

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

During the Feast of Dedication, while walking through Solomon's porch in the Temple, he found himself surrounded by a hostile group of Jews. "If you really are the Christ, don't hide it from us; come right out and speak it plainly. Why do you keep us wondering?" they demanded.

"How many times must I tell you? The works that I do is proof of who I am. If you were of my sheep you would believe, for they hear and believe my words. I will give them eternal life and no one shall ever steal them away. My father who gave them to me is the greatest of all powers; he and I are of the same mind." Yeshua continued speaking until he realized several devious, unkempt men moved stealthily among the crowd. He saw them secretly passing stones among the congregating people. He boldly directed his question to them. "For which of the many good works that I have done do you wish to stone me?"

Angry voices insisted, "We do not wish to stone you for any 'good works', but for your blasphemous claims. You are no different than we, yet you claim such mighty things, even to being Yahweh!"

"Is it not written in your very own scriptures, 'I said, you are gods?' If the prophets were called gods—the scriptures cannot be broken—what about one who has been sent directly from The Father? How then am I blaspheming, just because I say I am the son of Yahweh? Unless I do the works of my father, don't believe me.

But if I do, at least believe me for the sake of the works. Let them be proof of who I am."

The more Yeshua spoke, the more restless the angry leaders became. They threatened to stone Yeshua, hoping to influence the people to violent action. Yeshua, reading their intent, instantly crouched behind an oversized woman, with cat-like speed, weaved among the thick crowd and vanished, leaving his enemies confused and frustrated. Later he rejoined his disciples outside the city.

From there he traveled a day's journey, crossed the river Jordan, and entered into the land of Peraea, where his cousin, Johanan had baptized. Here he and his disciples were received well. Many remembered the words of Johanan concerning him, and were sincerely impressed.

On one occasion, after Yeshua had spent the better part of the morning in prayer, his disciples asked him to teach them more about how to pray effectively. "When you pray," Yeshua replied, "pray to The Father, giving praise to his name. Pray that his kingdom will soon come. Pray according to his will—and

that it will prevail on earth as well as in heaven. Ask for your daily needs, for forgiveness of sins. Pray that you may be spared severe temptations and the effects of evil.”

The question was asked, “How shall we know that he hears us, or that he has time for our requests?”

“Suppose you have unexpected guests arrive in the middle of the night, weary and hungry, but you have temporarily ran out of food. You go to your neighbor and knock on his door. He listens from his bedroom window as you explain your dilemma. ‘Go away! I am already in bed. The members of my family are all asleep. Come back in the morning,’ the man responds. But in your distress you urge him, ‘The shops are all closed and my friends are near fainting from hunger...please, I must not return empty-handed.’

“Because you persist, your neighbor will tire of your voice and relent...not because he is such a good friend, but because he wants to go back to sleep. So it is with your prayers; ask and it will be given to you...but in many cases, you must be persistent.

Even though you are carnal, you would not respond to your children’s requests by giving them harmful things. Your heavenly father is more righteous than you...would he not be more than willing to give you his holy spirit when you ask?”

Later that day Yeshua was again accused of getting his powers from satanic sources. Some demanded he perform magic to prove his powers. “If I rebuke and disarm Satan by his own power, would I not be working against Satan’s kingdom? For every kingdom divided against itself is doomed to fall. If this is the case...by what power do your students cast out demons? Even they prove your words to be false. On the other hand...if I use the power of Yahweh to rebuke demons...is this not proof that Yahweh’s kingdom is being made available to you? When a strong man relies upon his weapons to safeguard his possessions, he runs the risk of his enemy bringing companions, and overpowering him. His adversary will disarm him and divide his belongings. When a demon is driven out of a person, he experiences emptiness. Barren and depressed, finding no rest, he returns to the house of flesh he had previously possessed. When he finds the person still open and receptive, he invites seven more demons, more wicked than himself, to share the human house. Now the person is in worse condition than before.

Those who are not in agreement with me are against me.”

As he spoke, an excited woman from the crowd exclaimed, “Truly, the woman who gave you birth, whose breasts nursed you, is blessed above all women!”

In answer to the woman, he extended his hand and addressed the crowd, “True, but of even greater blessing is this: that you hear the word of Yahweh, and keep it.”

When the restless crowd demanded he prove himself with another sign he sternly rebuked them. “You are a faithless generation, constantly seeking after signs to amuse yourselves. I shall give you but one sign, the sign of Jonas. Just as he was a sign to the Ninevites, I shall be to this generation. Your evil

generation will be judged and condemned by a Gentile, the Queen of Sheba. For she was more righteous than you, traveling across the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. But you have before you a greater one than Solomon.”

After Sabbath services, Yeshua and his disciples were invited to dine at a rich Pharisee’s home. Outside, in the flower-jeweled gardens, a customary banquet was in progress. When Yeshua arrived, his disciples followed his lead, ignoring the washing rituals that others were meticulously engaged in. The host’s eyes narrowed with distaste as servants seated Yeshua among a pompous, unfriendly crowd of richly dressed guests. Priests and Pharisees occupied the head seats.

When all had been seated the indignant Pharisee host gestured toward Yeshua and his disciples. “Is it not an insult to our customs that you do not observe the ritual of washing?” he questioned.

Yeshua boldly leveled his steady gaze into the critical man’s eyes. His voice was calm but strong. “You Pharisees are so very careful to cleanse the outside of the dish, all the time hiding the filthiness of the inside. In the guise of cleanliness you cover your acts of extortions and wickedness. You ignorant man! Was not the maker of the outside also maker of the inside? I fear for you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. You remind me of hidden graves, covered by earth, that men walk over without knowing what lies beneath. You love the important seats in the synagogues, and grand greetings in the market places. Why can you not show mercy and compassion, giving to the poor, so that you may deserve such honor? Instead you make a big show of paying tithes even of your tiniest plants, passing over judgment and Yahweh’s love.”

A long robed, stout man, his face red with anger, interrupted, “Master, no doubt you include us, who make decisions concerning the laws, in your reproaches?”

“Indeed! You lawyers are no better. You knowingly pervert the holy law with unbearable, meaningless, religious-sounding rules and regulations. You change the law of liberty into heavy shackles, taking away the key to knowledge. You place burdens on others that you are unwilling to bear, nor change. You makers of the law, your ancestors killed the prophets and you build their tombs. It has been foretold, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles; some of them they will persecute and murder.’ This generation will stand responsible for all the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zacharias, whose blood was shed between the altar and the Temple. You, yourself, have rejected the truth and prevent any who would accept it.”

“Who gave you the right to condemn us? The Fathers have assigned us the sacred responsibility to preserve the Hebrew writings, to literally interpret and record the holy writings handed down to us by the prophets!” an angry voice insisted.

“At whose feet have you learned the law?” another voice demanded. “We are students of Ezra and Joshua, the son of Eleazar, great scribes of virtue and wisdom. By what authority do you judge us?”

The angered voices rose, each one louder than the other until no one could be heard. Every hate-filled question was a deliberate attempt to trick Yeshua into saying something that would give them cause to stone him. The commotion of loud voices and yelling attracted the attention of many from the

immediate area. An unusually large crowd gathered about, pushing and shoving, attempting to hear what was being said. Ignoring the confusion, Yeshua began speaking to his disciples. "Beware of the Pharisees' leavening of hypocrisy. Every evil deed that they have committed in secrecy will be brought out into the open. And remember, there is no need to fear man...he can do no more than destroy your fleshly body. Instead fear to displease the One who can take your life, resurrect it, and again destroy it eternally in the flames of hell."

Eventually the commotion died down and Yeshua tactfully excused himself and left without further confrontation.

During the following weeks Yeshua avoided the crowds. He devoted himself to teaching the disciples spiritual lessons and wisdom. "Take heed that you do not become overly involved in material possessions," he warned, "for your life is not given so that you may devote yourself solely to your personal possessions."

A certain selfish, rich land-owner prospered abundantly. His land produced so much he wondered what to do next, and how to preserve all his produce. Finally he decided to tear down all his buildings and build greater ones. He contented himself with thoughts of perpetual comfort and pleasure. He was in need of nothing, eating, drinking, and lavishly indulging himself. Little did he know that Yahweh was aware of his selfish attitude. 'You ignorant man, tonight you shall die and leave it all to someone else,' Yahweh said. This is the end of those whose lives are wholly wrapped up in acquiring personal wealth. Rather, they should be concerned about storing spiritual wealth and richness toward Yahweh."

Peter seemed puzzled. "Does this mean, Master, one should not develop and operate a successful business?"

Yeshua shook his head. "No, Peter. But on the other hand, to constantly occupy the mind with fearful thoughts concerning one's possessions leads to sin. Your life is more important than food. Your body is worth more than the clothes you wear. The Father knows your needs. Trust him to do for you the things you cannot. Don't set material things as your primary goal in life. Rather, be more involved with your spiritual development. It is your father's pleasure to give you the kingdom. Share your abundance with your brethren who are in need. Lay up eternal treasures in heaven. By so doing you will have all the things you need. Where your treasures are is where your heart is."

Judas raised his neatly trimmed eyebrows and questioned, "Is it safe to assume that all our desires will be supplied by The Father? Will he show us, as your followers, special favors? Are we lowly servants to receive riches in the kingdom?"

"Be prepared; let your lights shine," Yeshua answered. "Be like men waiting for their lord to return from his wedding. When they knock, he will surely welcome them in and serve them."

Likewise, if you are diligently watching, you will be received with gladness, whether in the first, second, or third watch. But, let me warn you, if the home-owner had known when the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. So you must be prepared; give no opportunity for the enemy to influence your attitude and conduct, for I shall come unexpectedly."

Peter still looked puzzled. "Is this parable directed toward us or to everyone?" he asked.

"Who is a wise and faithful steward who will be promoted to high office? Is it not the loyal servant who is found to be devoted to his master, involved in the responsibilities assigned him? Yes, and he will be promoted to rulership. But woe to the servant who decides his master's return is far into the future, abusing himself with food and alcohol, cruelly mistreating those he has charge over. His lord will return unexpectedly, punishing the offender and throwing him out in disgrace. His portion will be with the unbelievers."

John felt a twinge of fear at these words. "Will every sinner be punished equally...and what will determine their punishment?"

"Some will be punished more severely than others, depending on the degree of their understanding. Those who sin through ignorance shall receive less punishment than those who know better, yet choose to sin. More will be required of those who have been given greater understanding; their responsibility will also be greater."

The disciples began a heated discussion. "It seems the less one knows the better he fares. Perhaps to be ignorant will insure the greatest protection from Yahweh's wrath. Who, in his right mind, would strive to be the most educated? He receives the greater punishment," one asserted.

"Well...If you have no ambition, wanting no position in the kingdom, I suppose you could take that view. But to be a sluggard has no rewards either," young John said. "Would you not be just as guilty if you deny a Yahweh given ability or opportunity?"

"What suffering and hardships must we endure before we are counted worthy of such honor? We have had family and friends turn against us because of our decisions to enter this way. The scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of our communities have scoffed at us. We are accused of being sinners and Sabbath breakers. Our lives have been threatened by angry mobs. We have barely missed being stoned on occasion. Are we not already deserving of an honorable position?" Thomas asked.

Yeshua surveyed his students, their stern faces darkened with discontent. He knew each one desired the higher positions in the kingdom. But all were totally ignorant of how and when these offices would be filled. Again he explained, "I have been sent to cleanse the earth by fire. It seems to have already started. But before this, I have a serious, perplexing commission to fulfill.

Holding everything together until all is completed is extremely distressing. Do you think I have come to accumulate friends and win favor for myself and for you? Do you think I have come to bring peace to my followers? Just the opposite...instead, large families will divide, disagreeing violently. Parents will turn against their children, children against their parents. Close relatives will oppose and persecute believers."

Judas cupped his hand over his mouth and muttered to James, "It seems we would be wise to store away as much money as we can in preparation for just such times. If we make enemies of our own

families, what can we expect from others? Who can we rely on except ourselves when his fearful predictions manifest themselves?"

James slowly shook his head in mock hopelessness. "What is more distressing is that we have left our homes and families to establish a government that is elusive and endlessly future. We have nothing to show for all our sacrifices."

Judas urged the disciples on. "When is The Master going to see how urgent is the need for a new government immediately? Our nation is suffering more now than when Israel was openly at war with her enemies. How much longer must we wait for him to get serious? Our families have a right to become impatient with our absences, and neglect, seeing we are accomplishing nothing."

"Who else has the ability and power to pull our nation out of it's despair?" John asserted. "We know The Master has a plan; he has power and he commands authority. We have no other recourse but to support him. His intentions are cloaked in mystery temporally, and for good reason. He's testing our loyalty. How else can he determine what positions we are to share with him. I am compelled to believe he knows what he is doing. I intend to follow him wherever he leads."

Thomas considered both arguments. "There is merit in what both of you say. However, we have seen little progress in the direction of organizing anything of strength. All this talk, but little action. Much of what is being said is said in riddles. I will believe there is going to be a new government when I see some solid evidence. Something must be done by someone. I am not yet ready to join the rebels that roam the streets of Jerusalem. All they are accomplishing is getting jailed and beheaded for their efforts. But I am not ready to embrace defeat, either. Our families' lives are not so secure that we can be content to do nothing."

Even though the disciples were troubled about their involvement in Yeshua's plan, still each man coveted an important position. Not yet willing to openly question his motives and intentions, they assumed an attitude of "perilous events will compel his hand soon enough".

Yeshua led his disciples down the east side of Jordan. He was safer here than in Judea. As the day passed, many people gathered about, listening to Yeshua and asking questions. And as usual, scribes and Pharisees were eager to trick him with more of their questions. "Master, you speak of many strange, future events. What sign can you give us that we may know these things are truly coming to pass?"

"When you see a cloud rise out of the west, you instantly know to expect showers," Yeshua answered. "When the wind blows from the south, you expect warm weather. You hypocrites, why must you demand a sign from me? You know how to read the signs of nature. Must I believe you are unable to read the signs of prophecy? Why do you have so much trouble judging right from wrong?"

A question was put to Yeshua, "What can you tell us about the Galilaens whom Pilate had slaughtered while offering sacrifices to Yahweh? What had they done so wickedly that brought the wrath of Yahweh upon them?"

“Do you think they were more wicked than you because this happened to them?” Yeshua answered. “No, let me tell you, that is not the case. Neither were those eighteen people who were crushed when the tower of Siloam fell in Jerusalem. Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.”

Later, teaching in the synagogue, on a Sabbath, he saw a pitiful woman whose body was doubled over from a crippling disease. She had been in this miserable condition for eighteen years.

Holding out both his hands, he invited the woman to come before him. Slowly, she made her way down from the women’s section, unaware of the staring eyes of the congregation. She had heard many things about this gentle, wise healer. She had come to believe he was indeed The Son of Yahweh. Trembling with excitement and anticipation, she approached him meekly. She heard, in an authoritative voice, “Lady, you are loosed from your infirmity.”

She felt his hands gently touch her head. A surge of strength rushed through her body and she cautiously straightened to an unfamiliar height. Overcome with joy, she began praising Yahweh.

Many, who had witnessed the miracle, sat with tears of gratitude and thankfulness. From the women’s section came sobs of happiness. But from high seats in the elder’s section, jealous leaders quietly voiced their displeasure to each other. A tall, dignified, long-robbed figure rose from the head seat and approached the elated woman. The congregation quieted to hear the angry, indignant words of the synagogue ruler. “My good woman, Yahweh has given us six days in which to do our work. I trust you should know to pick one of these days to come and be healed, not on the Sabbath,” he growled his disapproval.

Yeshua felt a twinge of anger redden his face. “You hypocrite!” he loudly called out. “Would you not work to rescue one of your animals if it fell into a ditch on the Sabbath? Don’t you attend to their needs, watering and feeding them on the Sabbath? Is this lady, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, worth less than your animals? Should she not be rescued just because today is the Sabbath?” he demanded.

The antagonistic Jews gave no reply. They wanted to find something for which to condemn, and stir the people against him. But he answered every question with a question, making them seem the fool.

The following week he traveled toward Jerusalem. As he went through the cities and villages, he taught, “It requires great effort to enter the straight gate. Many will desire to enter, but will not make it. There will eventually come the time when the master will close the door. It will be too late to seek entrance then. When he says, ‘Go away. I don’t recognize you,’ many will answer, ‘We have ate and drank in your presence, assembled in your name. We have been taught by you.’ But he will deny that he knows them, calling them ‘workers of iniquity’. When they are rejected, they will weep and gnash their teeth. My true worshippers shall be gathered from every direction of the heavens, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets, in the kingdom of heaven. Many who are chosen last, in the latter days, will have higher positions in the kingdom than those who were chosen first.”

The more people flocked to hear Yeshua, the more jealous the Pharisees became. As a brewing storm, their unleashed fury grew, overshadowed by dark clouds of hatred. They hoped to use the news

of Herod's violence to their advantage, "Teacher, we have heard that Herod is on the rampage against religious movements. We think it would be most wise if you consider the danger you place yourself in by teaching here in Herod's domain. If news of your travels reach his treacherous ears, he surely will order your death."

Yeshua flashed an accusing look at his "helpful" enemies. "It is not Herod that wishes to kill me, nor Peraea the place that kills the prophets, but Jerusalem. Nevertheless, you may relay this message to Herod the fox, 'Today and tomorrow I cast out demons and heal. It is the third day that I shall be perfected'.

For this reason I make my way to Jerusalem."

Thinking of Jerusalem's terrible condition, future devastation, and his own death, Yeshua moaned inwardly, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem! If only you would accept my love. You stone and murder the very ones sent to you. How I yearn to gather you to myself as a mother hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings, protecting them from danger. But, no, you will turn upon me in violence. Your race will be left desolate until I return, until you say, 'Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord'."

As the multitudes followed loud voices committed themselves to loyalty.

"I will follow you, Master. Anywhere you go I will go. We want to be a part of your government. Accept us as your constant companions. What must we do to be your disciples?"

Yeshua turned to them and said, "If you would follow me, you must love me more than your father, mother, wife, children, and relatives. You must be willing to suffer persecution in order to be my disciple. Think about this: which one of you decides to build a house and doesn't first figure the cost involved? If you did not plan wisely, you could wind up with a partially built structure, unable to finish it. Or what king will not determine his military strength before he enters war with his enemy? It is the same with becoming my follower; there are many costs to consider." He continued teaching his disciples in parables.

The evening sun had vanished and Yeshua sent the people away.

He and his disciples retired to their boat anchored just a few feet from land. Several people still lingered about the banks of the great river Jordan. A large boat pulled into the banks and several men lowered a small vessel. Two men rowed to land; their voices sounded urgent. "We seek the teacher," they called out several times. When they neared Yeshua's boat he appeared before them.

"I am The Teacher," he announced. "You look very familiar. You men are from Bethany, are you not? What urgency brings you to this country?"

"We bring a desperate appeal from your very good friends, Martha, and Mary concerning their brother, Lazarus. He has been very ill for several weeks. They fear he is near death. They beg you to come to them as soon as possible. We have traveled as fast as we could, all day. We hope we have reached you in time. The women are confident you can heal their brother."

Breathless, the men watched for signs of distress from this calm man, but found none. He invited them into his boat for further news and conversation.

“Lazarus is indeed one of my beloved friends. I am saddened that his sickness has caused my friends pain. Of course I shall go to them. But his sickness is not deadly. It has happened for a specific reason, that by it The Son of Yahweh might be glorified before men.”

Two days later, Yeshua consulted his disciples, “Let us make plans to travel. It is time to return to Judea.”

John spoke hesitantly, “But Master, the last time we were there the Jews tried to stone you. Are you sure you want to go there again?”

Yeshua answered, “Is there not twelve hours in the day? If one walks in the light he will not stumble. But if he has no light he stumbles. Our friend Lazarus is asleep. I must go and wake him.”

Thomas spoke up, “If he sleeps perhaps he is better.”

“No Thomas, Lazarus is dead. I am glad, for your sakes that I was not there to prevent it. This incident will build your faith. Nevertheless...let us go now.”

Thomas turned to the other reluctant men. “Very well, let us go. Here goes our plan to overthrow the old government, and establish a new one. They will surely stone him. We will probably all just die together, and join Lazarus, who is already dead.”

When Yeshua and his disciples were but a short distance away, they lodged in a remote spot outside Bethany. “We must not go into Bethany just yet,” he said. “Ask around and see what the conditions are and report to me,” he requested.

He sent several of the men to ask questions. When they returned they reported, “Lazarus died four days ago. His sisters are still in heavy mourning, especially Mary. We learned that their house is filled with religious leaders, friends, and relatives, still trying to comfort them. Some of these men are not to be trusted; they were ready to stone you at one time.”

He sent two men to Bethany. “When it appears safe, inform Martha where I am. Caution her to be discreet.”

As soon as Martha was told where to find Yeshua she slipped away quickly and hastened to meet him. “At this point Mary is much too emotional to keep a secret. It is best I go alone,” she thought. When she saw Yeshua she clung to his hands, crying.

“Yeshua, Lord, if you had been here my brother would still be alive. But I know it’s not too late, whatever you ask, Yahweh will do,” she sobbed.

Yeshua placed a comforting arm around her shoulder. “Your brother will rise again.”

“I know he will rise in the resurrection,” she agreed, fully aware of the prophet Ezekiel’s writings of the resurrection of the whole house of Israel.

“Martha, I am the resurrection. I am life. Any who believe me, even though they die in this life, they shall live. They shall never die again. Don’t you believe this?”

“Yes, my Lord, I believe you are the Christ, The Son of Yahweh which was prophesied to come into the world.”

“Then trust me. Return to your house and inform Mary where I am. Caution her to come quietly, for there are some who would expedite my death before my time. Come to the burial ground in reasonable time. I shall be there.”

Mary sat in the great room, mourners and well-meaning friends surrounding her. Her swollen, red eyes brimming with tears. Her sobs had turned to moans. Martha entered the room, wiping Mary’s face with a damp napkin. “Mary, come. Let us speak privately.” As an afterthought, for those ears around her, she added, “We need to freshen up a bit...” When they were behind closed doors she whispered, “Mary...I have some wonderful news. But first you must understand how important it is not to be too obvious.”

Mary suddenly sat upright, giving Martha her full attention. “What are you trying to tell me? Where have you been? Have you heard from Yeshua? I can tell, from the look on your face, that you have,” she stated. “Where is he? Martha...tell me...where is he?” she demanded.

“Get hold of yourself, girl. We must not let everyone know where he is.

He fears his enemies will cause him trouble. He is lodging at the Millo Inn. He has asked for you, but you must go quietly. Cover your face before you leave; give the impression you are going to the tomb. I shall meet you at the tomb later.”

Mary slipped out of the house quickly, but not before someone spotted her. A personal friend confided to another, “I saw Mary leave alone minutes ago...she must be going to the tomb to mourn. Some of us should follow her. It is not good that she should be alone with her grief.”

When Mary reached Yeshua she fell down before him sobbing. Over and over, she repeated, “Oh, Yeshua...had you been here Lazarus would not have died.”

Those who had followed arrived; they, too, began weeping. Yeshua was touched by the sobering scene. Tears came to his eyes and he groaned within himself, “Why must even those whom I have been closest still waver in their faith? If Mary and Martha doubt me, who do believe...will anyone ever believe me? What must I do to convince them that I am the savior of the world...the power of life?” He turned to them and asked, “Where is he laid?”

As Yeshua followed them, the weeping continued. He felt their grief; instantly he responded with tears of his own. As they reached the grave he heard someone comment, “The Teacher must have loved him very deeply...see his tears. Why did he, with all his healing powers, not prevent Lazarus from dying?”

Yeshua, torn with sadness, groaned again. Martha and several more were waiting beside the burial cave. He motioned to the caretakers, "Remove the stone," he requested.

Surprised, Martha quickly reminded him, "Lord, you can't be serious. He has been dead four days already. His decomposed body will stink."

"Martha, did I not tell you, if you would believe, you would see Yahweh's glory?" Seeing the stone removed, he looked upward and began to quietly address The Father. Then louder, he said, "Thank you, Father, for hearing me. I know that you always hear me, but I speak this so that these may know that you hear me...that you sent me." Having finished his prayer, he raised his voice even stronger and called, "Lazarus, come out!"

The curious group stood gazing into the darkened mouth of the cave. Doubting eyes darted about in disbelief. Skeptical smiles nervously changed. After a few seconds the crowd began to shuffle their feet and move away slowly, shaking their bowed heads. Martha and Mary held onto each other in their sorrow. Yeshua stood quietly, his face still moist from his tears. He held his hands out toward the mournful sisters and guided them toward the cave. "Your brother awakes," he stated confidently. Their eyes widened; they squealed with sudden relief and exhilaration.

From within the shadows of the murky cave, an awkward figure, draped in hanging strips of burial cloths, slowly stumbled within view of the surprised gathering. Mary and Martha, in unison, gave a loud shriek of happy amazement, but were too stunned to move closer. Lazarus, no less surprised than his audience, struggled to free himself from the grave clothes while shielding his eyes from the sudden light. Shouts of surprise and concern traveled through the crowd; someone fainted; several were crying. Everywhere faces mirrored amazement. Yeshua's disciples watched the event in stunned silence. "Take away the grave clothes," Yeshua suggested.

"He no longer needs them."

Lazarus submitted to the care of his friends. "Why am I here, with all these people about me, in our burial ground? He asked his joyful sisters. "The last thing I remember is the two of you fussing over me..."

Martha was the first to respond. "Oh...Lazarus...you are alive!" she breathed. She gave Yeshua an apologetic, pleading look, mingled with gratitude and ran to her confused brother. "We thought we had lost you...four days ago...you stopped breathing... we sent for Yeshua...but he was so far away..." she stammered.

Mary, hugging and caressing her brother, laughing and crying, added, "We're so thankful...Yeshua came...he prayed to Yehwah, and then called to you. We should have known he could bring you back to us. Why didn't we believe? I feel so ashamed..." She turned to Yeshua. "Oh, Yeshua, my Lord, can you ever forgive us our lack of faith? We forget so soon...you tried to tell us so many times..." Her voice broke into sobs of both joy and repentance.

Lazarus's long, thin arms lovingly encircled his two emotional sisters. "I am here now...dry your tears. I feel as though I have taken a long, restful nap. I am suddenly full of renewed, youthful energy, more than I have felt for years." He released his sisters and bowed humbly before Yeshua. "All of this, I have you to praise for, my dear friend. You, The Son of Yahweh, have given me back my life."

Overcome with amazement, the awed group crowded around the two men. Some bowed before Yeshua, proclaiming him to be The Son of Yahweh, while others stood weeping. Several cynical faces went unnoticed as they turned away in jealous coolness.

"You must come back with us, for a visit, my Lord," Mary pleaded. You seldom have an opportunity to visit us. We have missed you so very, very much." The familiar yearning to bask in his tenderness, his wonderful comforting words of life flowed from her as she pleaded.

"Yes, my Lord, you must come," Lazarus and Martha joined in. "Let us celebrate this wonderful miracle together. We will invite all our friends and relatives...of course you will be our guest of honor. You have performed a great and wonderful thing for us. Let us show you our love and appreciation," they urged. "Words are too weak to express our gratitude and thankfulness. What can we say...or do?"

"I must be discrete, my friend," Yeshua answered. Already my enemies carry word to those who seek ways to take my life. Only one, the man Caiaphas, speaks in my behalf. The others plot against me. I can stay for only a short time...and there must be no celebration until after my departure. From here I will find seclusion near the wilderness, away from those who would take me before the appointed time. However, I shall return for a farewell visit. Though I shall go away...I shall return," he added.

After a brief visit, Yeshua avoided confrontation with his enemies by leading his disciples away from Jerusalem. For the next few days they traveled northeast, bypassing the cities of Jerico, Archelais, and Phasaelis. As usual, word spread to the peoples of each city they passed. Large crowds of sick and diseased clustered about begging for mercy and miracles. Yeshua healed and cleansed many. They crossed the Jordan River into the land of Peraea. There they traveled north through the picturesque terrain and secluded fruitful valleys until they reached the desert city of Ephraim.

After finding suitable lodging, Yeshua encouraged his disciples, "I know you each have family and business responsibilities to attend; go and set your houses in order. When you have done so, return here...we have little time to prepare for our journey into the land of darkness." This small, secluded town would afford Yeshua and his men the needed privacy for further preparation and teaching.

At winter's end the earth responded to the warmth of spring. Heavy showers brought new life and beauty to the desert, to gardens, orchards, and fields. Yeshua made plans. "Soon I must inform the men that it is time to return to Jerusalem. They fear for my life...and their own. There is little time...the plan must continue," he thought. "Even I feel the strings of dread pulling at my heart. It is just as well they not know now. First I will lead them back to our home towns. I must set my own house in order...see to my mother's needs. It will take us several weeks...the people are many along the way...there is so much work to be done..."

Yeshua taught and healed in the villages on the way to Galilee. Once again he was questioned by familiar Pharisees in the synagogue of Nazareth. "You speak so confidently about 'the kingdom of Yahweh', who are you that you have more knowledge than we who have studied the law for generations? When is this 'kingdom of Yahweh' coming?" they demanded."

"The kingdom of Yahweh is not something that can be seen instantaneously. The seed of righteousness is planted and begins to grow. Just as a tiny seed slowly grows and develops into a great, overshadowing tree, so is the kingdom of Yahweh. It must first begin within the hearts of its subjects."

Later, as the disciples sat with Yeshua enjoying an evening meal, James urged, "Master, explain to us more concerning the coming of the kingdom. What things can we expect in the near future?"

"Very shortly...things will begin to change drastically. You will have to deal with severe stress and hardship. You will long for these days and for my presence. Religious fervor will increase. Many people will try to deceive you into thinking I have appeared and reside in remote places. Pay no attention to them; when I return it will not be in secret. You will see me as easily as you see lightening when it shines from one side of heaven to the other. Before all this takes place I must suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation. Before my return the world will be conducting itself similar to the days of Noe, just before the great flood.

Even though they were repeatedly warned of their impending disaster, they refused to repent. Their only concern was eating, drinking, getting married, buying, selling, planting, and finding their own pleasures. It will be as the days of Lot, just before Yahweh rained fire down from heaven and destroyed them all. The world will be no different when I return. If you are atop a high building, do not stop to collect your possessions. Do not return from the fields to your city.

Remember Lot's wife. If you put your trust in your own ability to save your life, you will lose it. Trust Yahweh. If you should lose your physical life, you will gain back a spiritual life. Let me tell you what will happen: In one part of the world, two people will go to sleep in the same bed; one will awake to find the other has been taken, disappeared. In another part of the world, workers in the field will suddenly discover one has totally disappeared.

This will happen all over the earth."

"Where will they go?" John asked.

In a flash Yeshua's thoughts projected to the end of their age, to the terrible time when great armies of powerful Gentile nations would unite in their diabolical effort to destroy him and his heavenly army, at his return. The vision of Yahweh's wrath as he fought against them, millions of dead bodies strewn upon the earth, being eaten by vultures and scavengers, flashed before his mind.

He simply answered, "Wherever the body is...the eagles shall be gathered there." He choose not to detail the horror of the end of this age for fear it would be too painful for them to bear.

They continued on through Judea, finally reaching their home towns. Yeshua dismissed the crowds and gave the disciples leave to visit their families. He found his mother sitting in a small, worn chair by a window. The once well-kept house was in disarray.

The faded walls were showing needs of repair. Maria greeted him shyly, as though he were a stranger. "You have changed so, my son," she ventured. "All of my children are grown; they no longer have time for me," she complained. "Does no one care that I am left alone?"

He gave his mother an affectionate hug and a tear of sadness traveled down his bronzed cheek. "Yes, Lady. I care more than you know. I have come to strengthen you...to show my concern and love. You are never alone. Though you may reject me, I will never reject you. For a while, when my family turned away from me...I was saddened." Looking around at the neglected house he asked, "Where are my brothers? How is the business?"

"They have each gone his own way. This past year they have had severe difficulties in the business. They could not compete with the greater builders. When things began to slow down they argued so much among themselves. Finally, Jose...did you know he has taken a wife...? He moved away...joined his wife's family business. He is no longer a carpenter but a tiller of the soil.

I seldom see him. Simon and Judas left the business soon after it began to fail. They come and go...but they are very unstable...still just youngsters, really. They go off on fishing trips that last for weeks at a time. Sometimes they return with a fair amount of money...other times they have none.

"I don't know what I would do without James. At least he has stuck with the business, as bad as it is. He and his wife, Jael, try to help me as much as they can, but they have their own lives to live. The business takes so much of James' time...and Jael is a very delicate person. She has lost her last two babies. They do so want children, but she carries them for only a few months...then she loses them..." Her voice trailed into a sigh. "This place is just too much work for me...all alone."

Yeshua listened attentively. "Would you like to sell the place and move into a smaller house?" he asked. "What would serve you best?"

"I haven't thought about that...maybe after Passover. I love this old place. True, it is a burden, but still, it's roomy enough to have family visits, activities, and weddings. I cherish the memories of those times. Once this house rang with activity and love. So many of your friends, and family, have visited with us here. If you would just come back home and help James with the business...it was doing so well when you were home...things might work out so we could keep the house. I really don't want to sell it. Perhaps it would be wise to do so, though. You decide for me, Yeshua. What do you think I should do?"

Before Yeshua could answer she asked, "Where have you been, Yeshua? Is it true...the things I hear about you...that you travel around the country healing people? Do you make them promises that the kingdom of Yahweh is about to be set up? Are there not enough sick people here in your own country to heal? Must you travel all over the world to find them? Why...if the kingdom is coming...why is it taking so long...? How much must our people suffer before Yahweh comes to our rescue? Every day

you hear of some new slaughter, some new atrocities inflicted on our nation. I am almost afraid to make the trip to Jerusalem for Passover this year.

You hear of so much madness...but then again, as James has said...it will be no safer here...with so many people gone...I may as well go along with the family. Will you be going with us this year, Yeshua?" she asked.

"No, Mother. I must return to Jerusalem ahead of you...I have many people interrupting my traveling time. You will see me there. Remember...whatever happens to me is the will of The Father. He is ever with me...I must fulfill the prophecies. Regardless of my suffering, you must be strong. Remember the words I have spoken, and let them comfort you. Though I must go away, I will return.

The kingdom of Yahweh is indeed a reality...never doubt...trust me. I am The Son of Yahweh. You shall observe the Passover season comforted by a son at your side. I will see that you are cared for. I must leave tomorrow to attend my father's business."

After Yeshua gathered his students he began his slow journey toward Jerusalem. He was glad his brother James had been with Maria when he left her. He was saddened, knowing that soon his mother would suffer intense grief because of him. Again the crowds began to follow him and to ask many questions. He healed and answered questions as they traveled. When the disciples suspected they were headed for Jerusalem they became very afraid. He took them aside and confirmed their fears, "Yes, it is time for me to return to Jerusalem. The son of man shall accomplish all things written by the prophets. I shall be delivered to the chief priests, and the scribes. They shall turn me over to the Gentiles, to be mocked, scourged, spit upon, and killed. On the third day I will rise again."

"What does the Master mean?" the disciples wondered among themselves. "He surely is not making much sense," they agreed. "No doubt we will run into hostile troublemakers. Surely the Master will use his powers to protect us and himself. Who would dare do us harm...surely the people would intervene if they should so much as try." Not wanting to accept the truth, they avoided the depths of his words.

end of ch 13.