through the crowd and groups started moving again towards Jerusalem. It was then that Ezra found himself face to face with the rabbi.

“Ezra, my boy! Son of Jesse!”

“Hello, sir!” Ezra responded as strongly as possible, swallowing the lump in his throat.

“I’m glad to see you making this journey. Who are you traveling with, young man?”

“I travel with Jairus, Rabbi. He’s up ahead.”

The rabbi’s sculptured face wrinkled in concern. Pulling Ezra aside, he spoke intently, “Ezra, it is my responsibility as your elder to make you aware of something. Jairus may be a synagogue ruler, but be warned. He has alienated himself from many other leaders by his radical thoughts. Many think him extreme and fanatical. And rather negative, I might add. You would be wise to mark my words.”

Then, without even a word of parting, the rabbi turned towards another young man. “Micah! Good to see you!” And with that, he was off to his next conversation.

Ezra was stunned. *I have never heard words spoken against Jairus. Father said he is one of the most God-fearing, God-loving people he has ever known!* Hardly knowing what to think, Ezra hurried to catch up with Jairus. *Oh, these are confusing days.*

They traveled alongside neighbors and friends over the next few days. Daily, the crowd grew larger and larger as many other pilgrims joined the caravan. The words spoken by the rabbi troubled Ezra at first, but soon they faded as he, Jairus, and others had many engaging conversations about God's promises to Israel.

"Oh, Ezra," Jairus exclaimed after one particularly stimulating conversation. "It certainly isn't popular to speak of sin, rather than merely discussing ideas. But, if we will be faithful to do God's work in His way, if we see sin clearly enough to grieve and speak out as did the prophets of old, if we devote ourselves to prayer, our God will in turn be faithful to us. He will show us the way He has prepared. And He will raise up the great and mighty nation that He has proclaimed!"

*There is nothing negative about this man, Ezra thought to himself. Nothing negative besides his hatred for compromise and complacency. What I do see is a clear hunger for holiness and truth!*

The journey continued. They had walked with the long line of travelers around the Roman cities along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Next, they traveled down a road that roughly followed



the course of the Jordan River. Finally, having veered southward, they turned west, making their way uphill through the wilderness areas, toward the City of David. There they would celebrate the Passover. Ezra reveled at the thought. *Jerusalem! A city set upon a hill.* The prophets of old said that one day a Kingdom of God would be established that would last forever. *The Kingdom of God. What is this Kingdom?*

Ezra often looked ahead, hoping to find Jesus, Simon, or Andrew in the crowd of pilgrims, but they were nowhere to be seen. The brown dust and sweltering heat of the wasteland enveloped the line of travelers. A gray band of mountains stretched along the horizon ahead of them as the sun highlighted brilliant purple, pink, orange, and red across the distant hills and darkening sky.

By sundown of the sixth day of the journey, travelers settled down once again and camped on the side of the dusty road. Ezra joined Jairus at a campfire for the evening meal. It was good to be with his friend.

“Do you know, Jairus, that it’s been seven years since my last journey to Jerusalem? I was twelve. I was with father. It ended up being the last Passover he was able to go to, because the accident happened soon afterward. But the time in Jerusalem is a time we will never forget.”

“Your father has a good heart, Ezra. I know how much he has longed to see you make this journey again,” Jairus responded quietly.

Ezra sighed, “I do wish father could have come. We both have yearned to see and worship at the temple again,” Ezra paused as he stared into the crackling fire, “and to sit under the teaching and guidance of the scribes and Pharisees.” He leaned back on his hands and looked up into the stars. “Jairus, my father specifically asked me to see what the leaders in Jerusalem say about Jesus—whether He is the Messiah or not. The teachers of the law know the Scriptures well. Surely when they meet and hear Jesus, they will listen to and acknowledge the words He speaks. Don’t you think?”

In a clear, serious tone Jairus spoke, “Oh, Ezra, I’ve heard our leaders speak many times in the temple. I’ve seen them worship and carry out their duties. Some do seem to have a heart for God, and yes,

some may listen. But many live only external lives, desiring mainly to be seen of men. Some do care about the law and about doing everything right, but they seem to never yield their hearts. They hold that our traditions are equally as important as God's commands. In fact, I don't think some can tell the difference anymore!" Jairus shook his head and gazed into the flames.



Startled by what Jairus was saying, Ezra asked, "You don't think some can tell *what* difference anymore?"

"The difference between the traditions established by our fathers and God's own commands," Jairus repeated carefully.

"Give me an example." Ezra could feel a slight apprehension rising in his heart.

Jairus waited a moment before he responded. "All right, Ezra. We could talk about the thousands of 'extra' interpretations and explanations by mere men. We could discuss the mighty grand Sanhedrin and how an invention of man has become 'Yehweh's Voice'—or men wish it so. We could discuss Saul and the King's administrative positions and rule versus Samuel's God-given rule of anointing—man wants impressive stature and position while God wants heart and spirit. There are hundreds of examples that few today ever question. It seems we are drunk on our traditions and too fearful to ask, 'Why?!' But now, shall we consider the synagogues?"

In spite of Ezra's reluctant nod, he continued. "Has it ever occurred to you that the synagogue was actually never God's idea in the first place? All along it was God's intention that men worship in the *temple* in Jerusalem! But when Israel sinned, and we were scattered and no longer had a temple, it was our forefathers' idea to build synagogues in which to meet, pray, and read Scripture."

"What is so wrong with that?" Ezra questioned, frowning his brow.

"Oh, nothing is wrong with the idea itself. The problem is that, now, after many generations, worshipping in the synagogue is so

established that many leaders consider it GOD'S PLAN rather than MAN'S OWN IDEA. Don't you remember, Ezra, the 'alternate worship places' called High Places and what God thought of those? Now we've justified and colored over our own attempts to make Yahweh more convenient. THAT is the PROBLEM." As Jairus spoke, fresh examples flooded his mind. "Like the Philistine ox-cart, we justify facilitating our convenience and ease with our own traditions. Did not Nadab and Abihu, Uzzuh, Jannes and Jambres all find out what God thinks of our great ideas?" Jairus' eyes narrowed with deep conviction. His voice grew stronger, "One must distinguish between man's traditions and God's Holy Thoughts. That is not happening in recent generations, Ezra. The synagogue now is such an accepted tradition that a Jew is considered a rebel and unholy if he doesn't attend the 'right way.'"

Ezra was startled. He felt as if something very foundational to his Jewish beliefs was being pulled out from under him. He didn't know whether to continue to listen or give in to the anger he felt rising up in him. *Is Jairus actually questioning the validity of the synagogue—the very institution he is himself a ruler of? If God's people didn't have a place to meet, where could we read and listen to the scrolls being read? Where would the people of God gather?* Suddenly it occurred to him that he had been warned about Jairus. *Hadn't he been branded a troublemaker?* Ezra kept his thoughts to himself.

"Jairus," he said, shaken, "if we can't trust our leaders, who can we trust?"

Jairus' voice was still quiet, but firm. "Trust one who, like the prophets, fears no man. One who is not afraid to seek, follow, and respond to God, no matter how it hurts. One who has no earthly ambitions or personal motives. Trust Him who cares more about truth, God's honor and fruit than He does about His own welfare and reputation." Jairus sighed. "I, for one, am turning my eyes in hope to a man the Prophet in the wilderness called the 'Lamb of God.' To one who draws a crowd, but does not cater to them. One who loves men, but whose words and actions are not affected by those men who like Him and those who do not. A man such as this must be in touch with God. A man who can turn water into wine."

“Jesus!” Ezra declared, softening at the remembrance of Him.

After a moment of silence, Jairus spoke quietly, “Yes, Yesu, Jesus.”

“And you do not think our leaders will confirm Jesus as the Messiah?” asked Ezra.

“As the one responsible for the scrolls in the synagogue, I have had much opportunity to read and consider God’s word. Do you know what Isaiah says of the coming Messiah?

*‘He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem, He will be a trap and a snare.’”*

Ezra felt miserable. The fire no longer seemed warm or comforting. The stars seemed to have lost their sparkle. He had looked forward to going to Jerusalem, and now he felt out of sorts. Something within Ezra told him that this was the truth, yet everything else inside of him couldn’t accept it.

His stomach in a knot, Ezra hunkered down into his bedroll. Voices around them were fading into the darkness as travelers settled down for the night. He gazed into the heavens above.

“Adonai, help me to make sense of all these things. Help me to recognize what *You* say is true.” He lay awake most of the night. But after many hours, Ezra’s troubled thoughts were overwhelmed by the sleep that cloaked all of the weary travelers.



Ezra awoke the next morning with a lingering soberness. But with anticipation of seeing Jesus in Jerusalem, he also felt hope. He stood up and stretched his arms out in the sun’s early morning rays. *What will today hold? We should arrive in Jerusalem by late afternoon, and maybe we’ll be able to hear Jesus teach again soon. I really want to hear more of what He has to say. I need to hear more of what He has to say!*

Jairus, who was lying next to him, let out a long, drawn-out yawn and said, “*Tovo safro!* Good morning, Ezra.” Jairus rearranged his folded mantle, which had served as his makeshift pillow, and

stretched out his long legs. “Ahhh—these old limbs aren’t what they used to be. Give me a minute, young man. I’ll get up soon.”

Suddenly Jairus’ eyes popped open as he spotted something the size of a large fig creeping up the arm of his cloak. In an instant he was on his feet furiously brushing his sleeve. “Then again, these



limbs serve me just fine when my life is threatened! Aaugh! Spiders!” He shuddered as his face contorted, and he swatted his sleeve again. “Desert spiders are the worst!”

Ezra chuckled.

“I’m fine,” Jairus muttered quite unconvincingly. “Let’s get going.” He turned around and began rolling up his bedroll, talking under his breath as he shook, hit, and smothered every crevice and fold. “That thing probably laid a hundred eggs in here. By tonight we’ll both be *covered* with...”

By now Ezra was laughing. “Ahhh, forget about it. You’re right. We’re going to be fine.”

Jairus relinquished a grin and then went back to shaking out his mantle.

Ezra looked at the older man with returning affection. *Yeah, we’re going to be all right. I can’t fault Jairus for what he said last night. He’s just an ordinary man who is willing to question everything that does not seem to line up with Yahweh’s heart.* Ezra recalled how he had shuddered at the thought of standing against his own rabbi when he spoke disparagingly of Jesus. *Who knows, maybe I’m actually the one with a problem.*



By the time the sun had fully risen, Ezra, Jairus, and groups of travelers were well on their way to Jerusalem once again. They found themselves surrounded by throngs of people when they entered the Great City’s gates by late afternoon. Then familiar voices suddenly caught Ezra’s attention as they milled about.

“Hey! I would recognize Simon son of John’s voice anywhere!” Ezra cried out eagerly. “Come on, Jairus!” He craned his neck, trying to see above the crowd to find Simon.

And then, there they were: Simon, Andrew, John, James, Philip, and the others. And, yes—there was Jesus, too. It did Ezra’s heart good to see the familiar faces of those he loved!

Jairus was clearly pleased as well.

“Simon! Andrew!” Ezra shouted over the din.

Simon turned and his face brightened. “Andrew! James! Look who I found!” The reunion was a joyous one, full of backslapping, brawny hugs, and hooting and hollering.

Jesus laughed with them all. “Ezra, Jairus, we’re on our way to the temple. Would you join us?”

Ezra and Jairus then accompanied the ragtag group as they all made their way along. Finally, after walking through many dusty, winding streets, they reached the temple.

The temple! The grandeur and majesty, the huge stone columns and walls—all of it filled Ezra with a great sense of awe and reverence.





The priests, Pharisees, and scribes were easily recognized by their fine robes and phylacteries. *These are men who have given their whole lives to God and to His Law*, Ezra thought. He yearned once again to sit at their feet—to have the time and opportunity to study God’s Word.

Ezra looked up at the stately temple guards standing on the huge courtyard walls. At last, his gaze rested upon the sanctuary itself. *And this is where GOD dwells; all was built to the specifications that God Himself laid out for His people through Moses! This is where His greatness lies!*

A merchant’s shouts rudely interrupted his thoughts.

“Have you bought your offering yet? You’ll need proper coins, young man! If you need your money changed, I can give you the best rates in the temple!” Ezra was shocked as a short, squatty man in pretentious finery tried to pull him over to his business table. Jerking his arm out of the man’s grubby hand, Ezra trotted to catch up with Jesus, Jairus, and the others.

Peddlers called out from little booths set up throughout the courtyard. Animals in pens, doves in cages—all were for sale for the highest offer. Silver coins glinted in the midday sun as they were counted from hand to hand.

“Ooomph! Ow!” Ezra rubbed his leg, backing away from a sheep pen he ran into.

“Ah, my good sir!” The sheep merchant scurried over to Ezra. “Buy a lamb for the Passover? I can give you a good price. You can’t afford a lamb, can you? Here are my fine pigeons, take a look!”

Ezra pushed away from the man, even more determined to be rid of the peddlers. He tried to focus on the things he had longed to see. *There! There are some teachers of the law!* They were gathered under a magnificent porch, clearly discussing Scripture. *And over there are Levites, faithfully carrying out their duties.* Ezra was surrounded by the strange languages of devoted Jews who had traveled from distant lands. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. *Yes, God’s House—filled with His People. This is what I remember.*

It wasn't long, though, before Ezra's serene contemplation was broken by a disturbance around him. Out of nowhere, tables began flying in every direction.

At first Ezra was just perplexed. "Wha—what's happening!?" He looked to Jairus, but Jairus was just as confused.

Money boxes were being hurled into the air, booths were being pulled to the ground, animal hooves clattered, and doves took flight. People were shouting and screaming. The temple courts were in utter chaos!

"What is this?" Ezra shouted to Jairus over the racket. "A loose ox? A madman?" He spun around and caught sight of a whirling figure carrying a whip.

"There, Jairus! That way!"

Jairus turned. In the same instant they both recognized the man. They were stunned.

"It is *Jesus!*"



For an instant, Ezra's eyes met with Jesus'. They burned with a holy fire. Jesus swung back around in righteous fury.

Ezra stared at Jesus in disbelief. Was this the same man that had been so meek and gentle in Simon's courtyard? Was this the man so full of love, care, sensitivity? He had held children, laughed with delight, spoken words of truth that had resonated in Ezra's soul. But now, He was creating a catastrophe right here in the place most sacred and dear to all of Israel.

Ezra's glance flashed towards the religious leaders who were lined up against the back wall. They stood shocked, anchored in place. At the top of the steps, leading from the courtyard, stood the High Priest. He, too, was trying to make sense of the situation as temple priests and authorities quickly sought him out. Once the High Priest

saw the source of the turmoil, his eyes betrayed his wrath. His fists clenched tightly, grasping the edges of his robe.

Questions swirled violently in Ezra's mind. He examined the faces of each of the Pharisees in the crowd—a veritable who's who of leaders and experts. They, too, were filled with indignation, anger, hatred, and worse.

Ezra groaned deep within his soul. He knew what was happening. This time it was not Jairus who refused to ignore wrongdoings. It was Jesus, and He was determined to rid the temple courts of what would clearly be displeasing to God.

Ezra felt sick to his stomach. *But this is not how I wanted our leaders to meet Jesus! Now they are going to totally misunderstand Him.*

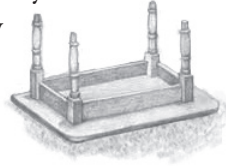
"Get these things out of here! How dare you turn my Father's House into a market!" Jesus shouted. His voice had a fiery passion that seemed to shake the foundation of the temple itself.

Then, as quickly as it had begun, the outburst was over. Jesus stood in the middle of the courtyard, panting. His whip clattered to the floor. A shocked silence fell upon those who remained in the



temple. Many of the peddlers and moneychangers had fled. Coins, broken tables, and empty cages littered the floor. Common people on hands and knees wrestled for the scattered currency.

Ezra's mind warred with his heart. He knew Jesus was right to be angry. The greedy peddling of sacrificial animals was an insult to Yahweh's Holiness.



*But couldn't Jesus have made His point a different way? Surely these great leaders would have listened to reason!* Ezra desperately searched the faces of the Pharisees again, in hope of finding even one who appeared soft. But he found none.

Instead, a sharp calculated voice snapped, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" It was the High Priest. He coolly looked down at Jesus from the top of the steps. All eyes then turned to Jesus.

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days," Jesus declared in response.

Another Pharisee scoffed, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"

*How could the temple be rebuilt in only three days?* Ezra felt the offense and confusion as well. *Jesus isn't making any sense.* He glanced at Jairus, whose eyes were wide with astonishment and wonder. *Jairus doesn't understand, either, but...he doesn't seem to mind not understanding!*

Ezra looked over at the Pharisees. They were clearly offended. And angry. They stood rigid with pride and self-righteousness.

*Jesus hasn't been in Jerusalem even one full day, and He is already in face-to-face confrontation with the hearts and minds of every religious leader here,* Ezra agonized.

He shook his head in awe as he recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah. What Holy irony—no one in any generation would WANT it to be this way:

*'He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem, He will be a trap and a snare.'*

The rulers were undecided about how to proceed and spoke heatedly amongst themselves. The crowd began to disperse. Jesus, James, Andrew, and the others turned and simply walked away, through the temple gates. Without hesitation, Jairus pursued them, and then motioned to Ezra, pleading with him to follow.

But Ezra found himself in a panic. Desires to run to the priests and Pharisees surged within him. *Surely I need to talk to them! Wouldn't God want me to? Maybe they will listen! These are leaders of Israel—God's chosen people! I can't just walk away...*

He moaned again, barely able to stand on his feet. In agony, Ezra watched Jesus and His followers walk out of sight.

*Oh, God! What do You want me to do? Do I pursue the scribes and teachers? These men have given their lives to the Scriptures! I have revered and honored them for my whole life as Your anointed ones. Surely I can't stand against Your chosen leaders. These very men have led Israel for decades!*

Ezra looked at the leaders still angrily conversing. *But wait!* He felt his confusion changing to reproach. *Why are they so mad at Jesus? Why weren't THEY angry with the abuse of God's House? Their role in Israel is to stand for, to represent, God's Holiness on behalf of sinners. Might it be that they are blinded by something in their own hearts? How else could they allow so much unholiness in the House of God? How could they close their eyes to the contradiction, every single day?* Ezra shuddered as he realized he was just as guilty as they were. Hadn't *he* been disgusted by the ambitious, self-serving merchants? And yet he had chosen to look the other way looking only at what seemed good.

Knees buckling, Ezra crumpled onto one of the steps leading up to the temple. For the first time, his back was to the religious leaders. *Oh, God, forgive me. Give me eyes to see and give me a heart of courage to respond to what You show me. God, I need to know what to do. I don't understand Jesus' words, and I certainly don't understand His ways. But, I see your Holy and Righteous heart in Him.*

All at once it became plain and obvious. Ezra knew deep inside that he could place his confidence in Jesus. This man had the heart

of God and was not afraid to walk in that. Was Jesus unpredictable? Definitely. Was He hard to understand at times? Yes. And yet doesn't His passion also show His love for God's Holiness and for God's people? Though he couldn't explain it, Ezra knew that Truth and Life could be found in this man.

Ezra KNEW what he must do and what he had really been longing for. All that had been so utterly foggy was now crystal clear as he looked truth full in the face.

A broad smile spread across his face. *I am going to follow Yesu.*

He stood up firmly. "I'm going to follow Jesus!" he declared with exhilaration in his newfound conviction. And with that, without the slightest fear or hesitation, he ran toward where he had last seen his Master.



# Unless You Forsake All

---

*So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.*

Luke 14:33

Jared sat alone beside his boat, unknitting tangles in his net. The late afternoon sun baked his back through his loose tunic. Besides the lapping of the waves on the shore, all was quiet. Many other fishermen had long since left for home.

When the cool of a shadow fell over him, he turned and looked over his shoulder. Against the bright sky Jared could see the dark form of his uncle Lemuel. He swallowed. Lemuel hadn't been around since his awkward encounter with Jesus at their house nearly a month ago.

"Hello, Jared," Lemuel said quietly. He stepped around the nets spread at his nephew's feet. "I heard I could find you here." He peered into the empty boat, trying to make conversation. "The fish were scarce today?"

Jared nodded his head. "Yeah, but that's not so unusual these days." He paused, then looked up. "So, how are you, Uncle Lem? Mother and Nana have missed you a lot. They're worried about you."

Lemuel made an awkward stab at lightheartedness. "Just them, eh?"

"Nah. We've all missed you," Jared chuckled. "It just isn't the same without your stories of stampeding camels in Syria, or rock slides in the Negev."

Lemuel grinned. He sat on the edge of the boat and took a deep breath of the fresh breeze coming in off the lake. “Yeah, well, I guess things haven’t been interesting enough for a good tale of late. I’ve mostly been in Galilee. And you? How’ve you been?”

Jared shook his head as he laughed at the thought of his own recent experiences. “I’ve done pretty well entertaining everyone with my own stories, I guess: how to row to shore with just one oar, how to lose half a catch of fish while falling out of the boat, how to fish in the dark when you’ve forgotten your torches.”

Lemuel shook his head too, but he wasn’t smiling. He seemed...sad.

“Yes, well, it isn’t surprising—seeing that you’re alone. I hear Ezra went to Jerusalem, too, with your father. You’ve been left with a rather difficult task.” He stood, trying to decide how to proceed. Then, he pulled something from within his cloak. “Here, I brought a little something.” He stooped in front of Jared to gently drop a bag, heavy with the sound of many coins.

Jared was astonished.



“I realize your father doesn’t want my money, but Jared, surely it is okay to at least provide for my mother. Will you get her a good doctor?”

Jared’s heart ached. He had always adored his uncle. But Lemuel’s rejection of Jesus had made things painfully complicated. Yet, it also hurt to see him hurting.

“Use what it takes to care for her,” Lemuel continued earnestly, “and the rest for whatever you might need.”

Jared shifted his weight uncomfortably. He looked down at the moneybag.

“*Take it!* I know you need it,” his uncle said gravely. “Jared, I saw Ashira in the marketplace last week. She looked like a pauper. Surely even your father’s *Jesus* doesn’t want things to just fall apart at home.”

Finally, Jared picked up the moneybag. Pulling himself to his feet, he faced Lemuel. He placed the moneybag back in his uncle’s hand. “I’m sorry, Uncle. I agree with father. I just don’t think we should take your money when you’ve taken such a stand against Jesus.”

Lemuel sighed heavily. Reluctantly, he slipped the moneybag back in his cloak. Then he looked at Jared intently. “So what is your plan? Surely you aren’t going to take off following Jesus around Judea and Galilee. Shouldn’t you get started on finding a decent occupation?”

Jared looked up, squinting, trying to predict the direction of his uncle’s words.

“You never were a fisherman,” his uncle said. “You have the mind and talents of a merchant. I’ll train you, Jared. Whatever you choose to believe about Jesus is fine with me. But you can still be a merchant. I’m heading to Greece tomorrow. Will you join me?”

Jared’s mind was reeling. This had been his life-long dream! The time had finally come. *I have to decide.* He sat slowly down again amongst the tangled nets.

His uncle squatted before him, waiting for an answer. His eyes looked hopeful.

“Uncle,” Jared began slowly, “all my life I would have eagerly followed you anywhere—especially on one of your trading ventures!”

I'm so clumsy with the nets—and I'd sure like to provide better for everyone." He paused, groping for words. "But since I heard Jesus talking in our courtyard, I'm starting to think differently."

Lemuel, listening, forgot about his fine clothes and sat back in the sand.

"I'm realizing I'm not who I thought I was," Jared said, groping for words. "I thought I was a good person—that I cared about God and others. But I wasn't. I'm not. All that mattered to me was *my* future and what *I* wanted. But now, I think Jesus is asking me to give up all of that."

"Jared, hear me out." Lemuel's voice grew louder with desperation. "You can *still* do God's will—by seeking what is best for both you and your family! A one-month journey could provide for your household for a full year! One month and you'd be back here—and you'd have some money to work with!"

Jared's eyes widened. *Could that actually work?*

Grasping Jared's arm, Lemuel looked earnestly into his eyes. "Surely Jesus doesn't want you to choose between him and caring for your family. A man can do both. You can have an honorable trade *and* serve God."

Something rushed upon Jared's mind like a wave. *Love the Lord your God and serve Him only.* He said it aloud, as understanding dawned on him. "Love the Lord your God and serve Him only!" Lemuel gave him a confused look.

"Uncle, if I'm going to serve God, the passions of my heart can't be divided. I can't hold onto my own dreams! It's not about that—or even about the physical well-being of my family. I'm coming to see that God has a far greater purpose in mind for each of us. I don't understand much yet, but I do want to follow Him. And I don't want anything to distract or stop me. I don't care if I have to fish until the day I die! Some other trade or occupation may be fine, too. And having more money is probably okay as well. But, if I understand Jesus correctly, it is *why* I do things that matters. And you are asking me to compromise, to 'have' both instead of seeking Him with all my heart. So, who knows? Maybe being a merchant some day will be

in God's plan for me. But for now I am going to stay here...until I know for sure."

Lemuel was speechless. He rose, stiffly, as though pained. Jared jumped up from his position. Then the two men stood face to face on the beach. Lemuel's face was flushed with frustration; Jared's aflame with fresh conviction.

"So now *you*, Jared! Throwing your life away so young, so promising." He drew in a long breath and let out an exasperated sigh. "I had such hopes for you."

Jared caught the glint of tears in his uncle's eyes.

"He's no Messiah at all," Lemuel whispered bitterly. "He doesn't save Israel. He divides it—destroying families and the lives of young people who could have prospered." He looked at Jared one last time. Then, in great sorrow, he walked slowly away.

Jared recalled bits and pieces of something he had heard Jesus say that had confused him at the time: "Do not imagine that I came to bring peace on the earth," Jesus had said. "No, I came to bring a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother. Your enemies will be right in your own household. If you love your father or mother more than you love Me, you are not worthy of Me. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of being Mine." Jesus' words were beginning to make sense.

Jared said quietly, almost to himself, "I'm sorry you don't understand, Uncle." With Lemuel went all of the hopes and dreams of Jared's childhood. But the tear that now rolled silently down Jared's cheek was not for himself. It was for one who would probably never return.

Jared turned and faced the lapping waves of the sea. A breeze blew through his hair and across his sunburned face. *What will this new life bring?* His future was now as obscure as the shrouded, far-off shore of the lake. But he didn't care. Though he was sad for his uncle, he knew what he was doing was right, and his heart warmed with a satisfying peace.

Suddenly, a voice startled him from across the beach. “Hey! Jared!” Jared whirled around to see Ezra running toward him.

“Ezra! You’re back!” Jared began running, too. They met and clasped forearms. “You’re alone. My father—and Jesus—are they coming?”

Ezra shook his head, panting. “I traveled back early with some others. I’ve had my father and Elizabeth and the rest of you on my mind all week. I had to get back, and I wanted to tell you all—Oh, Jared—” He stopped himself, at a loss for further words.

They both laughed.

“And I’ve got something to tell you, too,” Jared said. He looked past his friend just in time to see his uncle crest the hill and vanish from sight.

# He Will Teach Us His Ways

---

*Many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...  
He will teach us His ways,  
so that we may walk in His paths.”*  
Isaiah 2:3

Zivah sat pensively on a bench in her courtyard. She was irritated. Critically, she eyed a sandal thong which a leather worker had just repaired for her.

“Can’t that ridiculous man do anything right?” she muttered to herself. “Why, that sole came off the first time I wore the sandal, and now...”

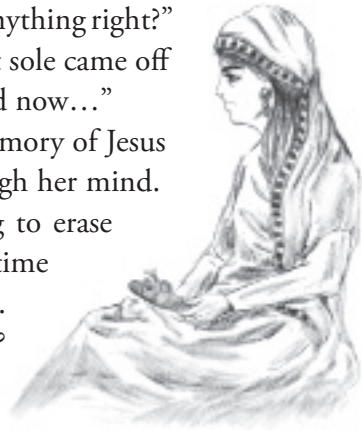
Zivah stopped herself. The memory of Jesus and his piercing gaze flashed through her mind. She shook her head briskly, trying to erase the guilt she felt for the hundredth time since that day in Simon’s courtyard.

*What is it about that Nazarene?  
Why can’t I seem to forget his words  
or his face?*

Trying to escape the storm inside her, Zivah whisked her water jar onto her hip and headed towards the well. But even as she went, Jesus’ words echoed in her mind.

*Love your enemies...to love only when love is returned to you is the way of mere men...God’s kingdom is very near, and unless you repent you’ll miss it....*

Zivah sighed and put down the water jar as she reached the well. *Love. What do I know of love?* In her life alone as a widow, she hid



behind her bitterness, her imagined perfectionism, her harshness. Her brother was a cripple, thought to be cursed by God. Jesse and his family—they were all she had. *Then why do I treat them as if I despise them? Why do I feel the impulse to destroy all the good that I have?* Zivah sighed again.

As other women gathered at the well to draw water, Zivah greeted them and let down the leather bucket. A young girl ran up, panting for breath.

“Jesus is back! He is teaching on the hillside!” she gasped out. “A crowd is already gathering!” With that, the girl ran hastily back out of the square.

Zivah’s heart skipped a beat. Then it sank. She had another chance to hear Jesus speak! But did she want to? The man’s words were challenging, even offending at times. Maybe she just wanted to see his eyes again, to see the kindness radiate from them. Suddenly, she dumped the water into her jar, heaved it onto her head, and set off for her house.

At home, Zivah poured the contents of her jar into her water cistern. Such was her haste that much of it splashed onto the floor before she was finished. Ignoring the mess on her immaculate floor, Zivah rushed out the door with barely a backward glance.

On the hillside, Zivah stood fiddling with her robe. *Why am I even here?* She recognized several familiar faces in the gathering crowd. She felt herself blushing as some noticed her. *What they must be thinking!* Then the leather worker she had been so angry with passed by. A flash of indignation flooded her. She reared her shoulders back as a familiar torrent rose to pour from her lips. But she bit her tongue.

Just then, she heard Jesus beginning to speak to the people farther up the hill. She moved closer.

“God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them. God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.”

Each sentence felt like a blow to Zivah. *Gentle and lowly? Merciful? Pure in heart? Peacemaker?* She felt tears well up in her eyes. She was none of these. Deep in her heart, she knew that if she were to be weighed on the scales of God's justice, like Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, she would be found wanting. The tears spilled over. She brushed them away impatiently.

"Hmmp!" The grunt of a nearby onlooker stole Zivah's attention. She found herself gripped by the smirk of disgust written in the lines of the old man's face. "Bah, peacemakers! Gentle, lowly... what fluff!" Zivah's shock turned to horror as she realized she was seeing herself in this man. Shuddering, she tried to focus her mind on what Jesus was now saying.

"God blesses those who are persecuted because they live for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers."

*Could it be that I am a persecutor?* Like a flood, she remembered all that she had said to Ashira and others about Andrew, about Simon, about Jesus; the times she had scoffed inwardly and outwardly, the times she said things she knew were not the truth. Oh, she could not bear to hear any more! The ache in her heart was too strong. She brushed past others in her haste to get away. *Maybe I can speak with my brother. He is a godly man. Maybe he can help me.*

She ran blindly down the hill and through the city, propelled by a desperate urgency. Her route to Jesse's house would lead her past the city's central well. As she approached it, she noticed Ashira drawing water. Zivah at first shrank back in dismay. This is not who I want to talk to—not yet anyway. But she willed herself to walk toward the well. Her heart pounded and her throat ached.

"Hello, Ashira."

Ashira's face strained with anxiety. "Hello, Zivah." With hardly another glance, Ashira continued to hastily draw water.

"Uh, Ashira..." Zivah ventured, "I was just at the hillside. Jesus is up there. Your father, too—and—" Zivah paused.

At the mention of Jesus and her father, Ashira drew in a sharp breath. Water splashed from the leather bucket as she choked back a sob.

“Are you all right, Ashira?” Zivah asked, perplexed at Ashira’s demeanor.

“No!” Ashira sputtered out. Catching herself, she quickly added, “I don’t mean to be disrespectful, Zivah.” She hurriedly sloshed water into her jar.

Zivah felt torn up inside. “No, dear, I’m sure you didn’t mean it.” In her own agony she didn’t see the tears streaming down Ashira’s face. She sat on the stone bench by the well, trying to express to Ashira what she had heard on the hill. “Jesus spoke of being humble, gentle, a peacemaker, merciful. I just want you to know that...”

Ashira interrupted her. “Zivah, please. I can’t listen now. My grandmother is very ill! I *must* go back home with this water, quickly!”

As Ashira lifted her water jar Zivah saw panic in her eyes. “Ashira! I knew Anna was ill, but has she worsened?”

“She’s dying, Zivah,” Ashira’s voice cracked with emotion. Without looking up, she turned toward home heaving the water jar onto her head.

“Can I help?” Zivah stood calling after her.

“No!” Ashira snapped, with the counterfeit courage of blinding pain. She bit her lip. She knew she had spoken too sharply. “I’m sorry, Zivah, there’s nothing you can do.” Swallowing another sob, she hurried on.

Zivah was stunned. With weak knees she reached down for the solid feel of the stone bench. She sat in utter despair. *What have I done? Have I hurt them so much that they don’t want me near in their time of greatest need? Her own heart broke for Anna. I’ve hardly said a word to her in years. Anna, Yahweh, forgive me! Oh, God, please don’t let Anna die. Everyone dies eventually, but must it be now?*

She groaned as waves of guilt wracked her whole body. *I wanted to tell Ashira what I heard from Jesus, and she thought I was going to lecture her on her tone of voice.* Zivah sank into deeper and deeper anguish.

Thoughts continued to torment her. *I need to speak with Jesse.* She rose from the bench. Looking into the sky she whispered, “I need You, Adonai. I realize that I need You.”

## *Zivah's Psalm*

*Can anyone fathom  
What He has done?  
Can anyone imagine  
What He has won?  
Though I was blind  
I am starting to see  
The depth of my pride  
And I want to be free!*

*I want the Light  
I see in Your eyes  
I need Your truth  
To break through the lies  
I want to hear  
I want to see  
Can all that I've done  
Ever be made clean?*

*Come shine Your Light,  
Sweet Messiah!  
Come loose my chains,  
Lord of Love!  
I choose to be nothing  
For You, for You!  
Lord, if You will,  
You can make me new!*



# He Performs Wonders

*He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,  
miracles that cannot be counted.*

Job 5:9

The house was dark and hot. Ashira closed the door behind her and bent to place her water jar near the door. She could hear her own distressed breathing distinctly in the silence. She paused to let her eyes adjust to the shadows of the room. Her heart felt as dark as the room seemed. She was angry with Zivah—angry at her for showing up at this painful time, angry at her just for being Zivah. *Why?* She fought to focus her mind, her throat still tight. *Oh, I must get this water to Nana!*

“Ashira?” Ariel stood in the short hallway that led to the back of the house, the baby on her hip. Her anxious voice was barely a whisper. “Nana’s fever is very high. Mother needs you.” Hands shaking, Ashira quickly filled a bowl with her well water and carried it towards the back room. Everything was so still. She was afraid. Ezekiel, Rebekah, and Kitra were huddled outside their grandmother’s room. Ezekiel’s eyes were wide.

Kitra reached for her older sister. “Shira, can we sthee Nana yet?”

Ashira stroked the little girl’s hair. “Shhh...soon.” She pushed aside the coarse cloth that hung as a makeshift doorway and stepped into the small room.

“Ashira, quickly!” Jedida’s voice was almost panicked. “She’s so hot.” Ashira sank down beside her grandmother’s pallet with a small cry. The fever had clearly taken its toll. Anna’s face was flushed bright

red. Her hair was wet through with sweat. Jedida dunked a cloth in the water Ashira had brought, and laid it across Anna's forehead.

"Nana?" Ashira said, quietly at first. She took her grandmother's hand, hot to the touch, and rubbed it. "Nana?" There was no response.

Anna's breaths were almost imperceptible.

"Oh, Nana..." Ashira's voice trailed off, choked with fear. "Mother, she won't say anything!" Tears streamed down her face.

Jedida was trembling as she put an arm around her daughter. There were dark shadows under her eyes; she had not rested in days. Ashira remembered, "Oh! Abba and Jesus—they're on the hill. They've come home. *Please*, mother—"

Jedida's anguished expression softened with relief. She kissed Ashira's head. "Yes! Go as quickly as you can." Ashira stood clumsily, fumbling towards the door. "And, have Ezekiel go with you," Jedida added. "It would help him."

Ashira and Ezekiel flew through the streets towards the far side of Capernaum, where the hills rolled away to the north. On the slopes of the mountainside, only a few Galileans lingered. Ashira panted. "They aren't here!" Three young boys rushed passed them, engaged in a game of tag.

"Hey!" Ezekiel shouted, recognizing a classmate. "Where is Jesus? Where has everyone gone?"

One of the boys paused and pointed back towards Capernaum. "Jesus and most of the others went down into the city, toward the synagogue. C'mon, want to play with us?"

Ezekiel didn't wait to answer. He turned and dashed down the hill, Ashira at his heels. As they got closer to the synagogue, the streets became more and more populated. When the structure finally came into sight, the crowd was almost too thick to penetrate. There was a sudden hubbub at the door of the synagogue. "Ashira, I see them!" Ezekiel yelled. Jesus and Simon, with Andrew and the others, were attempting to make their way down the synagogue steps.

At the sight of them, Ashira's desperation climaxed. "Please!" she shouted, charging into the throngs of people. "Let me through!" Ezekiel held tightly to her tunic as the pressure of so many threatened

to separate them. Crowd noise was rising. The hundreds pressed in on Jesus. Ashira's voice was drowned out, and she was immobilized by the swarming mass.

Someone next to her chattered, "I saw him do it. The man was cured!"

"Did you see his skin?" another woman said. "You would never have known he had been a leper!"

The wall of people parted hesitantly behind Ashira. The opening widened beside her, as a Roman passed through. He brushed past Ashira, his uniform disheveled and dusty. Ashira felt a tug on her sleeve. Ezekiel looked up at her, eyes bright. "It's that centurion!" he whispered hoarsely. The people fell quiet. "What's *he* doing here?" a voice called out.

Frozen in her spot, Ashira watched as the man approached Jesus. *Is Jesus in danger? Where is abba?* The people closed in again, watching intently, and she lost sight of both of them. Ezekiel dropped to his hands and knees, squirming to the front of the crowd. Ashira stood on tiptoe, trying to see.

Jesus and the centurion stood face to face. The Roman had removed his helmet, and Ashira strained to hear what he was saying to Jesus. "Sir! I do not deserve for you to even pass through the doorway of my home. Please, just speak the command, and my servant will be cured. I myself am a man under authority, and I have authority over my soldiers. When I tell one to go, he goes! And when I tell another to come, he comes. I tell my servant 'Do this,' and he does it wholeheartedly." Jesus looked into the man's eyes, and Ashira was surprised at the Master's expression. He was amazed. He smiled, as though He had just uncovered a treasure. Jesus turned to the crowd and said clearly to all standing there. "I haven't found faith like this even among the children of Israel!"

Some in the crowd spoke among themselves again. "How can he say that! Are the Romans better than we are?" A few began to leave.

Jesus put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Go. It will be done just as you believed it would."

Ashira pressed her way through the crowd to join her brother. “Shira,” Ezekiel said, “Jesus healed the centurion’s servant! Did you hear?” He pointed towards the centurion, who was hurrying back to the garrison.

“Ezekiel, where’s abba?” Ashira asked, “We need to get to him quickly.”

“This way!” Ezekiel pulled her through the loosened crowd. Simon stood tall next to Jesus, enthralled with all that was happening around his Master.

“Abba!” Ashira called, hastening towards her father.

Simon’s face broke into an overjoyed smile which quickly faded as he saw his daughter’s tear-stained cheeks. He took her in his arms. “Ashira? What’s wrong?”

“It’s Nana. She’s been in bed for days. She has a burning fever and—” Ashira’s voice broke in anguish.

Jesus came close. “Simon, Anna’s sick?”

Ashira looked at Him, struck again by His care. “Yes, she is *very* sick,” she choked.

Jesus beckoned to the other disciples standing nearby. “It’s time to go.”

The way was not long, but even at a brisk walk the trip felt painfully slow to Ashira. Many from the crowd had followed. As soon as the house was in sight, Simon began to run. He threw open the door and disappeared inside ahead of them.

Ashira hurried after him into the main room. Jesus was close behind, along with Andrew, James, John and several other followers.

“Ashira,” Jesus said. “Will you take me to where Anna is?” Ashira led Him through the little hall to the back rooms. She pulled back the cloth over the doorway and they came into the room where her grandmother lay.

Ariel stood just inside the entrance, her face almost white. Jesus paused and lifted her chin. He spoke her name. “Ariel, don’t be afraid.” She took a deep breath and nodded.

Ashira looked towards the far end of the room, where the others were talking together in hushed tones. Simon held Jedida close to him, and the younger children clustered near, clinging to their father. Jared had come up from the shore and stood near his father as well. Ashira met her brother's eyes and could see his anguish.

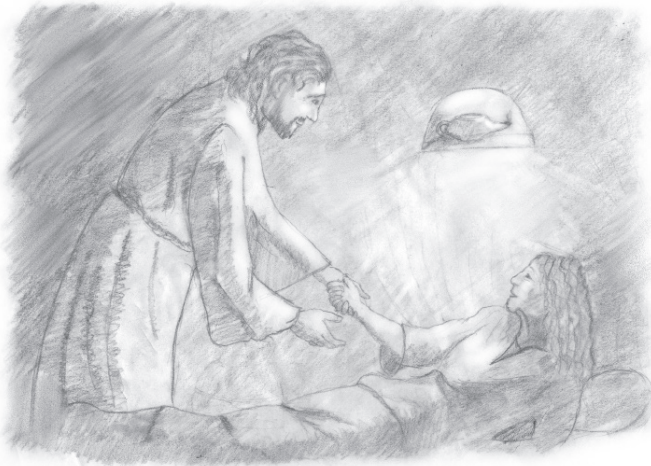
Distraught, Simon looked down at Anna, and then to Jesus. She lay so still. Was she yet alive? Ashira slumped to the floor, against the wall. Kitra left Simon's side and climbed into Ashira's arms. "It'sth all right now, Shira." Kitra whispered. "Nana'sth going to be better sthoo. Jesthusth came!"

Ashira looked up at Jesus. He was bent over Anna. At that moment she thought that He was the only one in this room unafraid of death. She had seen the fearlessness in His eyes when He told Ariel, "Don't be afraid." What kind of man was so stable, so powerful, so loving in the face of death?

Jesus touched Anna's hand. "Leave," He said. The authority in His voice reached every corner. He clearly was not speaking to the occupants of the room.

*Is He commanding the fever to go?* Ashira caught her breath and leaned forward.

"Anna," Jesus called, tenderly. Ashira jumped to her feet, and all in the room gasped and gathered around as Anna opened her eyes and sat up.



“Anna!” Simon could not contain himself. “Anna, how are you! Oh, Master! Thank you!”

Anna’s hand was still in Jesus’ hand. She had not turned her eyes from Him. Gradually, she found her voice. “Yesu, this is a *wonderful* sight to wake up to.” Jesus smiled and helped her to her feet.

Jedida threw her arms around Anna, and then backed off a moment, clasping her mother’s face in wonder. “Your fever is *gone!*”

Kitra cheered and leapt into Jesus’ arms, kissing His bearded face. Ezekiel hugged his grandmother, and then let out a whoop as he raced out to tell the others. Andrew slapped Simon on the back. They had seen so many healed over the past weeks, but this was very different, very personal. Ashira found herself laughing for the first time in many days. She embraced her grandmother, “Nana, how do you feel? You were so *sick.*”

Anna, still trying to take in everything, was beaming. “I feel very rested, not a pain anywhere!” She turned to Jesus, “*Thank you!*”

Ashira’s pulse still beat quickly, and her heart was overwhelmed. The room eventually quieted a little as everyone soaked in the amazement of what they had seen.

Anna glanced toward the window, her eyes lit with the familiar twinkle. “Jedida, how late is it? Can I fix you all something to eat?” She began to move towards the door.

“Anna!” Simon reproached playfully. “Are you sure you’re up to it?”

Anna laughed. “Well, Simon bar Jonah! I think that is the first objection you’ve ever made to getting a meal!” She squeezed his hand. “Really, dear, I’ve never felt better!”

Jesus grinned. “Unless, of course, Peter, you want Andrew to cook for everyone.”

Andrew chuckled, and Peter moaned. “Oh, no! We tried that on the way back from Jerusalem!”

Amidst more laughing, they all streamed into the front room. Jared brought in some of his catch. Ashira uncovered the windows that had been closed for many days, and the afternoon sunlight flowed into the house.

Ashira had completely forgotten the crowd. Until now. She peered out the small, high window for a closer look. The warble of many voices surrounded the house.

“Anna’s been healed!” some said. “Jesus cured her!”

Ashira stared. Word was out, and before long the crowd had more than doubled in number. People stretched down the street in both directions, and more were coming.

“There are so many!” Ashira said.

Jesus came and looked out, too. “So many sheep....”

There was a knock on the door. Ashira went and opened it. Zivah hesitated on the doorstep, and Ashira drew back, stiffening. “I—” Zivah stuttered, uncomfortably, “I heard Jesus was here.” Ashira gave an unwilling nod.

Jesus came into view. “Hello, Zivah,” He said warmly. She stepped towards Him, almost tripping over the threshold. Ashira caught her hand to steady her.

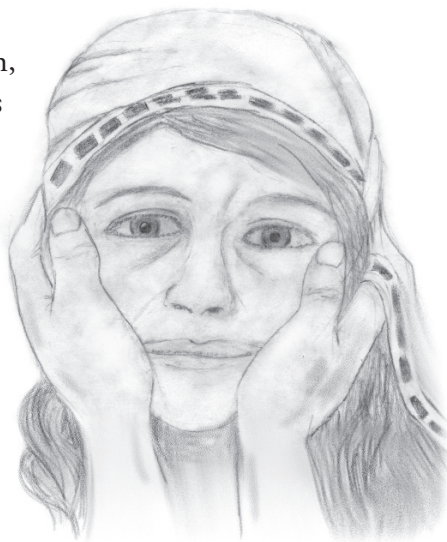
Zivah looked at Jesus. “Oh, Sir!” She fell to the ground at His feet, her face close to the floor.

Ashira’s heart was pounding. She moved her gaze away from Jesus, reluctant to accept what was happening. Jedida and Anna had paused their work and were watching. The roomful looking on was hushed. Was the Zivah at Jesus’ feet the same proud Zivah they had all known for years?

Jesus bent and lifted Zivah’s chin.

She tried to speak. “Oh, Master, forgive me—” But she could not finish.

Tenderly, He held her face in His hands for several moments, His gaze compassionate. “Zivah, your faith has healed you.” He lifted her to her feet and kissed her hand. “Be at peace.”



Zivah smiled. Ashira had never seen her as grateful, submissive, or loving before, but there was no mistaking the look on her face now for anything but a combination of those three very different qualities.

Ashira's face grew red, her thoughts confused. Once again, Jesus had done the last thing she had expected. *I can't see into her, but He does. He sees her heart, the way He saw the centurion's heart. He sees something, a change there, that has pleased Him. Why am I not glad?* Jealousy and anger inside her warred with the forgiveness she had just witnessed in this man Jesus.

Zivah motioned out the door. "We've brought Jesse, my brother—please, would you come to him?" Jesus walked outside, and Zivah followed close behind. She stopped suddenly, though, as she caught sight of Anna. "Anna! You are well!"

Anna smiled and came closer. "Ahh, Yesu made me well, as He has made you well." The two embraced, and Jedida joined them as they spoke together.

Zivah came slowly to Ashira, who had not left her place near the door. The two looked at each other. "Ashira," Zivah said, wrestling to find the words, "Could you please forgive me for how I've treated you? I have been so, so wrong." Ashira opened her mouth and closed it again. Zivah started to say more, but Ashira lowered her eyes.

There were sudden shouts outside. Ezra leaned in through the open door. "Jared! Come and see! My father is well!" The house emptied. Anna and Jedida forgot their cooking. Zivah looked once more at Ashira, and then ran through the door.

Elizabeth rushed to Ashira, laughing and crying at the same time. "Look! Look!" Ashira turned and saw: Jesse was on his feet! He was not only walking, but leaping! His shouts of praise permeated the jubilant crowd.

This was the beginning of a long, full night. The crowds brought to Jesus their loved ones—sick and lame and demon-possessed, and He healed them all. The crowd rejoiced aloud as He moved among the people, laying His hands on one after another. Crutches and stretchers were tossed away—their owners made whole. Feet danced

that had never walked, and every type of disease was made to leave. Anna, Jedida, and Zivah went to work, together. They brought food and drink to those who needed it. Everyone busied themselves in various ways on this night of nights.

The stars had been out for many hours when the crowds began to dwindle. Several found places to sleep right in the courtyard; others went to their homes. Ashira looked and found Jesus just outside the courtyard wall. He helped a six-year-old child to his feet. The little boy's constant coughing subsided, and his breathing returned to a child's rhythm. Jesus' arms hung heavily at His sides. Though this work meant everything to Him, Ashira could see that He was very weary. He still had not had a chance to eat. As the boy's parents took their son home, Jesus came into the courtyard. He stooped and gently lifted Kitra, who had fallen asleep by the gate with a grin on her face.

Ashira walked with Him into the house. Most of her mind was tense and numb, but as she closed the door behind them, her heart yearned for something beyond the wondrous miracles He had brought all around her that day.

Jesus gently handed Kitra to her mother, and whispered, "Sleep well, angel. Good night, Jedida."

*I want to know Him*, Ashira thought, her heart aching with longing. *With all my heart, I want to know Him.*



# *A Light Has Dawned!*

---

*The people living in darkness  
have seen a great light; on those living  
in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.*

Matthew 4:16

Ashira sat on the corner of the courtyard wall, drawing her cloak more tightly to herself against the crisp morning air. She squinted out towards the eastern side of the lake. The sky was brightening, but it was still well before daybreak. She looked back into the courtyard. People were sleeping here and there, and no one else inside the house was yet awake. But Ashira was awake...she had hardly slept. So many scenes from the night before kept replaying through her mind. So many miracles! At the time, everything had been happening so fast she couldn't take it all in. But afterward, when things had finally



quieted down, every scene tumbled over in her heart, in her thoughts, like a precious, amazing jewel—and with each facet she turned over came a new wonder. And at the center of it all was *Jesus—Messiah!* She was beginning to love to think of Him.

Quietly, Ashira hummed a tune for the words that had been slowly forming in her mind during the past hours. The song trailed off into silence as her face sank to her hands. She knew there was mixture in her heart. *Zivah. Everything about yesterday was so breathtaking! Everything except what happened with Zivah. Why can't I accept that SHE has changed? Surely it isn't right to think less of her than Jesus does.* Ashira breathed in deeply and slowly exhaled. *Adonai, what's wrong with me??*

She raised her head and again searched the horizon, hoping for a first peek at the rising sun. Footsteps rustled in the courtyard behind her. Ashira turned and saw Jesus, with His cloak and bag in one arm.

He spotted Ashira and came to her. “Good morning,” Jesus said softly.

“Do You—Are You leaving?” She hoped He wasn't.

He patted her arm, “Soon, but not right now. Many others haven't yet heard what you've heard, or seen what you've seen, Ashira. There are many captives to set free.”

Her thoughts racing, Ashira looked down.

Jesus leaned, half sitting on the wall beside her. “What are you thinking?” He cocked His head, trying to see her eyes.

Ashira knew she could not really hide, nor did she want to. She raised her chin, smiling ruefully. “Well, I have been thinking of a *lot* of things.” She paused, “But maybe You could help me understand something. Zivah—I—I was avoiding her last night. She changed so quickly after she came to You—but I couldn't seem—” Ashira's gaze sunk to the ground again. “*I couldn't seem to change that quickly toward her. Jesus, I want to love her...like You do.*”

“Do you really?” The question was matter-of-fact, but Jesus' eyes were soft with understanding and compassion. The truth of His challenge pierced through Ashira. She turned to face Jesus completely. “*Part of me wants to love her,*” she began. “But another part of me is resistant. I don't know if I really *believe* the change in Zivah.” Her

whispering grew more intense as her own motives were brought to light. “Or maybe I don’t *want* to believe it! Maybe I’ve hardened my heart to her so much I don’t even want to change if it means I have to—to actually *love* her.” Ashira stopped, horrified as her own words began to sink in. “Oh, Yesu!”

Jesus looked at her unflinchingly, “Ashira, you are beginning to see. Hating your sin, and wanting to change—that’s where Zivah has already begun and that’s where *you* must begin as well.” With unmistakable hope, He continued, “You’ll be free when you stop judging, and turn from your sin and go the other way. *Celebrate* the miracles Abba has done in Zivah and so many others...and He *will* do in you...” Nodding at her He added, “...IF you’ll follow Me.”

Ashira stared into Jesus’ eyes. Such straight words, such convicting words. Her heart was laid bare. And yet, He seemed to gift her with the courage to obey Him. “Jesus,” she slipped off the wall and stood before Him declaring, “That IS what I want. I’ve been thinking about this ever since the first time You spoke in our courtyard weeks ago. I thought about it all again last night — everything I’ve seen You do, and all You’ve said about repentance, about freedom, and about the good news of the kingdom. I know it’s all found in You! I *want* to follow You, and I *will*. I want to look to You and learn to love like You love and hate whatever *You* hate.” Ashira paused, realizing she had gotten a bit loud. She looked around at those stirring from their slumber in the courtyard. She leaned toward Jesus and whispered earnestly. “*Will You help me?*”

Jesus chuckled at her with delight, “Of course, daughter of Simon.” He took her hands in His and looked at her seriously, “You can trust me to help you moment by moment, time by time. I’ll tell you a little secret, okay? If you put your life and heart and future in My hands, I’ll be with you always, until the sky rips open at the trumpet blast of Gabriel, and then forever past that.”

“Yesu!!” Ashira was awed to silence. Trying to take it all in, she thought for a moment and said, a little sheepishly, “Jesus? I’ve been thinking of You all night and...it’s kind of turned into a song for You. Would...would You want to hear it?”

Jesus looked genuinely surprised. “Ashira!” His face lit up, “I’d love to.”

She glanced over her shoulder, hoping not to disturb the few still resting. Some had roused and were listening, but she began to sing anyway, her eyes set firmly on Jesus.

*“What can I give  
What can I lay down  
To show You how grateful I am?”*

*What can I say  
What can I do for You  
To show You how much I love You?”*

*Here’s my life  
Take it  
Use it  
It’s all that I have  
But maybe somehow through this thing  
You’ll see how much You mean to me.”*

Ashira’s eyes never left Jesus, so intent was her desire for Him to know that she meant every word, personally. She could see He was filled with pleasure. She would never forget the expression of love on His face.

“Thank you, Ashira.” Jesus was clearly touched. “I will always remember this gift. This faith gives me and my Father so much joy. Will you continue to trust me, however and whatever I do with your life?”

Ashira thought about what He was saying, “I don’t know exactly what that will mean, but I do know I *can* trust You. And so I will!”

Jesus squeezed her hand gently.

The clop, clop sound of horses was almost at the gate before it caught Ashira’s attention. To her shock, the Roman centurion and



the young servant that Jesus had healed the day before stood right outside the courtyard. With radiant faces they whispered to each other as the elder gave instructions to the younger. A large sack of fine flour was pulled off the smaller horse of the servant and placed with a careful thud by the gate of Simon's courtyard. Ezekiel ran over to the gate from where he had been tending the goats. Ashira could only catch bits and pieces of the brief conversation between the centurion, the servant, and her excited younger brother.

Ashira looked back to speak to Jesus, but He had slipped away. Her heart couldn't help but continue to talk to Him. *Jesus, You are so Faithful. I know we will be continually amazed by who You are and what You reveal to us. Look! Those who were formerly our enemies are caring for us, as if they were family.* She looked around as others, awakened

by the commotion, eyed the centurion with curiosity. *Though many will reject You, how precious are those who do love You.* She shook her head in wonder. *What a kingdom, what a family this will be!*

Her little sisters rushed toward the gate as the horses and riders clopped away. “Thankths!” Kitra called out.

The Roman looked over his shoulder and nodded, “You’re welcome, little lady.”

Simon swooped Kitra up off her feet and they both waved as the horse trotted out of sight. Everyone laughed in astonishment.

The sun was fully breaking the horizon now, casting a hazy early morning glow over the courtyard. Ashira saw Andrew stretching. He jostled awake a couple of the other disciples. Ezra had just arrived and joined Jared and her abba in their conversation at the other side of the courtyard. She laughed out loud as she saw Elizabeth and Jesse coming up as well—Elizabeth beaming as she rushed to keep up with her abba’s strides. Ashira strolled over to her mother. Jedida, with the baby on her hip, was marveling as Ariel not-so-timidly offered fig cakes to the early risers.

Pointing toward Ezekiel, Ashira whispered to her mother, “Look!”

Ezekiel was now energetically whittling off the end of the sword he had carved so many weeks ago, apparently altering it into a tool of some sort. He looked up at his mother and sister, saying, “For the centurion! Do you know he told me to call him Marcus?!”

Meanwhile, Anna was motioning for Rebekah to help her open the sack of flour, “This will make the finest bread we’ve ever had!”

Already, Jesus had turned their entire lives upside down, and had begun to change their hearts in ways they could never have imagined. Ashira recalled His question to her, “*Will you trust Me, however and whatever I do with your life?*”

She knew that the question was the same for all of them. *This is only the beginning!* she thought. Jesus would leave Capernaum soon.

Her own abba might leave as well, today, in a week, or in a month. Tomorrow was completely unknown. But she knew that if each of them trusted everything to Him, then their pasts were covered, their today had hope, and their futures were absolutely secure. Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled, and it filled their hearts with joy. Upon those living in that land of darkness a Light had truly dawned.



*The Promise is for us, for our children, for all of those even far off—as  
many as would call on the name of the Lord, their God,  
Behold!—The Lamb of God—  
who takes away the sins of the world.*

*A Light has dawned!*



# Glossary

*In preparing to write this story, we thought it would be important to learn the customs, environment, and lifestyle of those in Israel two-thousand years ago. What we discovered really helped us to see their world through their eyes, so we've included this sort of "glossary" to share the ways and events of those years with you.*

## **Carpentry**

Like all other trades in Biblical times, carpentry was usually a family business. The father and his sons, who functioned as assistants until they had more experience, ran the business. From a young age, they knew the uses of the different tools and often helped their father while he worked. Farmers depended on carpenters for yokes for their animals, and everyone else needed tables, doorframes, stools, chairs, and many other everyday items. Carpenters were respected craftsmen and often wore a chip of wood behind their ears to proudly indicate their trade. Common tools for a carpenter were the adze (similar to an axe), awl, mallet, and saw.



## Clothing

Clothing during the first century was very similar to that which had been worn in Abraham's day. It was simple, functional, and highly valued. Only the high-standing and well-to-do had more than one set of clothing. People of the middle and lower classes wore the same garment all week long, then washed it on the day before the Sabbath. Woven from wool, the typical attire was a long tunic (ankle-length for women, slightly shorter for men). The tunic was covered with an outer coat (or mantle), and the entire outfit was held together loosely by a belt. According to tradition, each corner of the mantle held a tassel, meant to remind the people of God's laws. An additional piece, the head covering, varied greatly. Blue was usually worn only by women. Scarlet and deep purple, being very expensive dyes, were reserved for the clothing of the wealthy.



## Courtyard

The courtyard, found in any home, from the dwelling of the poorest farmer to that of the affluent official, was one of the most important features of the house. Surrounded by a low wall, and sometimes shared with several other families, the courtyard was the center of most household activities. The open space was much preferred over the dark, often unbearably hot interior of the house. A large fire pit, an oven, a grindstone, a garden, and storage jars were usually located in the courtyard, since it was the place for food preparation. Small shelters for the family's livestock (sheep or goats) were also there, and in Capernaum, fishing gear was stored in the courtyard. Overall, it was the gathering place for the household, for both menial tasks and celebrations.



## Fishing

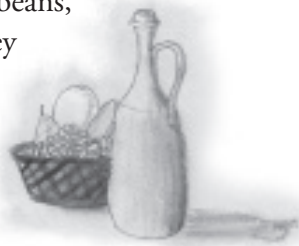
Fishing on the Sea of Galilee was an important industry and yielded a rich harvest, but it took long, hard hours, often from evening until early morning. Gear consisted of different sizes of mesh nets, baskets to hold the catch, a stone anchor, torches for attracting fish, food and water jars, extra ropes, and oars for propelling the boat. Fishing usually took place at night because the sunlight scared the fish to the deepest parts of the lake. Most of a fishing night was spent casting nets in one spot, then rowing to another spot to cast nets again. The fish were then dragged into the boat and sorted. Mending nets took up much of a fisherman's time when he was not actually fishing. The repairs were made on nets he had woven himself.



Two common nets used on the Sea of Galilee were the hand net and the dragnet. The hand net was a circular net of fine mesh with weights around the perimeter. It was thrown with a broad spinning motion over shallow waters. As it fell, it took the shape of an underwater dome, which caught the fish. To bring the fish in, the fisherman closed it with a line attached to its center, much like a drawstring. A dragnet, eighteen feet wide and hundreds of feet long (on the open end), was weighted at one end and had corks on the other. It was ideal to use between two boats. It would hang from the floats and was held straight down by lead sinkers.

## Food

People ate just about the same meals every day. Lentils, figs, fish, dates, and milk products were common, and beans, cucumbers, grapes, plums, apples, and honey were also available to some. Salt, gathered from Magdala, was used extensively as a preservative. Meat was eaten only on rare occasions, except for fish, which was typically eaten every day. Bread was the



staple food. On some days, such as the Sabbath, Jews were forbidden to eat bread made with yeast. Diluted wine was a very common drink because water was often dirty, even when it came from a well.

### Goats

Goats were very important to Jewish families.

Their milk was used to make butter, cheese, and yogurt. Their skin was made into leather, which could be made into tents, and their wool could be made into clothing. Unlike most other animals, goats were able to thrive in the mountainous regions of Judea as well as the hilly Galilean landscape. They were able to withstand harsh conditions, and could eat almost any kind of plant or shrub.



### House

In Galilee, most structures were built of black basalt, stone, or sun-dried brick. There were few windows in the house, resulting in a dark, hot environment. The walls of homes were thick for insulation. Niches in the walls were used for storage. The main room of the

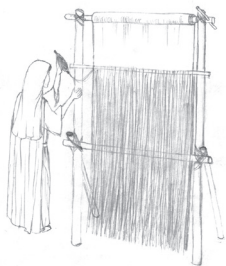
home had a floor with two levels: a ground floor of hard-packed earth, and a raised stone platform. (A floor could also be made of dirt, stone, or pebbles and plaster.) Animals wandered around the lower level, where cooking was sometimes carried out. Sleeping and eating took place on the upper



level. The inside of the house had very few furnishings, and poor families slept on mats and sat on the ground. Poorer houses had few rooms, only one courtyard (rather than two or three), and the home's entrance usually opened into the courtyard. A home that had been in the family for several generations would be larger, with rooms added on as the family grew. This was the reason for the maze-like array of rooms in many homes.

## Loom

By Jesus' time, a large loom had been developed that allowed garments to be made out of a single piece of cloth; up until this time, two pieces of cloth had to be sewn together to make a large enough piece of clothing. This loom had to be managed by two people, one handling the shuttle, and the other working the threads. Because of the way the cloth was woven and made into clothing, stripes on



clothes always fell vertically. Garments were sold in markets without openings for the head, in order to prove that they were new. The customer would then fit it according to the needed size, and, if it was a woman, embroider it with colorful decorations. Many poorer people, however, would weave their own clothing on looms in their homes.

## Merchants and Marketplace

The marketplace was set up near the city gates. It was a noisy place with animals bleating and braying and people shouting and bargaining. Generally, the buyer would offer half of what he intended to pay, and the seller would ask twice what he expected to gain. Because there was no way to store food for a long period of time, women would go to the market every day and buy only what they needed for that day. The day before the Sabbath was a big market day, when people would buy whatever they needed for the next day.



Merchants could either be local shopkeepers who sold goods in the same place every day, or they could be people who traveled to buy goods to bring back and sell in Israel. They were practically the only ones who traveled outside of Israel. Merchants were sometimes dishonest and used crooked weights and measures. These men might overcharge people for their goods and grow very wealthy as a result.

## Messiah

The Messiah was the Promised One whom—it was prophesied—God would send to restore Israel. Many Israelites were expecting a majestic king who would defeat the Romans. When Jesus came without beauty or majesty, many didn't believe that He was the Messiah because He seemed so real and human. They had been expecting a king to drive the Romans out, and here was their King: humble and riding on a donkey's colt.



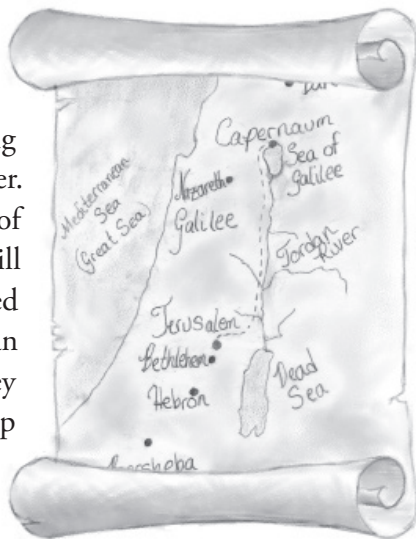
## Passover

Each year, thousands of Jews would go to Jerusalem to celebrate a festival called Passover. It was a celebration of how God had set the Israelites free from Egyptian slavery. The festival began on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Nisan. The word “Passover” comes from the Biblical event of the tenth plague, which God brought on Egypt for keeping the Israelites in bondage. God killed the first-born child in every Egyptian home but *passed over* the homes of the Israelites that had blood on their doorposts. The word “Passover” also refers to the *passing over* of the Israelites from slavery into freedom.



## Road to Jerusalem

Jews traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem often took a route going first south along the Jordan River. Then, once they reached the end of the river, they traveled west, uphill to Jerusalem. The city was located in a fairly high region of the Judean Mountains. The possible road they traveled on can be seen on the map on the right. The whole journey covered approximately 550 miles and probably took three to four weeks.



## Roman Occupation

Rome ruled and occupied Israel during Jesus' day. Romans were hated by the Jews for a number of reasons. The first was that the Jews resented rule and taxation by pagans who worshipped a myriad of false gods. The second was that most Romans were cruel toward conquered people who refused to submit to their form of government. If a Roman asked a Jew to do anything for any reason, it was not an option to refuse. One of Jesus' teachings that was hard for the Jews to accept was, "If [a Roman] asks you to carry his pack for one mile, carry it for two." This love for one's enemies was scandalous for many Jews at that time.

Roman garrisons were very common throughout Galilee, the most troublesome of Israel's provinces. Capernaum, located at the far north side of the Sea of Galilee, was in a key position geographically and had a garrison of soldiers. It is estimated that as many as 600 Roman soldiers at a time were stationed there. This, understandably, impacted and complicated the lives of the Jews living in Capernaum, causing a measure of resentment toward the Roman presence.

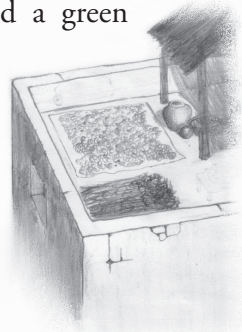
Though most Romans were despised, one centurion in Capernaum was a God-fearing man who respected the Jews. He built

Capernaum's synagogue, the ruins of which are still there today.

## Roof

The flat roof of the house was constructed of strong beams, covered with a network of brushwood and plastered with mud. A roller was kept on the roof to compact the surface after heavy rains turned it into a thick slosh. Roofs were always leaking, and during the rainy season (November to March, on our calendar) they acquired a green

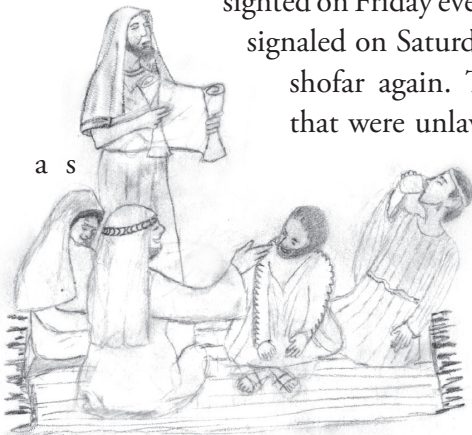
tint because of the small plants that would sprout in the mud. On hot nights, the roof served as alternate sleeping quarters. During the day, however, it was a popular place for all sorts of other activities. Fruits and grains were laid out and dried on the roof. The use of this area was so great that Jewish law required that a parapet be built around the edge so that no one would be injured by a fall.



## Sabbath

The Sabbath was the Jewish Day of Rest. The beginning of the Sabbath was announced by three blasts of the shofar (a ram's horn) from the roof of the temple or synagogue when the first star was sighted on Friday evening. The end of the Sabbath was signaled on Saturday evening by three blasts of the shofar again. There were thirty-nine activities that were unlawful to do on the Sabbath, such

lighting fires of any kind and walking more than a certain distance. On the day before the Sabbath, known as the Day of Preparation, there was much work to be done. The three meals for the next day



had to be cooked, enough water had to be drawn to last the entire next day, and the lamps had to be prepared. Near evening, people put aside their work and dressed in fresh clothing. Friday evening was a time of joy, praise, thanksgiving, and worship.

### **Schooling**

Most Israelite boys between the ages of six and thirteen were required to attend school at the synagogue every day except the Sabbath. They gathered in the synagogue early each morning to be taught by the town's greatly respected rabbi. The boys sat in a semi-circle on the floor in front of the rabbi, who would be rhythmically reciting scripture passages in Hebrew for the boys to repeat. Usually, Hebrew was the only language used in the classroom, as opposed to the common speech of Aramaic. In the effort to learn these passages by heart, the youths would copy them onto wax-covered tablets, using a sharpened bone or metal stylus as a writing utensil. Once a child had mastered the Hebrew alphabet and shorter passages, he would be allowed to copy longer lessons onto parchment with real pens dipped in ink. Partway through the day, the children would pause to eat the lunches they had brought with them. Many young men loved studying God's Word. The childhood dream of many was to become a scholar and lawyer.



## Sea of Galilee

What most know simply as the Sea of Galilee actually had a variety of different names. But whether it was called Lake Tiberias, the Sea of Chinneroth, Lake Kinnereth, Lake Gennesaret, or some other obscure name, the thing that this freshwater lake brought to the minds of most people was fish. This lake was one of the most productive fishing grounds in Israel, with over 230 fishing boats on it day in and day out. Larger Roman vessels also used the lake for transporting troops and supplies to different areas of Galilee. Among the many varieties of fish found in the waters, the most common were the tilapia and the lake sardine. The flourishing industry supported at least nine cities and countless villages along the lakeshore. The lake reaches its deepest point at 157 feet, stretches to about 14 miles long, and is (at its widest point) 8 miles wide.

## Seasons and Harvest Time

The two months of olive harvest  
The two months of planting grain  
The two months of late planting  
The months of hoeing up flax  
The month of harvest of barley  
The month of harvest and storage  
The two months of vine tending  
The month of summer fruit



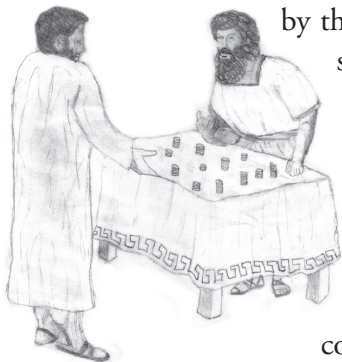
Farming and harvesting in Jesus' time depended entirely upon the seasons. Summers were hot and dry during the day, though cool at night. Winter was rainy and very cold, especially on high plateaus and mountains. Some parts of Israel, like Jerusalem, occasionally received some snow as late as April.

Grains were a main source of sustenance. Wheat was the most important crop, and was planted during the fall rains. Harvest was a few months later. Millet and flax were also grown during this cycle. Millet was used for animal feed, and flax was an important

commercial crop used to make linen. After the wheat harvest, the farmer turned his attention to vines and fruit trees. Grapes, figs, and olives were all common fruits, harvested in the spring.

### **Tax Collectors**

Jewish tax collectors, also called publicans or exactors, were despised

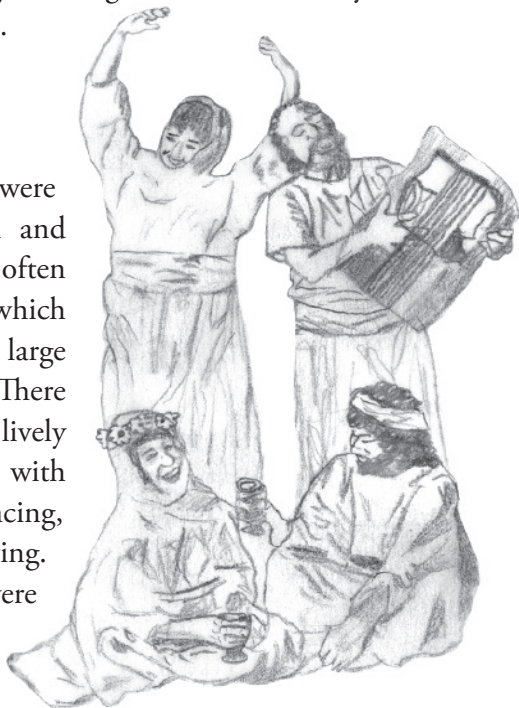


by their own people. They were put at the same level as heathen slaves, robbers, and murderers, and were considered unclean because they mixed with the Gentiles and worked on the Sabbath. Publicans were free to collect as much as they could and they often charged too much so they could line their own pockets with the

extra money. Taxation was based on a family's income and the value of its property. Caravans were taxed according to the goods they carried, and every male aged fourteen to sixty-five was required to pay an annual tax.

### **Weddings**

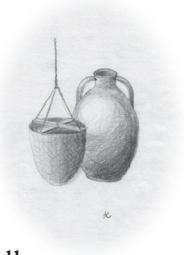
Weddings in ancient Israel were a time of great celebration and rejoicing. The festivities often lasted for seven days, during which time the guests consumed large quantities of food and drink. There was rhythmic music and lively dancing. The dances began with only the bride and groom dancing, then everyone else following. The bride and the groom were treated as a queen and king, and weddings were often



expensive and lavish.

## Well

The well was a place visited frequently by women in first-century Israel. The need for fresh water was recurrent (there was no way to keep large amounts of water from becoming contaminated), so the well was a natural gathering place for women all throughout the day. Women would bring large clay jars to pour the water into, but would actually draw the water with a leather bucket kept at the well. The well was always at the center of the town, so as to be easily accessed by all residents.



## A Woman's Work

A Jewish woman's duties centered on her home. Her days began at sunrise and lasted all day until nightfall. Each morning and evening, women gathered at the well and collected fresh water for their families. Fuel needed to be collected for baking bread. The floor in the house needed to be swept constantly. Wool needed to be spun and cloth needed to be woven to make into clothing. Upkeep of clothing was also very important because few people had changes of clothes in Jesus' time, so women were continually mending and patching clothing. Curds had to be made from goat's milk. Food needed to be gathered, and meals had to be made. The main job of a woman was making bread, which she did three to four times a day. To make bread, women had to grind their own grain, which was

