

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Where Do We Go From Here?

Yeshua, hanging on the cross, had spoken his last words. Suddenly a loud roaring came from the north, fast building in strength and fierceness. A loud noise echoed from the temple as the huge, thick curtain that hung before the holy of holies, split into. Trees bowed to the ground, massive boulders trembled and shook in their places, splitting into many pieces. Flashes of fire licked at the earth, sending traveling flames and fireballs along the ground. Screams echoed through the eerie darkness. Men and women panicked, running in all directions, falling, struggling to keep their balance above the trembling earth. Amid the havoc, a few women clung together, sobbing, refusing to leave their beloved Yeshua.

As swiftly as the earthquake had occurred, it was gone. People slowly gathered, standing around the still hanging bodies, amazed and fearful. An officer shouted loudly to the onlookers, "Certainly this was a righteous man, The Son of Yahweh!" Many convinced people clustered together, nodding their heads in agreement. Gradually the darkness lifted; a blazing, afternoon sun hung, undisturbed, half way between heaven and earth.

Because it was preparation day for the yearly Sabbath, called the Passover season, the Jewish leaders urged Pilate to break the legs of the crucified men, hastening their deaths. "As you know, Sir," they explained. "At sundown we begin the observance of a holy day, the first day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is not fitting that these criminals hang throughout this day. We pray you have them disposed of by sundown." Pilate sent soldiers to take care of their request. When the soldiers reached the crucified men, they discovered Yeshua already dead. They broke the legs of the two thieves. They thrust a sharp spear head into Yeshua's side. His remaining body fluids gushed out and ran down his already bloody body.

Among the people who had witnessed the crucifixion was a man named Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea. Joseph, an honorable counselor, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, had not taken part in Yeshua's arrest. He was opposed to the deed; he secretly believed in Yeshua. When it was known Yeshua was dead, Joseph hurried to Pilate for permission to take the body.

Nicodemus, the priest who had visited Yeshua privately, heard Joseph was taking the body. He quickly instructed a servant, "Go! Fill my carriage with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes!"

Together, he and Joseph hurried to claim the body. They, with the help of others, carefully took the lacerated body from the stake.

Nearby, Joseph owned a well-manicured family cemetery garden of unused tombs. Followed by weeping women and curious people, they took the body of Yeshua to the garden and placed him inside a tomb. Working together, they cleansed the body with water brought for the purpose. Then they carefully placed well-spaced amounts of spices inside long strips of linen, they used to wrap the body securely. When all was done, a servant helped them roll a huge stone against the mouth of the tomb.

After the stone was in place, John took Maria back with him to their banquet room. Within a short time the others had assembled there, too. Even though it was still daylight, they would partake of the Passover meal as they had always done. They were frightened and felt much safer being together in one place until after the uncertainties of recent events passed. They could give each other comfort and talk over what to do now that Yeshua was dead.

The women hurried away to purchase more spices before the Passover meal and high day began at sundown. They would not attempt to return to the tomb for the next three days because of their observance of the holy day and weekly Sabbath that followed. The shops were still open since it was the preparation day, mid-week, but would be closed soon, for the next two days, in observance of the two Sabbaths. They would not venture back to the garden until early morning on the first day of the week soon after the weekly Sabbath.

Before the sun went down the chief priests and Pharisees hurriedly met with Pilate. They related, "Sir, we remember that deceiver claimed that within three days and three nights he would rise again. We urge you to seal the stone and set a watch for three days and nights to insure his followers do not steal his body. Should they do this, they will convince the people he actually did rise. This would be more than disastrous," they insisted.

They were granted their request; the sepulcher was sealed and guards stationed over it until the 7th day of the week at sundown.

The next evening, those who had gathered with John, and his brother James, moved quietly about in the large, dimly lit room. The air was laden with sadness and grief. John had insisted Maria retire undisturbed to a smaller room. She had grieved throughout the night and day. Exhausted, her soft sobs had finally given way to sleep. It was dark now, the high day ended.

Because of fear and grief, those closest to Yeshua had not worshipped at the Temple. Instead, they had banded together, sharing their pain, drawing on each other for comfort.

"I want so badly to visit The Master's tomb," Mary kept saying.

"You know it's unsafe, now," Martha reminded her. "With Pilate's soldiers guarding the tomb for another two days. They, no doubt, will not allow us inside the tomb with more spices.

And...tomorrow evening the weekly Sabbath begins...we must wait until the first day of the week.

"We are under heavy suspicion of stealing his body. If we show up before the three days have expired, we surely will be thrown in stocks," Philip stated dryly. "Those soldiers are probably very bored

by now. It would be folly for any of us to show up there while they are there. If we are wise, we will give them time to leave.”

“That means we will have to wait until after the Sabbath...that will be another two days,” Martha responded. “His body will begin to decay by then.”

“When will we ever get back to him?” Mary moaned. “Soldiers or no soldiers, I’m going to him soon after the Sabbath!” she resolved. “Tomorrow, before sundown, we shall prepare the spices...and have them ready to take as soon as the Sabbath ends.”

“I don’t see that we have a choice,” James added. “Even then it will be dangerous. The best time to go will be well after the Sabbath, early the following morning. The watches will be ended the evening of the Sabbath, when the three days are fulfilled.”

“Here we sit, like a bunch of scared rabbits,” Thomas growled. “We may as well be criminals. Just two days ago we thought we were on our way to becoming important, co-rulers in a newly established government. We don’t know what is going to take place before this festival is over. Everywhere there is unrest and danger. Now that the excitement is fading, the Roman soldiers may just turn on all of us. They could well do it...for nothing more than their hunger for perverted entertainment.”

Peter had been pacing the room restlessly. “If we have to wait that long, we may as well return to our families. My wife and relatives await me. The least we can do is keep the weekly Sabbath with our families. As far as I am concerned, that’s what I am going to do. There’s nothing we can do now...I am anxious to awake from this nightmare!” He looked around for support.

“We can all sit around here with our chins dragging the ground, or we can make the best of what’s left. The Master would want us to get on with our lives. So...shall we plan to go to the garden tomb the first day of the week?” Several nodded agreement. With this decision made, some left to spend the evening with their own families.

By late Sabbath afternoon the Temple was full of Jews from all over the region keeping the Passover festival. Today they had come to the Temple for the weekly Sabbath services. Three full days had passed since the excitement of the crucifixions, the darkness and the earthquake. People still discussed it in whispered tones. But most had put it out of their minds, more intent on things at hand. They did not immediately hear the rumblings coming from the outside. When huge, heavy, oak tables began vibrating, volumes of books and scrolls tumbled from their shelves, there was a frightened hush over the city. As the noisy activity increased the hush turned to panic. Terrified, women screamed; children began crying. For about an hour people ran wildly through the Temple courts, stumbling over shifting stones, bumping and falling into each other.

The followers of Yeshua had re-gathered to observe the Sabbath together. They had shared a meal and were quietly conversing, comforting each other. Some were meditating, others obviously deep in silent prayer. They heard strange sounds coming from the distance, rumblings, and excited voices. The

building they were in begin to vibrate, but nothing else happened. They moved closer together, waiting, wondering, a little frightened, drawing comfort from one another.

There was one last, earth-shaking rumble and all was quiet.

A dark cloud hung over the Temple, as a flood of people fled down its many steps. Amid the scurrying crowd, a frightened man, frantically pulled two children along with each hand. His wife, carrying a small child, followed, desperately trying to keep up.

He threw quick words across his shoulder, relating his experience. "I was outside...I saw this blinding streak of lightening. It struck with such force; the whole garden of the skull seemed ablaze. Then the power of heaven shook the ground beneath, just like it happened midweek. Hurry," he urged the breathless woman, "who knows what will happen next?"

Within the hour, clouds of dust rose from thundering hoofs.

Soldiers frantically drove their steaming steeds to the Temple. Shaking, the soldiers stood before the elders, explaining what had happened. "We have never seen anything like it," one excited soldier blurted out. "One minute we were playing a game of lots...the next we were knocked to the ground, flat on our backs, unable to so much as breathe!"

"That's not the half of it," another soldier interrupted, his large, muscular arms flailing about. "This streak of lightening turned into some kind of being. We couldn't believe the strength it had...moved that sealed boulder as though it were a ball of wool."

"And then the ground beneath us begin to shake and crumble. Here we were lying helplessly on the ground. We couldn't move a muscle, or speak a word," a third soldier added. "Then you wouldn't believe what we saw. Right before our very eyes, a figure in the tomb begin to move around in there. I know this sounds unbelievable. We swear by all that's holy! That's exactly what happened." The man stopped for a gulp of fresh air.

"We know you must have heard the sound of the quake...perhaps even seen the blazing light," he stated. "When we regained our strength, we had no thought but to ride away from there as fast as we could. No one can fight a power like that!" he insisted.

Dark-robed priests fidgeted nervously as they listened. After the soldiers finished relating their frightful experience, the priests excused themselves and went into a huddle. Several minutes later they returned to the soldiers with a plan. "The excitement, the storms, the unusual weather conditions, and all the earthquakes we have had this week has unnerved us all." The priest stroked his long, gray-streaked beard thoughtfully. "We can appreciate the effect it has had on you men, you being right in the middle of it all. Perhaps the intensity of the lightening injured you temporarily, causing you to see things. We don't want people to think you have become mad. Let's keep this quiet, shall we? Should this be noised about, your credibility will be questioned...you may even be punished by your superiors.

"We are prepared to compensate you handsomely for your temporary delusions. All we require is that you each stick by this story: report that a mob of men, followers of this trouble-maker, disciples, if you will...in a surprise attack, overpowered you during the night. They bound you and stole the body.

By the time you were able to free yourselves; they had disappeared into the darkness. We will see to it, should you be interrogated by any authority, that your story is secured. In the meantime, try to arrange for duties as far away from Jerusalem as possibly, maybe even take a holiday. A good rest and change of scenery will do wonders for you.” The soldiers agreed to the terms, accepted the lucrative bribe, and lost no time leaving the vicinity.

All over the mountain sides strange things had happened.

Many tombs, once sealed and deserted, were oddly standing open. Startled and confused, several men and women found themselves walking toward their homes, not knowing why they were where they were, wondering why they were dressed so strangely. Some felt a compelling compulsion to go into Jerusalem, and were headed in that direction. Others were amazed at the changes in the area around them. It had looked so different, the last they had seen it.

Ruth, a young Gentile slave, startled to find herself alone looked about in bewilderment. She could not determine where she was. She found a comfortable spot to sit while she collected her thoughts. Then she cringed in fear. The last thing she remembered was of being beaten by Hamor, a rotund, male overseer.

“They found me praying...and...I...begged him not to beat me. I know he didn’t want to...but...he had been ordered by my angry Master to...”

Events leading up to her last memory slowly began returning. “When the head mistress discovered I had slipped away to listen to the young preacher from Capernanum she told the master. He threatened to have me flogged if I ever tried to see him again. He tried to make me promise... I never promised...no, I knew I had to see him again. I hunger for the words of life he speaks...Yet, being a slave, it is almost impossible to get away.

But I did...I remember that much. Yes...he came through our city...and my dear friend Jananes...he helped me. For five days he worked feverishly, doing extra work just especially for me, so that I would not fall behind in my duties. We hoped I would not be missed. I prayed I would not be missed...and I wasn’t.

“It worked so well, Jananes and I took turns working extra hard, at every chance. I was able to hear the holy man Yeshua several times. Jananes went and he heard...and he believes, too.

We both know he is the very son of Yahweh. He speaks such wonderful things...things of freedom, life, love, and a hope for a future life of happiness. If we can only learn enough about his way of life, and live the way he tells us...we can live in his wonderful kingdom...where there is only peace and joy. We will never have to fear the lashes of the overseer...

“How did I get here?” she searched her memory. “I had worked extra hard all month...and so had Jananes. We didn’t dare both be gone at the same time. It had been a long time since we had been able to hear the teachings of this wonderful teacher.” Her memory came in bits and pieces. She kept going back to past events. At the same time she was aware of the present. She felt peaceful and calm. She had never experienced such a satisfying emotion before. Yet, there was an unexplainable

excitement growing inside her. “It is so wonderful to have Jananes as a true friend, to share with each other the things we have learned from Yahweh’s very own son. I am a slave, yet I am filled with joy,” she breathed. “But...where am I...what errand am I on, so far away from my quarters? Why was I beaten?”

Then, gradually, scenes began to take shape. “Yahweh’s son was in the city...he was healing the sick, giving life to the dying, sight to the blind, and all the time inviting us to follow him into his glorious kingdom. Jananes went to hear The Teacher during the early morning. He shared with me all the things he had seen and heard. The next day, in the afternoon, I slipped away...we both had finished two days’ work in advance. The other servants were kind, even though they knew what we were doing. As long as we did more than our share of work, making it easier for them, they looked the other way.

“Now I remember,” she thought, “When I sneaked back in the servants quarters, I thought the room was deserted...then, out of the darkness I felt myself being grabbed from behind and thrown to the hard ground. I was afraid to move, so I lay still. I closed my eyes and prayed...I could feel the lashes of the leather whip. The flogging didn’t hurt as badly as it had at other times. I remember the grating voice of Hamor demanding, ‘Tell me where he is...the two of you have been sneaking off together...where is he?’ I didn’t answer for a while. Then I asked, ‘whom do you seek, Sir?’ He stopped beating me then...and I felt a little sorry for this pitiful man who was powerfully strong, yet so weak, to consent to doing this kind of distasteful, cruel disciplining. Many times his master has ordered that he, too, be beaten by other taskmasters as punishment for being too lenient with the slaves in his charge.”

She remembered Hamor’s growling voice as he had wiped his red face with the back of his hand, ‘You know you and Jananes have angered the master more than once. We have had a servant keeping an eye on the two of you. If its marriage you want, you should have made the proper requests. You know I can’t let the two of you run away together.’

“I remember wondering where Jananes might be. He had not told me he was going anywhere. And I said, ‘We are not planning to run away...we are not.’ He didn’t believe me. I heard a voice in the background say, ‘She lies...they have been bedding down together...they’ve been planning to join this new religious group. Every time they get together they speak of a new kingdom, as though they were going to go join up with this new miracle- working, traveling teacher. She’s been gone off somewhere since noon, and so has Jananes. I tell you...they plan to run away!’

“I tried to convince Hamor I didn’t know where Jananes was. But he kept beating me, demanding I tell the truth. The voices in the background kept urging him on, insisting Jananes and I were lovers that we had been planning to run away for a long time. And I remembered thinking Jananes had fantasized a few times about running away, but that had been a long time ago. We were both youths, full of grand ideas and lots of dreams. We still have dreams...but our dreams have been about life eternal in the kingdom of Yahweh. If Yahweh will accept lowly slaves into his kingdom, as his son revealed, anything put on us in this life is worth enduring. Yahweh will help us to endure patiently. And I wondered if Jananes had really decided to actually go and follow Yeshua. Surely he would have told me. But, on the other hand, he may have thought to protect me, by not letting me know.

“The last thing I remember was asking Yahweh to come to the rescue of his lowly servants, and thinking I must trust Yahweh for whatever happens, surely he is in control’. I heard the sounds of blows and felt my body being violently shoved about. I remember feeling something moist trickling from my mouth, and I was afraid I was going to have an embarrassing accident. I remember nothing more than a last prayer, ‘your will be done...’ I don’t know how I came to be here but I have this strong urge and conviction that I must go to Jerusalem. Jananes will be there and find me. Jerusalem is where the house of Yahweh is...surely Yahweh will be there. I have never felt so happy, nor so content.” The young woman confidently made her way eagerly toward Jerusalem.

In another grave site a bearded man stood hesitant, looking about puzzled. In the distance he could see the bustling city of Jerusalem. Although his memories of the city were unclear, there was a strong fascination that invoked painful sensations and disturbing sadness. He noticed the open grave and the unfamiliar scene of shattered stone and gaping holes in the once settled landscaped terrain. He stroked his beard thoughtfully, resisting a strong urge to run as far away from this place as he possibly could. He was aware of a mystery which must be solved. He knew his name was Jarib. The last memory he had was of being led to the execution block where he was to have his head severed from his body. The dark, menacing face of the executioner was still fresh in his mind. The memory of the pressure of a strong, cruel soldier’s grasp, as his face had been shoved down onto a blood- stained block, lingered in his subconsciousness. It seemed to have happened only minutes ago.

When he tried to remember beyond that his temples throbbed in pain. Of course...it was only natural that he had felt so depressed at sight of Jerusalem. It was there Herod Antipas had ordered his execution. Memory of past events flooded his mind.

He could still feel the painful shackles that weighted his ankles in the dungeon. Gradually he began to recall the events that had led up to his execution. He thought, “I was in prison. There was also a man, Johanan the Baptist, a prophet, or preacher...

I, a rebel and robber was accused of murder,” he remembered.

“No, I am innocent of murder, but unable to prove it. The man I robbed was found dead...but not by my hands,” he thought. “I have been imprisoned for several months awaiting sentence. But...I am not there now,” he reasoned. “The man, Johanan keeps coming to memory. Why?...he is a most interesting, intelligent person, but rather strange. He also is a prisoner...no, that can’t be...he was executed.” Events were cluttered in his memory. “Now I remember...He spoke of things I had never heard of. At the very first I felt unusually comfortable listening to him. He had a way about him that commanded attention and respect. I became fascinated with his words. He told us prisoners about a man, Yeshua, who was sent from Yahweh to deliver us all from prison. We kept questioning him as to when this was going to take place. He seemed a little worried about the timing, though.

“Johanan was allowed visitors. Several of his friends came often. After some time, when he didn’t hear from the man, he seemed doubtful and worried. He sent word by his friends, seeking proof that the prophet was who he claimed to be. When they returned with their report we were all amazed. The returning men were so excited, and overjoyed by what they had seen and heard; one had to believe

them. They could not have possibly made up such wonderful stories. They repeated many amazing words spoken by the man...things only one of authority would speak. It was clear Johanan was right. This man surely was sent from Yahweh. Johanan's friends were eager to go back and see and hear more from the man. I, too, wished I could hear his words. I was sentenced to death...it could never be."

Then Jarib remembered, "Johanan got himself into serious trouble with Herod and his wife, Herodias. I remember the painful sadness I felt when the executioner came for him. I had known the man for such a short while, yet, strangely, I cared deeply for him. I began to think of my own death, soon to be.

And as never before, I wanted to live."

Jarib felt a twinge of sadness and guilt. "I began to meditate seriously on the wonderful words of hope I had so recently heard. I knew I had to repent, change my attitude. I was ashamed of the wasted years, the cruel things I had done to others. I longed to make up for my crimes...but it was too late.

The next few weeks I spent searching my innermost self, praying, and reflecting on my past life. When it came time for my execution, I felt little fear. For the first time in my life I felt content and whole. Yahweh has forgiven me. I am clean."

Sudden realization caused him to clasp his hands around his neck. "I was executed! Yet I am alive. My head is still on my shoulders. I am but a few miles away from the prison where I was held. What is happening? Then he remembered his very last prayer before the axe. "Great Yahweh of Israel...I don't deserve your mercy...but I praise you...for you are merciful. If only I could make amends, start all over, live my life anew...learn to love and give..." Beyond those words he had no memory. As full realization returned, he marveled aloud, "I do not know how... this must be one of the miracles of The Son of Yahweh. I have been given this opportunity...to make amends. My prayers have been heard. Praise you, Jehovah Yahweh...great and powerful giver of life."

All across the country similar situations were occurring in graveyards. Many people were finding themselves in strange situations. Some had been martyred for their stand for righteousness. Others had been imprisoned for believing in one Yahweh, and had died from injuries. They all shared the same feeling of freedom and joy. Everyone, whom Yahweh had resurrected, finally realized they had been given a second chance at life. They had, for one reason or another had their lives cut short. Now, it was returned to them with renewed hope. None realized at the time, this was The Father's way of celebrating the resurrection of his first-born son.

The apostles, friends and family of Yeshua, still in mourning, and apprehension, were making special efforts to remain inconspicuous. Frightened afresh, the earthquake drove them deeper into seclusion.

Three days had passed since the death of Yeshua. Mary, eager to take spices and pay her respects to her beloved Master, along with several others, quietly left their quarters before daybreak. She had wanted to come last evening, just after the Sabbath. But the others had persuaded her to wait until now, at daybreak, on the first day of the week. In addition to the other fearful events, there had been

that dreadful storm and earthquake in the late afternoon, the day before. So the women had decided to wait until the storm passed. By then it had grown very dark.

Convinced the danger was too great they had postponed the trip to the tomb. It was calm now. They felt much safer, even though it was still dark. Eager to get to the tomb, the women decided not to wait for the others who had decided to make the trip later.

Three days of the soldiers watch had ended the afternoon before; they would have left by now. As they hurried toward the hill they wondered how they would get the massive stone rolled away from the mouth of the tomb. When they got there, to their surprise, they found the stone already moved.

Mary's friend Magdalene whispered, "The stone is gone. Let us go inside the tomb." The morning was just beginning to shed its darkness. Mary cautiously made her way into the dingy entrance of the tomb. She strained to see about the small room. On the stone bench, where the body had lain, she saw only the shadow of her boy as she blocked the door.

Mary gasped, "Someone must have stolen his body. Perhaps the soldiers took him away." Seeing Peter and John following in the distance she ran back to them. "They have taken the Lord out of the sepulcher. The stone has been rolled away. We don't know where he is," she whispered in a small, urgent voice. Grayness of night had changed to early dawn, the sun's first faint rays sending its light through the mouth of the tomb.

Cautiously, the group huddled together as they moved deeper into the shadowy tomb. Gasps of incredible surprise came from each stunned viewer. There on the stone slab, where Yeshua had lain, lay the collapsed linen wrappings, outlining the form of his rigid body. The room smelled sweetly of the fragrant spices still scattered inside the body wrappings. And to the side, the head napkin, rolled up neatly, lay by itself. Shocked, they each took turns looking inside, then backed out of the cavity in sober silence.

When they had looked their fill, they stood looking at each other in disbelief. Then before they could speak, two strangers, in shining clothes, appeared before them. Again the group gasped; they cowered together in fear. "There is no need to be frightened. I know why you are here. You seek Yeshua of Nazareth. Why do you look for the living among the dead?" one of the men asked the perplexed group. "He is not here. He has risen just as he said he would. Remember what he told you when he was in Galilee? He said, 'The son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified...but on the third day rise again.'"

The other stranger spoke. "Go find the others and tell them Yeshua will meet with them in Galilee. You will see him there, just as he promised." With these words the shining beings vanished before them.

Still suffering from shock, the trembling, joyful group lost in conversation, slowly began making their way back toward the city. But Mary lingered behind, weeping. The words of the angel had not penetrated her grief. She had to see one more time where her beloved Yeshua had lain. Alone, she

ventured inside the sepulcher again. This time the tomb was lighted. Two beings, much like the previous ones, sat on each end of the slab.

“Why are you still grieving, Lady?” one asked.

She was too numb with grief to be afraid. She found herself answering between sobs, “Because we came here with spices for The Master’s body. You have taken it away...and I don’t know what you have done with him.” Not waiting for an answer, she slipped quickly out of the tomb to search further. As she ran through the garden, blinded by tears, she saw the figure of a man walking nearby. She assumed he was the caretaker of the cemetery gardens. He asked, “Woman, whom do you seek? Why are you weeping?”

She answered, “They have moved the body of my Lord, and I don’t know where they have placed him.” As an after-thought, she added, “Sir, if you have transferred his body to another tomb, tell me where...so I may make arrangements to take him.”

“Mary!” The familiar voice demanded her recognition. Like a slap in the face, Mary shed the shock that cloaked her awareness. The scales of confusion fell away. Her face lighted with unspeakable joy.

Impulsively, she reached forth outstretched arms to greet him. “Master!” she exclaimed.

The man stepped back, avoiding her touch. “You must not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my father. Go tell the brethren that I will go to our father, our Yahweh, prior to meeting with them in Galilee. Go quickly.” Then he disappeared from her sight.

Mary, eager to share the news with the other women, sprang away, running as fast as she could. When she caught up with the others, she spilled her exciting experience in one breath. Seeing the skeptical faces, she insisted, “I am not crazy...I did see him. He spoke to me by name, even forbad me to touch him. He told me he was going to ascend to The Father...then he would come back and we will all be able to see him again in Galilee. He is alive...alive, I tell you. The Master lives...!” she sang.

“Won’t the rest be happy when we tell them?”

Hardly had the words left her mouth when the same man appeared before the group. “Good morning to you, my friends,” he said. “Mary speaks the truth. I am among you again. Go and relay the news to the others.” A cry of joy and surprise rang out in unison. Yeshua backed away as the women attempted to touch him, to embrace him. When their attempts to touch him failed, they fell at his feet and worshipped him, their tears of happiness spilling to the ground. As mysteriously as he had appeared, he disappeared, leaving them in awe.

When the women regained their composure, they rushed back to where other disciples and followers of Yeshua were staying, eager to share their wonderful news, only to find they were not to be believed. Peter, however, wanted to see for himself and headed toward the garden of tombs, only to be passed by young John as he sprinted by.

Later, that same day, Cleopas and Phillip, followers of Yeshua, walked to their homes in the village of Emmaus. Their conversation was one of sadness as they discussed the events of the past few days. To their surprise they sensed someone had joined their company. Not recognizing him, they thought he must be a stranger. He questioned them, "Why are you speaking as though you have just returned from a funeral? What has happened?"

Cleopas was surprised. "Where have you been that you have not heard what has been happening? Have you just arrived in this area?"

The stranger responded, "What things do you speak of?"

Phillip began to explain, "There was a man, a prophet, Yeshua from Nazareth, mighty in deed and word. We thought and trusted him to be the one to redeem Israel. But the chief priests and rulers delivered him to be crucified. We know he died and was buried mid-week, over three days ago."

The stranger's voice was sad. "Oh, you foolish doubters. Why are you so slow to understand all that the prophets have spoken? Do you not remember what they spoke about the Christ? Do they not speak of how he must first suffer these things before entering into his glory?" Then he began expounding from the scriptures all the things written by Mosheh and other prophets that concerned himself. Still they did not recognize him.

As they neared the village, he gave the impression he would continue on. The men were so intrigued with his knowledge of the scriptures; they insisted he stop and have a meal with them. It was while they sat at the table, when he blessed the bread and passed it to them, they realized he was Yeshua. Instantly, he vanished out of their sight.

Surprised and elated, the men found it hard to control their emotions. "Now I know why we were so engrossed in what he was telling us. Never has anyone made the scriptures come alive so vividly; only The Master could know these things."

Later when the two men related their experience to the disciples, they were clearly received with skepticism by some. But, when Peter and John returned, confirming the women's witness and later Yeshua appeared before them all, they became believers. "Peace to you all," he greeted.

There was dead silence as the doubters gasped with fright. "Why are you all so frightened? Why is it so hard for you to believe the witnesses that told you they saw me? Did the women not witness to you of my resurrection? Have you hardened your hearts to the truth? Look," he raised his scarred hands.

"See...here are the scars on my hands; look at my feet. If I were a ghost, I wouldn't have flesh and bones. Feel me...it is I."

Before he disappeared he surprised them by making an unusual prediction. He repeated, "Peace to you all. As my father has sent me, so I will send you. He gently blew in their direction and said, "Receive the holy spirit. Whose sins you remit, will be remitted. Those you hold guilty, will be guilty."

Thomas had not yet joined the group when Yeshua appeared. Later, the apostles relayed to him that he had missed seeing Yeshua. He looked at them in amazement, clearly disbelieving their claim. "You jest,

no doubt," he accused them. When they persisted, he shook his head. "Unless I see him myself, feel the scars with my own fingers...I cannot believe this."

At the end of the festival, on the last holy day, Thomas was with them when Yeshua appeared before the group again. Although the doors were securely locked, he materialized inside the room. "Peace to you all," he greeted. Then, with outstretched hands, he addressed a red-faced Thomas. "Here, Thomas," he invited. "Feel the scars, see my hands. It is time you stopped doubting, and believe."

Thomas fell to his knees. "My Lord, it is you. I do believe now."

Yeshua said, "You believe because you see me. Had you believed the words I spoke to you before, you would have believed earlier. Blessed are they who believe, even though they have not seen me."

The festival was over, and most of the disciples had stayed to observe the following weekly Sabbath together before leaving. Yeshua rewarded them with another sudden visit, relating prophecy to the events that had happened, strengthening their faith. Even the most skeptical finally became convinced that he actually was alive. After he left their company, they begin to discuss the events among themselves. Though extremely happy that The Master was alive, they were confused.

Peter, talking to several of the disciples, asked, "What are we to do now? The Master was dead and now he is alive. That is a great miracle we must admit...and we all rejoice at this.

Where do we go from here? As far as the world is concerned he is dead. He no longer has a following, nor even appears visibly to any, other than us. He has made no plans known, even to us. At least before his crucifixion we had certain expectations. Now that none of that has materialized...what...or where does that leave us?" Peter looked around at the blank expressions before him. "I can only speak for myself, but I would think there is much better things for us to do than sit around here, hiding from imaginary foes. I still have a business to run, a family to support, and lots of responsibilities awaiting me. It's time for me to get on with my life. As soon as the Passover season is over, that's what I am going to do."

They all agreed with Peter. "What is left for us? We are not accomplishing anything here. We agree with you, Peter. We shall all return back to our jobs."

Sometime later, back home again, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and others were fishing the Tiberias sea. After spending the night without catching anything they returned to shore. Before they anchored their boats, a man on shore called to them, "Have you a good catch, children?"

Surprised, they replied, "No, we have had only disappointment through the whole night."

"Then throw out your nets on yonder side," the man suggested confidently. "You will draw in enough to make up for the night."

When they threw their nets in, the nets filled to the limit.

John realized who the man was. He yelled at Peter, "It's The Master."

Peter, embarrassed because he was naked, grabbed some clothing and jumped into the water. He swam toward land, followed by several of their smaller boats pulling the loaded nets. As they approached shore they saw a fire, with bread and fish spread out. A voice called, "Come, bring your fish and let us eat." They all knew it was Yeshua. This was the third time he had appeared to the apostles.

After they had finished eating their fill, Yeshua became very serious. "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than you love other men?" he asked Peter.

Peter, surprised, answered, "Of course, Lord. You know that I like you."

After repeating the question for the third time, Peter became distressed. "Master, you know everything. You know that I like you. Why do you keep asking me this?" Then Peter remembered the three times he had denied knowing Yeshua, and he felt remorseful.

"Yes, Lord, I love you," he finally admitted. He realized Yeshua wanted more than a casual commitment.

Yeshua looked Peter straight in the eyes, "Then feed my sheep, Simon," he stated. "Let me tell you something. While you are young you will dress yourself and go wherever you choose.

When you become old you will rely on others to do for you. You will be taken places you do not want to go. Now, while you have the strength and courage of youth, accomplish your best.

Come...follow me."

Peter shivered with dread, for he suspected this was a prediction of a perilous future. Pointing to John he asked, "And what will happen to him?"

Yeshua shook his head. "What business is that of yours? If I choose that he live until I return, that's my business. Concern yourself with following me." Before he vanished, he instructed the disciples to meet with him at a certain time on a particular mountain above Galilee.

It had been several days since Yeshua had appeared to the apostles on the Tiberias sea. They had all managed to meet here, waiting for him to appear again. Some began to doubt again. "I know we are all here because The Master is to meet with us, but we can see for miles and there is no man in view," Thomas said.

"We have been here waiting for hours... What are we doing here, anyway? We have left our businesses again. Where do we go from here? Are we starting all over again?" he questioned.

Before anyone had time to answer Yeshua appeared in their midst. The awed disciples fell on their faces, worshipping. They listened intently, their mental appetites aroused, as past and future revelations spilled forth from Yeshua's store of eternal knowledge.

Yeshua settled down to teaching his students. "I came into the world for this very purpose, to begin a work. After I return and send you the comforter, the Holy Spirit, your understanding will yet mature. Through you I shall build my church, a body of servants, dedicated to following my instructions, learning how to love and serve their fellow man. You will spread my word to all nations of the world. My kingdom is not of this present age.

Nor will it be after the order of the world's governments. Those whom The Father draws to me will be a small group. They must endure persecution and hardships. Those who believe and are baptized, holding out to the end, will be welcomed by The Father and all the holy angels into the kingdom.

"It was necessary that I die in your stead, that you may live. Sin is the author of death and its penalty must be paid with a life. All have sinned. Had there been no sacrifice to pay the penalty for mankind's sins none would live beyond their physical existence. None could be accepted in the glorious kingdom of the Yahweh family. Those who accept my sacrifice by answering the call to righteousness, obeying my commandments, shall be cleansed from their sins, reconciled to The Father. They shall arise in the last days to everlasting life. They will be purified and refined. They shall shine like the brightness of the heavens, and the stars for ever and ever.

"I have sat upon the throne with the Ancient of Days, sharing His glory. I was there when the angels fell, when Lucifer rebelled and led a host of heavenly spirits astray. I was there at the great war of the universe when planets were turned to dust and cinder. I reformed the earth and fashioned new life upon it.

I breathed the breath of life into the man of clay and called him 'Adam'. I planned the ages, and watched as the families of mankind populated into greatness. I pleaded with them through my servant Noe for a hundred years. But they refused to heed. I sent the waters to cleanse the earth, to destroy their perversions and pollution, and grieved at the destruction of the first age. After mankind repopulated, I prevented their self- destruction when I confused their languages at the tower of Babel.

"During the second age, we, Elohim, searched among the families of man, for one through whom we could further the plan of eternal life. Until Abram, there was none. The nations all insisted on having their own gods. None would recognize my authority. Then the man Abram listened to my call and proved his loyalty when tested. Because Abraham obeyed my laws, and taught them to his children, I revealed myself to him. Through his son Isaac, his children became my special family. By great power and many signs, I freed them from slavery and led them out of Egypt. Through Mosheh, I revived my laws—that they should abound in good health, prosperity and peace. Their twelve tribes grew into one great nation, Israel. The people insisted on their own ways, the way of death. Still I pleaded with them through my prophets. In time Israel quarreled and split into two nations, the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Because of their sins I allowed the ten-tribe House of Israel to go into captivity and scatter abroad. Judah did not learn from Israel's example; they, too, fell by the hand of their enemies."

Then he paused before reminding them, "All power has been given to me in heaven and in earth. I am sending you to baptize those who believe; they shall be saved from eternal death. Those who do not believe shall not receive life in the future age.

"Those who believe shall be able to cast out demons in my name. They will not be hurt by poisonous creatures. If they accidentally drink poison it will not hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick and the sick will recover. The past events that have taken place are the fulfillment of the writings in the law, in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me. Now that eternal life has been made available, mankind redeemed from their sins, the third age is now beginning." Then he opened their understanding; his

words began to make sense for the first time. “Therefore, you are to go into all nations, teaching and baptizing them into the name of The Father, the Holy Spirit, and The Son. Teach them to observe all the things I have taught you.

And remember, I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age.

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