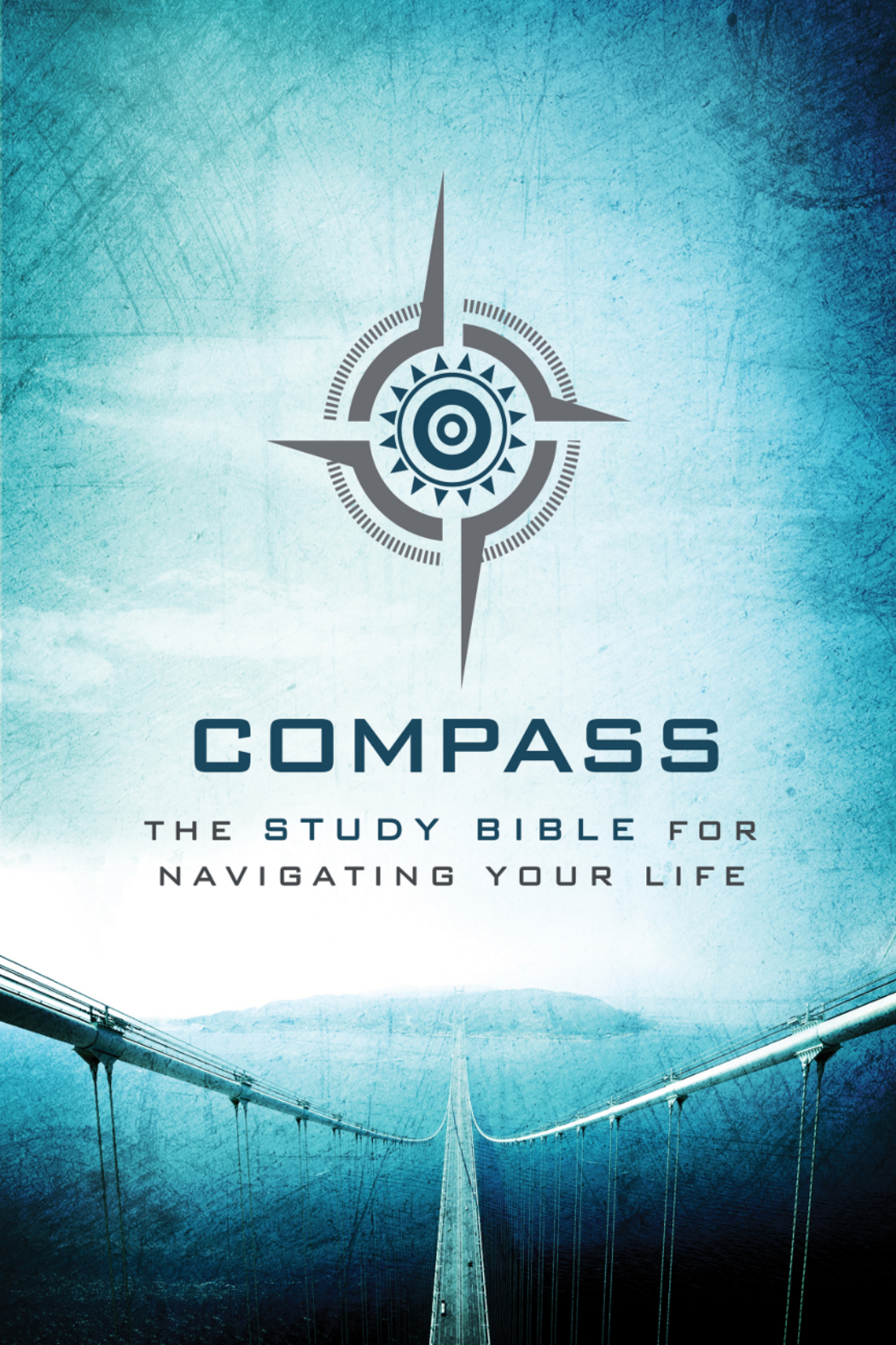

COMPASS
THE STUDY BIBLE FOR
NAVIGATING YOUR LIFE



COMPASS

THE STUDY BIBLE FOR NAVIGATING YOUR LIFE



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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A WORD FROM ECCLESIA BIBLE SOCIETY

I speak for every artist, musician, editor, writer, and scholar involved in this project when I tell you that we are all honored to have a small part in the sacred work of translating the Scriptures. It has been an honor to have labored, studied, fasted, and prayed over the work that we believe God has placed before us. We have not taken the task lightly, and through the process we have been changed. We are thrilled to see the ways that God uses His Word to speak to His people and reveal Himself to those who had never heard His voice clearly.

As you engage in this story, you may experience a strange feeling that may be best described as a vague sense that you are being followed or pursued. If so, your instincts are correct. This pursuit is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian faith. This is the story of God's relentless pursuit of us, and in the story we will begin to hear His footfalls following unfailingly behind us. Some religions invite seekers to study a new language before they can read their sacred text; then they are asked to chase after a god that dwells in the heavens. But those of us who walk in the path of Jesus are able to read the truth about God in our native tongues, and we experience the beauty of God who has drawn near to us in the person of Jesus. He continues to speak to us through His Spirit and the Scriptures as He has to other men and women, boys and girls, since the beginning of time.

We believe that as you read you will be able to experience God taking the broken pieces of your life and making you whole; your anger and resentment will be replaced with hope and grace; you will imagine a new way to live as a participant in God's redemptive work in this world.

I invite you to listen to *The Voice* with an open heart. You will hear God as He whispers of His love to you.

Chris Seay
President, Ecclesia Bible Society

PREFACE

the voice.
Step into the Story of Scripture

Any literary project reflects the age in which it is written. *The Voice* is created for and by a church in great transition. Throughout the body of christ, extensive discussions are ongoing about a variety of issues including which style of worship is most appropriate, how we distinguish cultural expressions from genuine expressions of faith, what it means to live the gospel, and how we faithfully communicate the essential truths of historic Christianity. At the center of these discussions is the role of Scripture. Instead of widening the division between culture and theology, it is time to bring the body of Christ together again around the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers and Ecclesia Bible Society together are developing Scripture products that foster spiritual growth and theological exploration out of a heart for worship and mission. We have dedicated ourselves to hearing and proclaiming God's voice through this project.

Previously most Bibles and biblical reference works were produced by professional scholars writing in academic settings. *The Voice* uniquely represents collaboration among scholars, pastors, writers, musicians, poets, and other artists. The goal is to create the finest Bible products to help believers experience the joy and wonder of God's revelation.

Uniqueness of *The Voice*

About 40 different human authors are believed to have been inspired by God to write the Scriptures. Most English translations attempt to even out the literary styles of the different authors in sentence structure and vocabulary. Instead, *The Voice* distinguishes the unique perspective of each author. The heart of the project is retelling the story of the Bible in a form as fluid as modern literary works while remaining painstakingly true to the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts. Accomplished writers and biblical scholars have been teamed up to create an English rendering that, while of great artistic value, is carefully aligned with the meaning inherent in the original language. Attention is paid to the use of idioms, artistic elements, confusion of pronouns, repetition of conjunctions, modern sentence structure, and the public reading of the passage.

To help the reader understand how the new rendering of a passage compares to the original texts, several indicators are embedded within the text.

- **Standard type** denotes the dynamic translation that is the foundation these elements are built on. It translates the many imprecise words that English translations have borrowed in their renderings, including *LORD, Christ, baptism, angel,* and *apostle*. The translation process for each book began as negotiation between

a gifted writer and scholars working in the original language. After that first phase, a few selected scholars carefully read the manuscript, compared it to the original language, and evaluated the faithfulness to the text and the theological and historical nuances of the translation. At the same time a publishing team ran consistency checks, copyedited the manuscript, and compared the rendering with the major existing English translations. A final acceptance process included each of the three groups—biblical scholarship, English writing competence, and publishing expertise—impacting the translation.

- **Italic type** indicates words not directly tied to the dynamic translation of the original language. These words bring out the nuance of the original, assist in completing ideas, and often provide readers with information that would have been obvious to the original audience. These additions are meant to help the modern reader better understand the text without having to stop and read footnotes or a study guide.
- **Delineated material** expands on the themes found in the text. This portion is not taken directly from the original language and is set apart in a second color or by a colored line from the Bible text. It may include cultural, historical, theological, or devotional thoughts.
- **Screenplay format** is used to identify dialogue and to avoid the repetition of conjunctions, articles, and certain verbs. The speaker is indicated, the dialogue is indented, and quotation marks are avoided. This helps greatly in immediate comprehension of the situation for the user and in intensification of the dramatic presence during the public reading of Scripture. Sometimes the original text includes interruptions in the dialogue to indicate the attitude of the speaker or of who is being addressed. This is shown either as a stage direction immediately following the speaker's name or as part of the narrative section that immediately precedes the speaker's name.

We follow the standard conventions used in most translations regarding textual evidence. *The Voice* is based on the earliest and best manuscripts from the original languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic). When significant variations influence a reading, we follow the publishing standard by bracketing the passage and placing a note at the bottom of the page, while maintaining the traditional chapter and verse divisions. The footnotes also reference quoted material and help the reader understand the translation of a particular word. Words that are borrowed from another language and words that are not common outside of the theological community (such as *baptism, repentance,* and *salvation*) are given expanded translations derived from more common terminology. For clarity some pronouns are replaced with their antecedents. Because Greek and Hebrew word order and syntax differ significantly from English, we have followed standard translation practices and altered these elements when necessary to help the reader achieve clarity in understanding Scripture and its meaning.

Our purpose in using these literary devices is to reveal the beauty of the Scriptures and to assist the reader in clearly and quickly understanding the meaning of the text. We are constrained to be faithful to these ancient texts while giving the present reader a respectful and moving experience with the Word of God.

A Different Translation Process

The Voice Bible is a different sort of translation. It combines the relative strengths of scholars who are experts in the original languages and modern

writers, musicians, and poets who are skilled in their use of English, our target language. Our idea was to set up a collaborative process whereby scholars and writers could work together to create a translation that was faithful and accurate to the original languages while at the same time beautiful and readable to an English-speaking audience. In some cases scholars and writers worked closely together; in others they worked at some distance or even anonymously. Members of the translation team from Ecclesia Bible Society and Thomas Nelson coordinated the overall process.

Whenever people render one language into another (whether ancient or modern), they are involved in translation. There are levels of formality in the translation process. Generally, these are described on a continuum between formal and functional equivalence. But these approaches are not followed strictly by any Bible translation team, and most translations must mix formal with functional elements in order to communicate clearly. Realistically, languages are too complex and fluid to be reduced to a single approach in translation. A strictly formal translation process will result in an unreadable text that obscures the meaning of Scripture rather than making it accessible. A strictly functional translation process will result in a text that might communicate to a reader well what the original text means but not what the original says.

With *The Voice* Bible we acknowledge the difficulties translation teams face and offer what might be described as a mediating position between the extremes. We describe our approach as "contextual equivalence." Recognizing that context is the most important factor in determining the meaning of a word, sentence, paragraph, or narrative, we have sought to create a Bible translation that preserves both the linguistic and literary features of the original biblical text. A "contextual equivalent" translation technique seeks to convey the original language accurately while rendering the literary structures and character of a text in readable and meaningful contemporary language. This particular translation approach keeps in mind the smaller parts and the larger whole. In endeavoring to translate sacred Scripture, *The Voice* captures uniquely the poetic imagery and literary artistry of the original in a way that is beautiful and meaningful.

Two other related descriptors are used to situate a Bible translation in the field. Some claim their translations are "word-for-word" in contrast to those that are "thought-for-thought." Word-for-word translations generally claim to be more literal and therefore superior to those that are thought-for-thought. The critique is sometimes made that thought-for-thought translations reflect the interpretive opinions of the translators and are influenced by the contemporary culture more than word-for-word translations.

There are four primary objections to these claims. First, every translation is an interpretation. Anyone who has studied translation theory recognizes that it is impossible for translators to get outside their skins and objectively render a text. The Italians say it bluntly: *tradutorre, traditore*—"The translator is a traitor." Even if it were deemed useful to design a computer program to translate mechanically the Scriptures into English, human subjectivity and judgment would still come into play in various ways; for example, choosing which texts to translate and deciding which English word to use to translate a specific Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic word. Subjectivity and interpretive opinions are impossible to avoid in the translation process and do not necessarily have a negative impact on a translation.

This leads to a second objection regarding the nature of words and thoughts. The strict distinction between "word" and "thought" must be questioned. After all, a word is merely an expressed thought, whether spoken or written. This becomes

clear when dealing with people who are fluent in multiple languages. When they have a thought they wish to express, they must choose which language, then which word or words, then which word order. There may be a line of distinction between a thought and a word, but it is not a hard and fast line; it is at best a dotted line.

Third, words generally do not have a single meaning; they have a range of meanings—what linguists refer to as a "semantic field." Even the translators of the King James Bible recognized that words do not carry the same sense every time they occur in a text (see preface to the 1611 edition). For example, how should one translate the Greek noun *dikaiosunē*? In one place the word might mean "justice," in another "righteousness," in another "equity" or "integrity," and in another something that is "true" or "right." One must understand the context in which a word is used in order to render carefully its meaning in another language. This context is not just semantic but also historical and social. For example, our use of "God's Anointed" or the "Anointed One" as a translation of the title *Christ*—and in selected places expanded to "God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*"—captures something of the historical and social reality behind Jesus' identity. He is God's Anointed King who comes to liberate His people from sin, addiction, disease, oppression, and death.

To press this point even further, words don't just *mean* things, they *do* things. Words have both meaning and function; they function within clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and stories in ways that are different from the definition a person might find in a dictionary or lexicon. Beyond this, however, words also function in various ways to elicit emotions, actions, and responses from those who hear them. In order to translate a text well, one must consider not only what words mean but what they do.

Fourth, a word-for-word correspondence is difficult to maintain because translators may need multiple words in one language to express the meaning of a single word in another. Take for instance the Greek word *sōthēsetai* (Romans 10:13). Because of the way the English language works, it takes no fewer than four words to translate this single Greek verb: "he/she will be saved." Again, the context reveals who will be saved, what salvation entails, and when it is realized.

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, *The Voice* represents a hybrid of the word-for-word and thought-for-thought approaches. In some places *The Voice* follows a word-for-word translation; in others it expresses the meaning more in a thought-for-thought approach. This is necessitated contextually both by the original language and by our target language (English). Responsibility to render the biblical languages carefully and to create a readable translation for an audience is not an either/or pursuit; a "contextual equivalent" translation seeks to be faithful and realistic to both tasks.

Another issue *The Voice* project team had to address involved inclusive language. Generally speaking, we have made no attempt to make *The Voice* gender neutral or gender inclusive. We have tried to follow the sense of the text and have made translation decisions based on the context. When, for example, Paul reminded the *adelphoi* ("brothers") of Corinth of the content of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), it is unlikely that he intended to include the "brothers" and exclude the "sisters." Since the apostle adopted typical letter-writing practices of his day, his manner of addressing the community was likely determined by cultural mores. In such cases, we have decided to render the text "brothers and sisters." However, in passages where it is clear that the admonition is addressed to one gender and not the other, we have taken seriously the historical situation and utilized the

appropriate masculine or feminine nouns and pronouns. The warnings against loose women in Proverbs 5–7, for example, are clearly aimed at young men. Furthermore, Proverbs 31 does not describe a remarkable partner or spouse but a remarkable woman who happens to also be a wife. This perspective respects the particular situations that gave rise to the texts in their original historical settings and does not seek to exclude (or include for that matter) those not being directly addressed by the biblical writers. Commentaries and proper exegesis can make reasonable application of texts across gender lines in ways translations cannot.

Finally, although *The Voice* represents a new approach to Bible translation, we have intentionally avoided the tendency to use trendy language. Our goal was to capture the beauty and brutal honesty of the Scriptures in language that is timeless and enduring. In the process, we have come to recognize our profound indebtedness to the various strands of Christian tradition that have made these texts available. We stand in gratitude to a multitude of saints who gave their lives to preserve and transmit the Scriptures in their original languages from one generation to the next. We acknowledge the significant contributions made by the Reformers and their followers (not to mention their predecessors) to give us a common language and scriptural heritage in the English-speaking world. Although we have not always tried to imitate them, we have always learned from them. Our hope and prayer is that a new generation of people will encounter the Scriptures through *The Voice* and step into the story of Scripture.

Christ in This Translation

In its original Greek language, the New Testament refers to Jesus hundreds of times as *Christos.* Most English translations of Scripture render this "Christ," which is not a translation but a transliteration. The unfortunate effect of this decision is that most readers mistake "Christ" as a kind of second name for Jesus. In fact, *Christos* is not a name at all; it is a title. It is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title *Messiah*. So when the New Testament writers call Jesus "(the) Christ," they are making a bold claim—one of the central claims of the Christian faith—that Jesus is the Messiah. While there was no single expectation about the Messiah in Jesus' day, many of His contemporaries would have recognized the Messiah as God's agent who comes in the last days to redeem God's people and repair our broken world.

Because we understand that no single English word or phrase captures the richness of the term *Messiah* or *Christos,* we made a strategic decision in *The Voice* to translate *Christos* and not simply to transliterate it. The root idea of *Christos* is derived from a Greek verb meaning "to anoint (with oil)." The act of anointing someone with oil is a way of setting that person apart for God's use. When people are anointed—kings and priests, for example—oil is poured over their heads, signifying God's Spirit coming upon them and empowering them for the tasks ahead. This is why we have decided to translate *Christos* as "God's Anointed," the "Anointed," or the "Anointed One," depending on context and narrative flow.

But there is another aspect of *Christos* we need to highlight. You see, according to tradition, the Messiah is to be a son of David, and as such He has a royal function to continue David's dynasty and to reign over a newly constituted kingdom. In order to become king, a person must have God's anointing. So from time to time, as we translate *Christos* as "God's Anointed," we have added the explanatory phrase "the Liberating King" to remind us of the primary mission and the reason God elects and empowers Jesus in the first place. Jesus comes as the King

of a new kind of kingdom and exercises His royal power to rescue and liberate His creation. This liberation takes place on various levels, all of which are related.

Not long after Jesus begins His public ministry, He returns to the synagogue in Nazareth—where He had grown up—and reads the Scripture portion that day from Isaiah 61:

> The Spirit of the Lord the Eternal One is on Me.
> *Why?* Because the Eternal designated Me
> to be His representative to the poor, to preach good news to them.
> He sent Me to tell those who are held captive that they can now be set free,
> and to tell the blind that they can now see.
> He sent Me to liberate those held down by oppression.
> *In short, the Spirit is upon Me* to proclaim that now is the time;
> this is the jubilee season of the Eternal One's grace.
>
> (Luke 4:18-19)

From the way Jesus responds to the reading that day, it is clear that He understands His Spirit-enabled work to be about proclaiming the good news, releasing exiles and other political prisoners, healing the sick, and freeing the oppressed—in a word, "liberating" the poor, the captive, the sick, and the marginalized from whatever threatens them. But there is more. The Scriptures declare that Jesus comes to liberate those made in His image from the power and penalty of sin, which is the reason God's good creation is so fouled up and disordered in the first place. In fact Paul tells the Romans that all creation has been damaged by sin and longs for the day when God's children are revealed and set free from the power of sin and death. When that day comes, creation itself will be liberated from its own slavery to corruption (Romans 8:18-25). By translating *Christos* as "God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*" on occasion, we are reminded of the title's true meaning and an important truth: the extent of Jesus' kingdom and the reach of His liberating work extend beyond our hearts, beyond our politics, beyond our world.

The Divine Name

To know a name is to know something special. When people tell you their names, they signal willingness to know and be known. It is often a prelude to their personal journeys, an invitation to relationships. This dynamic is certainly true in the story of Scripture when God chooses to reveal His name to His people.

While many titles are attributed to God in the Scripture (for example, "Lord," "God," "God-All-Powerful," and "Commander of *heavenly* armies"), He has only one name, the name He revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. It is used about 6,000 times in the Old Testament to refer to the one True God of Israel. The English transliteration of the Hebrew name is *YHWH.* Although we do not know which vowels would have been pronounced with these four consonants, we think the name may best be spoken as *Yahweh.* In the past, some translators rendered the divine name Jehovah; but this is actually a name made up from the consonants of YHWH and the vowels of *Adonai,* one of the Hebrew words for "Lord." Today most Bible translations render the divine name as "LORD." The capitalization of each letter tells the reader that the word appears in place of God's Hebrew name and is not just a title of reverence and honor. In *The Voice* we have taken special care to translate the divine name as the "Eternal One" or the "Eternal," depending on the context.

The translation of God's name is based upon a number of factors. First, the name *YHWH* is clearly understood to be God's covenant name. It was revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:13-15). Here is that classic exchange:

Moses: [13]Let's say I go to the people of Israel and tell them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to *rescue* you," and then they reply, "What is His name?" What should I tell them then?

Eternal One: [14]I AM WHO I AM. This is what you should tell the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to *rescue* you."

[15]This is what you are to tell Israel's people: "The Eternal, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is the One who has sent me to you." This is My name forevermore, and this is the name by which all future generations shall remember Me.

The revelation of God's name to Moses is associated with the liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian bondage and the institution of God's covenant with Israel at Sinai. The declaration affirms that this God is none other than the God who had already appeared and established a covenant of blessing with Abraham and his sons. Therefore, it is a covenant name that links past, present, and future: "I am the God who was with Abraham. I am the God who hears the prayers of My people now. I am the God who will rescue them in the future. I am the Eternal." It is a relational name that emphasizes God's saving actions and His dedication to His covenant people.

Second, the name *YHWH* appears to be built on the Hebrew verb meaning "to be." When asked His name, God responds, "I AM WHO I AM . . . . [say,] 'I AM has sent me to *rescue* you.'" The verbal idea has a timeless quality, particularly since it links God's past, present, and future saving actions on behalf of His people and the world. This is why we think the English word "eternal" helps to capture something of its meaning. Furthermore, God emphasizes that this name is eternal; it stands forever and must be remembered by future generations of God's covenant partners.

Third, while we have anglicized most other names in Scripture (*Benyamin* = Benjamin; *Shemuel* = Samuel; *Jeshua* = Joshua; *Petros* = Peter; *Paulos* = Paul), we have chosen not to do so with the divine name out of respect for that name and our deep appreciation for both Jewish and Christian traditions. The Ten Directives warn against using the name of God in any frivolous, self-serving way (Exodus 20:7). Over time—and under the influence of this directive—faithful Jewish communities spoke the name less and less until it was prohibited from use altogether except on the most solemn occasions in the temple. Even when Scripture was read aloud in the synagogue, the reader did not utter the divine name; instead, when he came across it in the text, he substituted a word for it. In Aramaic-speaking synagogues they would say *Adonai*; in Greek-speaking synagogues they would say *Kyrios*. Many Jews today carry on this tradition of reverence by refusing to speak the name at all and indicating the presence of the written name in Scripture by saying *HaShem,* which means, "the name." Early Christians continued similar practices regarding sacred names and invented new ways to signal that respect. When, for example, scribes wrote and copied the Scriptures, they refrained from fully spelling out the names and titles associated with God the Father, Son, and Spirit. Instead, they employed what we call today *nomina sacra* (that is, "sacred names"). When copyists came across these special names in the text, they would abbreviate them with two letters (generally) and draw a line above those letters to indicate to the reader that the word is a sacred name.

The Voice translation of the divine name as the "Eternal" and the "Eternal One" carries on the church's long-standing tradition of reverence for God and His name. It also attempts to translate the meaning of the name and recontextualize it

for our culture. We wish to emphasize both the covenantal and everlasting aspects of God's name. It is covenantal in that God is revealing His special name as a prelude to an enduring relationship with Him, a relationship in which He promises to be with and for us. It signals God's willingness both to know us and to be known by us. It is everlasting in that God's name, like God Himself, is timeless and unchanging. Although existing outside of time and space, God has revealed Himself in time and space in order to engage His people—past, present, and future—in a loving and faithful relationship. The "Eternal One" stands in sharp contrast to everything else in the universe which is temporary and constantly changing.

STEP INTO THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

A New Way to Process Ideas

Chris Seay (president of Ecclesia Bible Society) first recognized a need for *The Voice* more than 20 years ago during his early attempts to teach the whole biblical narrative as the story of God's redemptive work in God's Anointed, Jesus of Nazareth. Chris observed that the way this postmodern generation processes ideas and information raises obstacles to traditional methods of teaching biblical content. Instead of primarily propositional-based thought patterns, people today are more likely to interact with events and individuals through complex observations involving emotions, cognitive processes, tactile experiences, and spiritual awareness. The result of Chris's observations is a retelling of the Scriptures in a narrative form: this is *The Voice*, not of words, but of meaning and experience.

The Timeless Narrative

The Voice is a fresh expression of the timeless narrative known as the Bible. Stories of God's goodness that were told to each generation by their grandparents and tribal leaders were recorded and assembled to form the Christian Scriptures. Too often, the passion, grit, humor, and beauty have been lost in the translation process. *The Voice* seeks to recapture what was lost.

From these early explorations by Chris and others has come *The Voice*: a Scripture project to help readers step into the story of Scripture. Thomas Nelson Publishers and Ecclesia Bible Society have joined together to develop Scripture products and resources to foster spiritual growth and theological exploration out of a heart for the mission of the church and worship of God.

Communicating the Story

Putting the Bible into the language of modern readers is a painstaking process that involves correlating ancient languages and cultures with the English vernacular. Scripture is filled with passages intended to inspire, captivate, and depict both the beauty and the ugliness of the world; but earlier translations have not always been successful in communicating the beauty, grit, and story of Scripture. *The Voice* is a translation of the Bible's collage of compelling narrative, poetry, song, truth, and wisdom. *The Voice* will call you to step into the whole story of God with your whole heart, soul, and mind.

INTRODUCTION

the voice.
Step into the Story of Scripture

The book you are reading is no ordinary book. The Bible is a veritable library, a book of books, but not just any books. These books are inspired by God, written by people flush with their encounters with Him, shaped by communities of faithful believers, and recognized by the church universal as an authoritative account of God's activities in the world. Speaking of the first part of the Christian Scriptures, Paul reminds Timothy that these books are in fact "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Generations of Christians have sensed the warm, sweet breath of God as they thumbed through the pages and breathed in the enduring message it contains. If you allow His breath to wash over you, you will hear the authentic voice of the one True God addressing you, correcting you, and training you for what is ahead.

The Christian Bible is the most translated and retranslated book in all history. All or part of it is available today to the vast majority of the world's population in nearly 2,300 of the world's 6,909 languages.[1] When the Scriptures were published in English in 1611 under the auspices of King James I of England, they provided the English-speaking world a common language and a shared heritage which shaped Western culture in significant ways. In America the first book read by children and adults was the King James Bible. The memorable stories in its pages entertained them, trained their minds, formed their consciences, and fashioned their societies. No book has had a greater impact on so large a group of people. However, the English language has changed in the last four centuries—as all languages do over the course of time—so we arrive at a new moment with a fresh opportunity to retell these classic stories in the common language of a new generation.

We have not arrived at this moment on our own. We stand upon the shoulders of countless dedicated sinners-made-saints who gave the best of themselves to God and passed the Scriptures along to their sons and daughters. For 1,500 years the Christian Scriptures were meticulously hand copied, checked, and rechecked in order to ensure the accurate transmission of these vital books in their original languages. Others gave themselves to the study of those original languages and translated the Scriptures into the languages of the people, often at great risk to their own lives.[2] So now it is our turn. Our scholars have worked from the best Greek and Hebrew texts available.[3] We have wrestled with the

[1] M. Paul Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World,* 16th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2009). The vast majority of the remaining languages represent small, remote populations averaging only a few hundred speakers each.

[2] William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536) was one of the first to translate the Scriptures from the original languages into English. He was tried for heresy and burned at the stake in 1536, yet his translation greatly influenced the scholars who would translate the King James Bible.

[3] For the Hebrew Scriptures we turned to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004). In a few places the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (known as the Septuagint) have influenced translation decisions. For the Greek Scriptures we worked from *The Greek New Testament,* 4th ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1993) and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, ed., 27th ed. (Westphalia: Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung, 1993). Textual variants in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew are only occasionally referenced in footnotes.

languages—the original languages and English, our target language—debated every decision, and taken inordinate care to make sure we are passing along to the next generation a readable, personal, faithful, creative, and transformative version of Scripture.

The heart of the Christian Scriptures—both Old and New Testaments—is the story of God's covenants with and promises to His people and the world. Concerned with the proliferation of evil, sin, and its dire consequences to His good creation, God decides that the best route to reclaim and repair His broken creation is to reveal Himself to one person, then another, and then another on the way to redeeming the entire world. Each book of the Bible tells part of the story. Each chapter fits into this grand scheme. Each verse contributes some fact, some detail, some nuance to the overall drama. You will notice that the content of some books overlaps (for example, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles), and that is because they are written from different perspectives with unique interests.

Now let us be clear. The Scriptures offer more than an account of God's past actions in history. They also speak of a future that has not yet been fully realized, a future when all things will be made new. That vision of the future is what drives the church and directs its mission. It reminds us that things are not now as they are supposed to be, not now as they are destined to be. It tells us what the world will be like when the one True God finally reigns supreme over a restored creation and evil, suffering, sin, and death are things of the past.

The Scriptures invite us to begin or deepen our connections with God, repair our relationships with each other, take our rightful places as stewards of God's creation, all while discovering what we are made to do. Properly understood, the Bible is deeply relational and must be read in relational terms. It is not just a story about people "way back when." On each page we read about our spiritual ancestors: Abraham our father, Sarah our mother, Paul our brother, Deborah our sister, and a host of other siblings. These books may well have been written by different people to different audiences, but in them we hear God addressing and wooing us. When we immerse ourselves in its story, we find our places in the world as men and women have been doing since the church was born during Pentecost (Acts 2:1-6).

Some well-meaning people tend to reduce the Bible to a set of manageable propositions. They select certain verses to memorize and judge for themselves which parts to read, which rules to follow. But the Scriptures are not meant to be stripped of their storied context. They are meant to be read as chapters in a larger drama of love and redemption. To read part of the Bible is to know only part of the story, not the grand sweep of sacred history. The Scriptures demand that we read and re-read them, that we study and dig deep in order to discover the truth about God, ourselves, and the world. Had God wanted us to have only a few dozen verses to memorize or a set of rules to follow, He could have provided that. Instead, He decided to disclose Himself in the messiness of people's lives, the intrigues of political power, the occasional miraculous deed, and the inescapable still, small voice. Now don't misunderstand, there is nothing wrong with memorizing verses or following the rules, but these must be selected carefully and understood for what they are. It is always unwise to abridge the greater story of Scripture with our own chopped-up versions. Read Obadiah as well as Isaiah. Read Jude as well as John, for you will find in the smallest books a generous portion of the story as it drives toward its fulfillment.

This is why we have added so many valuable resources to *The Voice*. In addition to the 66 books of the Bible, you will find

- resources for personal and communal study,
- brief essays and commentaries that explain difficult passages,
- suggestions on how to read the Bible with greater clarity,
- a plan for reading through the entire Bible in three years, and
- strategies for engaging the story of Scripture during Advent, Lent, and Easter.

Each of these resources has been designed with you—the reader—in mind, whether you are coming to the Bible for the first time or have spent a lifetime studying the Scriptures.

As you read through *The Voice* and consult the helps provided, we invite you to step into the story of Scripture, hear the authentic voice of God, and experience the beauty, power, and grace resident in each book. Unlike other stories you may hear—ancient and modern—this story is completely true.

David B. Capes, PhD



ROAD MAP TO GOD'S PROMISES®

01 02 03 04 05 06

Jesus Is Your . . .

Savior

- Psalm 106:8
- Luke 1:47
- Luke 19:10
- John 3:16
- John 4:42b
- John 6:47
- Romans 3:24-25
- Romans 10:9
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 2:8-9
- 2 Timothy 1:8b-9
- Titus 3:5-6
- 1 John 4:14

Lord

- Psalm 68:19
- Psalm 86:5
- Isaiah 50:7
- Mark 12:30
- Luke 6:46
- Acts 2:25
- Acts 2:36
- Romans 6:14-16
- Romans 10:9-10
- Romans 12:1-2
- Romans 14:8
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Philippians 2:9-11

Love

- Psalm 42:8
- Proverbs 8:17
- Jeremiah 31:3
- Hosea 2:19-20
- John 3:16
- John 14:21
- John 15:9, 13, 17

Jesus Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Love *(continued)*

- Romans 5:8
- Romans 8:38-39
- Ephesians 3:14, 16, 19
- 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 1 John 4:7-11
- 1 John 4:16-19

Peace

- Psalm 4:8
- Psalm 29:11
- Isaiah 9:6-7
- Isaiah 26:3
- Isaiah 26:12
- John 14:27
- Romans 5:1
- Romans 16:20
- Ephesians 2:13-14
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Philippians 4:9
- Colossians 3:15

Forgiveness

- Psalm 85:2
- Psalm 103:12
- Isaiah 1:18
- Isaiah 43:25
- Isaiah 55:7
- Jeremiah 33:8
- Mark 11:25
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 1:6-7
- Colossians 2:13
- Colossians 3:13
- Hebrews 8:12
- 1 John 1:9
- 1 John 2:1

Jesus Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Righteousness
- Isaiah 32:17
- Isaiah 54:14-17
- Romans 3:22
- Romans 3:24-26
- Romans 4:5
- Romans 5:17
- Romans 8:3-4
- Romans 8:10
- Romans 8:29-30
- Romans 9:30
- Romans 10:10
- 1 Corinthians 1:30
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 3:6-7
- Philippians 3:9
- Titus 3:5

Deliverer
- Isaiah 9:4
- Isaiah 61:1
- Mark 16:17
- Luke 4:18
- Luke 10:19
- John 8:32, 36
- Romans 6:22
- Romans 8:2
- 2 Corinthians 3:17
- 1 John 4:1-4
- Revelation 12:11

Fellowship
- Psalm 119:63
- Zechariah 2:10
- Matthew 18:20
- John 14:21
- John 14:23
- John 15:4-5, 7
- 1 Corinthians 1:9
- Ephesians 5:2, 19, 30
- Philippians 2:1-2
- 1 John 1:3
- 1 John 1:5-7
- Revelation 3:20

Example
- Mark 10:43-45
- John 13:14-15
- John 13:34
- Romans 15:5-7
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Philippians 2:5-8

Jesus Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Example *(continued)*
- Colossians 3:13
- Hebrews 12:2-3
- 1 Peter 2:21
- 1 John 2:6
- 1 John 3:16

Companion
- Psalm 27:10
- Psalm 119:63
- Proverbs 18:24
- Isaiah 54:10
- John 14:18
- John 15:15-16
- Hebrews 13:5
- James 4:8
- 1 John 1:7
- Revelation 3:20
- John 15:12-14
- 1 Corinthians 1:9
- 1 John 1:3

Brother
- Matthew 12:50
- John 1:12
- Romans 8:14
- Romans 8:29
- Galatians 3:26
- Galatians 4:6-7
- Ephesians 2:19
- Hebrews 2:11
- 1 John 3:1
- 1 John 3:2

Guardian
- Exodus 23:22
- Deuteronomy 1:30
- Deuteronomy 33:27
- 1 Samuel 2:9
- 2 Chronicles 16:9a
- Psalm 3:3
- Psalm 61:3
- Psalm 91:7
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 59:19
- Zephaniah 3:17
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3
- 1 Peter 3:12-13

Security
- Psalm 23:6
- Isaiah 40:26
- John 6:27

Jesus Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Security *(continued)*

John 6:37
John 10:27-29
Romans 8:38-39
2 Corinthians 1:22
Ephesians 1:13
Ephesians 4:30
Philippians 1:6
2 Thessalonians 3:3
Hebrews 6:11, 12, 18-20
1 Peter 1:3-5
Jude 24-25

Sufficiency

Psalm 103:2-4
Matthew 21:22
Mark 11:24
John 14:13
John 15:7
John 16:23-24
Romans 8:32
Romans 8:37
2 Corinthians 3:5
2 Corinthians 9:8
2 Corinthians 12:9
Ephesians 1:3
Ephesians 1:19
Philippians 4:13
Philippians 4:19
2 Peter 1:3-4

Fulfillment

Psalm 22:26
Psalm 37:4
Psalm 63:5-6
Psalm 103:5
Psalm 107:9
Psalm 145:15-16
Isaiah 55:2
Isaiah 58:10-11
Jeremiah 31:14
Joel 2:19
Joel 2:26
Matthew 5:6
John 4:13-14
John 6:35
Romans 8:32

Everything

Psalm 68:19
Matthew 21:22

Jesus Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Everything *(continued)*

Mark 11:24
John 15:7
John 16:23-24
Romans 8:37
1 Corinthians 3:21-23
2 Corinthians 5:17
2 Corinthians 5:21
2 Corinthians 9:8
Ephesians 1:3
Ephesians 3:20-21
Philippians 1:21
Philippians 4:13
Philippians 4:19
1 John 3:22

The Bible Is Your . . .

Infallible Authority

Psalm 33:6
Psalm 33:9
Psalm 119:89
Proverbs 30:5
Isaiah 55:10-11
Mark 13:31
John 5:39
2 Corinthians 1:20
2 Timothy 3:16
Hebrews 4:12
1 Peter 1:23
1 Peter 1:24-25
2 Peter 1:20-21

Deed of Inheritance

Psalm 37:34
Matthew 25:34
John 14:2-3
Acts 20:32
Acts 26:18
Romans 8:16-17
1 Corinthians 2:9
2 Corinthians 1:20
Galatians 3:29
Ephesians 1:11-14
Ephesians 3:6
Colossians 3:23-24
Hebrews 11:16
1 Peter 1:3-4
2 Peter 1:4

The Bible Is Your . . . *(continued)*

Guide for Life

Psalm 19:11
Psalm 23:3
Psalm 32:8
Psalm 37:23
Psalm 119:9
Psalm 119:11
Psalm 119:24
Psalm 119:105
Proverbs 6:22-23
John 8:31-32
2 Peter 1:4

Stability

Deuteronomy 33:27
1 Kings 8:56a
Psalm 40:2
Psalm 46:1
Psalm 119:89
Proverbs 4:20-22
Proverbs 18:10
Isaiah 40:8
Ezekiel 12:25
Matthew 5:18
Matthew 24:35
Romans 8:31
2 Thessalonians 3:3
1 Peter 1:23-25
Jude 24-25

Strength

Nehemiah 8:10
Psalm 18:2
Psalm 27:1
Psalm 119:28
Proverbs 8:14
Isaiah 30:15
Isaiah 40:29
Isaiah 40:31
Isaiah 41:10
Daniel 10:19
Ephesians 3:16-17
Ephesians 6:10
Ephesians 6:13
Philippians 4:13
Colossians 1:10-12

What to Do When You Feel . . .

Discouraged

Psalm 27:1-14
Psalm 31:24

What to Do When You Feel . . . *(continued)*

Discouraged *(continued)*

Psalm 138:7
Isaiah 51:11
John 14:1
John 14:27
2 Corinthians 4:8-9
Galatians 6:9
Philippians 1:6
Philippians 4:6-8
Hebrews 10:35-36
1 Peter 1:6-9

Worried

Psalm 4:8
Psalm 91:1-2
Psalm 119:165
Proverbs 3:24
Isaiah 26:3
Matthew 6:25-34
John 14:1
John 14:27
Romans 8:6
Philippians 4:6-7
Philippians 4:19
Colossians 3:15
Hebrews 4:3-9
1 Peter 5:7

Lonely

Deuteronomy 4:31
Deuteronomy 31:6
Deuteronomy 33:27
1 Samuel 12:22
Psalm 27:10
Psalm 46:1
Psalm 147:3
Isaiah 41:10
Isaiah 54:10
Matthew 28:20
John 14:1
John 14:18
Romans 8:35-39
Hebrews 13:5
1 Peter 5:7

Depressed

Nehemiah 8:10
Psalm 30:5
Psalm 34:17
Psalm 147:3

What to Do When You Feel . . .
(continued)

Depressed *(continued)*
- Isaiah 40:31
- Isaiah 41:10
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 51:11
- Isaiah 61:3
- Luke 18:1
- Romans 8:38-39
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- Philippians 4:8
- 1 Peter 4:12-13
- 1 Peter 5:6-7

Dissatisfied
- Psalm 34:10
- Psalm 37:3
- Psalm 63:1-5
- Psalm 103:1-5
- Psalm 107:9
- Proverbs 12:14
- Isaiah 12:2-3
- Isaiah 44:3
- Isaiah 55:1
- Jeremiah 31:14
- Joel 2:26
- Matthew 5:6
- 2 Corinthians 9:8
- Philippians 4:12-13

Condemned
- 2 Chronicles 30:9
- Psalm 32:1
- Psalm 32:5
- Psalm 103:10-12
- Isaiah 43:25
- Isaiah 55:7
- Jeremiah 31:34
- John 3:17-18
- John 5:24
- John 8:10-11
- Romans 8:1
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Hebrews 10:22
- 1 John 1:9
- Revelation 12:10-11

Confused
- Psalm 32:8
- Psalm 55:22
- Psalm 119:165

What to Do When You Feel . . .
(continued)

Confused *(continued)*
- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Isaiah 30:21
- Isaiah 40:29
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 50:7
- 1 Corinthians 14:33
- Philippians 4:6-7
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- James 1:5
- James 3:16-18
- 1 Peter 4:12-13

Tempted
- Psalm 119:11
- Proverbs 28:13
- Romans 6:14
- 1 Corinthians 10:12-13
- Ephesians 6:10-11, 16
- Hebrews 2:18
- Hebrews 4:14-16
- James 1:2-3, 12
- James 1:13-14
- James 4:7
- 1 Peter 1:6-7
- 1 Peter 5:8-9
- 2 Peter 2:9a
- 1 John 1:9
- 1 John 4:4
- Jude 24-25a

Angry
- Psalm 37:8
- Proverbs 14:16-17
- Proverbs 14:29
- Proverbs 15:1
- Proverbs 16:32
- Proverbs 25:21-22
- Ecclesiastes 7:9
- Matthew 5:22-24
- Matthew 6:14
- Romans 12:19
- Ephesians 4:26
- Ephesians 4:31-32
- Colossians 3:8
- Hebrews 10:30
- James 1:19-20

Rebellious
- 1 Samuel 15:22-23
- Proverbs 12:21
- Proverbs 14:16-17

What to Do When You Feel . . .
(continued)

Rebellious *(continued)*
- Isaiah 1:19-20
- Romans 6:12-13
- Ephesians 4:17-18
- Ephesians 5:8
- Ephesians 5:21
- Philippians 2:5-8
- Hebrews 5:8
- Hebrews 13:17
- James 4:7
- 1 Peter 2:13-15
- 1 Peter 1:13-14
- 1 Peter 5:5-6

What to Do When You Are . . .

Experiencing Fear
- Psalm 23:4-5
- Psalm 27:1-3
- Psalm 31:24
- Psalm 56:11
- Psalm 91:1
- Psalm 91:4-7
- Psalm 91:10-11
- Proverbs 3:25-26
- Isaiah 54:14
- John 14:27
- Romans 8:15
- Romans 8:29, 31, 35-39
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- Hebrews 13:6
- 1 John 4:18

Mentally Disturbed
- Psalm 30:5
- Psalm 55:22
- Psalm 119:165
- Psalm 147:3
- Isaiah 41:10
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 50:7
- Romans 8:38-39
- 1 Corinthians 14:33a
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Philippians 4:8
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- James 3:16-18
- 1 Peter 2:6

What to Do When You Are . . .
(continued)

In Need of Courage
- Deuteronomy 33:27
- Psalm 27:14
- Psalm 30:5
- Psalm 31:24
- Psalm 118:17
- Isaiah 40:31
- Isaiah 41:10
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 51:11
- Romans 8:38-39
- Philippians 4:6
- Philippians 4:8
- Philippians 4:13
- 1 Peter 4:12-13

In Need of Patience
- Psalm 27:14
- Psalm 37:8-9
- Psalm 40:1
- Ecclesiastes 7:8-9
- Isaiah 40:31
- Lamentations 3:26
- Romans 5:3-5
- Romans 8:25
- Romans 15:4-5
- Galatians 5:22
- Hebrews 6:12
- Hebrews 10:35-37
- Hebrews 12:1
- James 1:3-4
- James 5:7-8

In Need of Peace
- Psalm 37:11
- Psalm 37:37
- Psalm 119:165
- Isaiah 26:3
- Isaiah 26:12
- Isaiah 55:12
- Isaiah 57:2
- John 14:27
- Romans 5:1
- Romans 15:13
- Romans 8:6
- Romans 14:17-19
- 2 Corinthians 13:11
- Philippians 4:6-7

Spiritually Lukewarm
- Deuteronomy 4:9
- Deuteronomy 8:11-14

What to Do When You Are . . . *(continued)*

Spiritually Lukewarm *(continued)*

Psalm 44:20-21
Jeremiah 6:16
Hosea 6:4
Malachi 3:7a
Hebrews 3:12-13
Hebrews 5:11-12
Hebrews 12:15
2 Peter 2:20-21
1 John 1:9
Revelation 2:4
Revelation 3:2, 15, 16

In Grief

Psalm 23:4
Psalm 119:50
Isaiah 41:10
Isaiah 43:2
Isaiah 49:13b
Isaiah 51:11
Isaiah 61:1-3
Matthew 5:4
1 Corinthians 15:55-57
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
2 Corinthians 5:8
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
Hebrews 4:15-16
1 Peter 5:7
Revelation 21:4

In Doubt About God

Isaiah 46:10b, 11b
Isaiah 55:10-11
Isaiah 59:1
Mark 11:22-24
Luke 12:29-31
Romans 4:20-21
Romans 10:17
1 Thessalonians 5:24
1 Peter 4:12-13
2 Peter 3:9

What to Do When . . .

You Need Confidence

Proverbs 3:26
Isaiah 40:31
Isaiah 43:2
Zechariah 4:6

What to Do When . . . *(continued)*

You Need Confidence *(continued)*

Habakkuk 3:19
John 14:12
Romans 8:37
2 Corinthians 7:16
Ephesians 3:12
Philippians 1:6
Philippians 4:13
Hebrews 10:35-36
Hebrews 13:6
1 John 3:21
1 John 5:14-15

Troubles Hit Your Life

Nahum 1:7
Psalm 31:7
Psalm 121:1-2
Psalm 138:7
Isaiah 43:2
Matthew 6:34
John 14:1
Romans 8:28
Philippians 4:6-7
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
2 Corinthians 4:8-9
Hebrews 4:15-16
1 Peter 5:7

You Have a Physical Illness

Exodus 15:26
Psalm 103:3
Psalm 107:20
Proverbs 4:20-22
Isaiah 53:5
Jeremiah 17:14
Jeremiah 30:17a
Matthew 8:8
Matthew 9:35
Mark 16:17-18
Luke 6:19
Hebrews 13:8
James 5:14-15
1 Peter 2:24
3 John 2

You Are in Financial Trouble

Deuteronomy 8:7, 14, 18
Deuteronomy 28:2-8
Deuteronomy 28:11-13
Joshua 1:8
Psalm 23:1

What to Do When . . . *(continued)*

You Are in Financial Trouble *(continued)*

Psalm 34:10
Psalm 37:25
Proverbs 13:22
Ecclesiastes 2:26
Malachi 3:10-12
Matthew 6:31-33
Matthew 10:8
Matthew 19:29
Luke 6:38
1 Corinthians 16:2
2 Corinthians 9:6-8
Philippians 4:19
3 John 2

You Are Having Marital Problems

Genesis 2:18
Genesis 2:24
Joshua 24:15
Psalm 101:2
Proverbs 3:5-6
Proverbs 10:12
Romans 13:10
Ephesians 4:31-32
Ephesians 5:21-33
1 Peter 1:22
1 Peter 3:1-7
1 Peter 3:8-11

You Are Deserted by Loved Ones

Deuteronomy 4:31
Deuteronomy 31:6
1 Samuel 12:22
Psalm 9:10
Psalm 27:10
Psalm 37:25
Psalm 43:5
Psalm 91:14-15
Psalm 94:14
Isaiah 49:15-16
Isaiah 41:17
Isaiah 62:4
Matthew 28:20
2 Corinthians 4:9
1 Peter 5:7

You Don't Understand God's Ways

Psalm 18:30
Psalm 34:19
Psalm 55:22

What to Do When . . . *(continued)*

You Don't Understand God's Ways *(continued)*

Psalm 138:8
Isaiah 41:10
Isaiah 55:8-9
Jeremiah 32:40
Jeremiah 33:3
Hosea 6:3
Romans 8:28
Romans 8:31
Romans 8:35-37
1 Corinthians 10:13
Hebrews 10:23
1 Peter 4:12-13

You Are Waiting on God

Psalm 27:14
Psalm 33:20
Psalm 62:5
Psalm 130:5
Psalm 145:15-16
Isaiah 40:31
Habakkuk 2:3
Hebrews 3:14
Hebrews 10:23

What the Bible Has to Say About . . .

Faith

Matthew 9:20-22
Matthew 9:28-29
Matthew 17:20
Mark 9:23
Mark 11:22-24
Romans 1:17
Romans 10:17
Romans 12:3
2 Corinthians 5:7
James 5:14-15a
Hebrews 11:1
Hebrews 11:6
Hebrews 12:2
1 Peter 1:7-9
1 John 5:4

Love

Jeremiah 31:3
Mark 12:30-31, 33
John 3:16
John 13:34-35
John 14:21

What the Bible Has to Say About . . . *(continued)*

Love *(continued)*
- John 15:9-10
- John 15:12-14, 17
- John 16:27
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 8:38-39
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 13
- 1 John 4:7-8
- 1 John 4:10-12
- 1 John 4:16-21

Eternity
- Psalm 22:26
- Psalm 23:6
- Psalm 37:18
- Psalm 49:15
- John 3:16
- John 4:14
- John 5:24
- John 6:27
- John 6:47
- John 6:51
- John 10:27-28
- John 11:25-26
- 1 Corinthians 15:54-55
- 1 John 5:11
- 1 John 5:20

Praise
- 2 Samuel 22:4
- Psalm 34:1
- Psalm 47:1, 6-7
- Psalm 48:1
- Psalm 50:23
- Psalm 63:3-5
- Psalm 71:8-14
- Psalm 92:1
- Psalm 96:4a
- Psalm 107:8
- Psalm 147:1
- Isaiah 43:21
- Acts 16:25
- Hebrews 13:15
- 1 Peter 2:9

Serving God
- Exodus 23:25-26
- Deuteronomy 10:12
- Deuteronomy 11:13-15
- Deuteronomy 13:4

What the Bible Has to Say About . . . *(continued)*

Serving God *(continued)*
- Joshua 22:5
- Joshua 24:15
- 1 Samuel 12:20-22
- 1 Chronicles 28:9
- Psalm 100:1-2, 4
- Matthew 6:24
- Matthew 4:10
- Romans 7:6
- Romans 12:1-2
- Romans 12:10, 11-13

Obedience
- Deuteronomy 5:1, 32-33
- Deuteronomy 11:26-28
- 1 Samuel 15:22
- 1 Kings 3:14
- Psalm 143:10
- Isaiah 48:18
- Jeremiah 7:23
- John 14:15-21
- Acts 5:29
- Ephesians 6:1
- Colossians 3:20-24
- 1 Peter 2:13-20
- 1 John 2:3-6

The Carnal Mind
- Proverbs 14:12
- Isaiah 26:3
- Romans 8:6-8
- Romans 12:1-2
- Galatians 6:8
- Philippians 3:18-19
- Philippians 4:8
- Philippians 2:5
- Colossians 3:2, 5
- 1 Timothy 5:6
- 2 Timothy 2:4-22
- 2 Timothy 3:2-7
- James 4:4
- 1 Peter 2:11
- 1 John 2:15-17

The Grace of God
- Exodus 33:17
- Job 10:12
- Psalm 5:12
- Psalm 30:7
- Psalm 84:11

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The Grace of God *(continued)*

- Psalm 115:12-13
- Proverbs 3:4
- Proverbs 8:35
- Proverbs 10:6, 22, 24
- Proverbs 14:9
- Isaiah 60:10
- Acts 4:33
- 2 Corinthians 4:15
- Ephesians 1:6
- Hebrews 4:16

The Holy Spirit

- Joel 2:28
- Matthew 3:11
- Luke 11:13
- John 7:38-39
- John 14:16-17
- John 16:7, 13
- Acts 1:4-5, 8
- Acts 2:4
- Acts 2:38
- Acts 4:31
- Acts 8:14-17
- Acts 10:44-46a
- Acts 19:2-6
- Romans 5:5
- 1 Corinthians 6:19
- Ephesians 5:18

God's Faithfulness

- Genesis 9:16
- Genesis 28:15
- Deuteronomy 7:8-9
- Joshua 23:14
- 1 Kings 8:56
- Psalm 36:5
- Psalm 89:1-2, 33-34
- Psalm 121:3-4
- Psalm 119:65
- Isaiah 54:9-10
- 1 Corinthians 1:9
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 1 Thessalonians 5:24
- 2 Timothy 2:13, 19
- 2 Peter 3:9

The Church

- Psalm 133:1
- Matthew 16:15-18

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The Church *(continued)*

- Acts 2:41-47
- Romans 12:4-5
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-28
- Ephesians 1:10-22-23
- Ephesians 2:20-22
- Ephesians 3:15, 21
- Ephesians 4:11-12
- Ephesians 5:23-27, 29
- Colossians 1:13-18
- Colossians 2:10, 19
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
- Hebrews 13:7, 17

Stewardship

- Deuteronomy 28:2-8, 11-12
- Deuteronomy 29:9
- Joshua 1:8
- 1 Chronicles 22:13a
- Job 36:11
- Proverbs 11:24-25
- Malachi 3:8-12
- Matthew 6:20-21
- Matthew 6:33
- Matthew 10:8
- Matthew 19:29
- Mark 10:29-30
- Luke 6:38
- 1 Corinthians 16:1-2a
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
- Colossians 3:23-24
- 3 John 2

Satan

- Proverbs 18:10
- Matthew 12:28-29
- Mark 16:17-18
- Luke 10:17-19
- Romans 16:20
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Ephesians 6:10-18
- Colossians 1:13
- Colossians 2:10-15
- Hebrews 2:9, 14-15
- James 4:7
- 1 Peter 5:8-9a
- 1 John 2:13-14
- 1 John 3:8
- 1 John 4:1-4
- Revelation 12:11

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The Return of Christ
- Matthew 24:3-14
- Matthew 24:27, 29-31
- Matthew 24:34
- Matthew 24:36-44
- Luke 21:25-28
- John 14:1-4
- Acts 1:11
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- 1 Timothy 4:1-3
- 2 Timothy 4:1-8
- 2 Timothy 3:1-5
- Titus 2:13
- 2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-13
- 1 John 3:2-3

The Unsaved
- Mark 16:15-16
- Luke 4:18-19
- Luke 5:32
- Luke 19:10
- John 3:3
- John 3:16
- John 3:17
- Acts 16:32
- Romans 1:18-20
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 5:12
- Romans 6:23
- 2 Peter 3:9

Truth from the Bible About . . .

Forgiving Others
- Isaiah 43:18-19
- Matthew 5:10-12
- Matthew 5:44
- Matthew 6:14-15
- Matthew 18:21-22
- Mark 11:25
- Luke 17:3
- Romans 12:21
- Ephesians 4:31-32
- Philippians 3:13-14
- Colossians 3:13
- Hebrews 10:30
- 1 Peter 2:19-23

Truth from the Bible About . . . *(continued)*

Forgiving Others *(continued)*
- 1 Peter 3:9-10
- 1 Peter 4:12-14

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- Psalm 55:14
- Malachi 3:16
- Luke 24:13-15
- John 17:11, 21-23
- Acts 2:1, 42, 46-47
- Romans 15:5-7
- 1 Corinthians 1:10
- Galatians 6:2-10
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- Ephesians 5:2, 19, 30
- Philippians 1:3, 27
- Philippians 2:1-2
- Colossians 2:2
- Colossians 3:16
- Hebrews 10:24-25
- 1 John 1:3, 7

Your Responsibility
- Deuteronomy 6:6-9
- Deuteronomy 11:18-19
- Proverbs 22:6
- Matthew 5:13-16
- Matthew 10:42
- Matthew 25:35-40
- Mark 16:15
- Luke 3:10-11
- Acts 1:8
- Galatians 6:1-6
- 1 Timothy 5:8
- Hebrews 6:10
- James 1:27
- James 2:15-17
- 1 John 3:16-18

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- Deuteronomy 18:18
- Psalm 103:20
- Proverbs 12:18
- Proverbs 13:2-3
- Proverbs 16:21, 23-24, 27, 30
- Proverbs 18:4, 7, 20, 21
- Joel 3:10
- Matthew 12:34b, 36-37
- Mark 4:39
- Mark 11:23

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- Luke 17:6
- John 12:49-50
- Romans 10:6a, 8-10
- 2 Corinthians 4:13
- Hebrews 10:23
- Hebrews 11:3
- James 1:26

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- Joshua 1:8
- Nehemiah 9:20
- Psalm 31:3
- Psalm 32:8
- Psalm 37:23
- Psalm 48:14
- Psalm 119:105
- Proverbs 3:5-6

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- Proverbs 6:22-23
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- Isaiah 48:17
- John 16:13
- Isaiah 30:21
- James 1:5

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- Isaiah 65:24
- Psalm 37:4
- Psalm 91:15
- Psalm 145:18-19
- Proverbs 15:29
- Jeremiah 33:3
- Matthew 6:6
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- Matthew 21:22

OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS

The book of beginnings

By Moses, the shepherd of God's people

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Every great story has a great beginning. Genesis, the first book in the Bible, is no exception. It opens with a memorable phrase, "in the beginning," a phrase that is echoed later in Scripture (John 1:1) and answers some basic questions: Where have we come from? Why are we here? What has gone so terribly wrong? It chronicles the beginning of time, of heaven and earth, and of all God's splendid creatures. It tells the story of a loving God who has acted to restore His broken creation to its original beauty and goodness. But where has this book come from? Like most things ancient, its origin is cloaked in mystery. Tradition ascribes the authorship of this and the next four books in the Bible to Moses, a man of extraordinary ability through whom God rescued and gave laws to His people. But even if Moses was not responsible for the final form of the book we have today, his life and work helped shape it through all the lively stories told and retold by generations that remember and celebrate his life.

Genesis offers a fascinating account from creation through the age of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Scriptures reveal God as a covenant-making and covenant-keeping partner who relentlessly pursues and loves His creation. When it becomes clear that Adam's and Noah's descendants have strayed from God, He chooses Abraham and his family to begin the work of repairing the world and bringing true blessing and healing to the rest of the families of the earth.

As the story unfolds, Genesis recounts the great exploits of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose name God changes to Israel). At times the patriarchs flourish under God's blessing and protection. At other times, they fail miserably to remain faithful to what God requires of them. Despite their flaws, God is clearly at work, moving and transforming them into a people who are chosen to declare His love and truth to the world.

The final chapters of Genesis are devoted to telling the story of Joseph, one of Israel's sons, and they relate how Abraham's descendants come to live as free people in Pharaoh's Egypt. But when the Book of Exodus begins, it is clear their freedom has been taken away.

Out of nowhere, time, space, and all the living whirl forth as God speaks the universe into existence. With the utterance of His voice, creation takes form, chaos yields to order, light eclipses darkness, and emptiness fills with life. Not long after God creates the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, the story takes a tragic turn when the first couple disobeys the clear instruction from God not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result, humanity falls from God's intended perfection. The disastrous consequences of this decisive act are demonstrated in Cain's murder of Abel, Noah's flood, and the Tower of Babel.

1 In the beginning, God created *everything*: the heavens *above* and the earth *below*. *Here's what happened:* 2*At first* the earth lacked shape and was totally empty, and a dark *fog* draped over the deep while God's spirit-wind hovered over the surface of the *empty* waters. *Then there was the voice of God.*

God: 3Let there be light.

And light flashed into being. 4God saw that the light was *beautiful and* good, and He separated the light from the darkness. 5God named the light "day" and the darkness "night." Evening gave way to morning. That was day one.

God: 6Let there be a *vast* expanse in the middle of the waters. Let the waters *above* part from the waters *below*.

7So God parted the waters and formed this expanse, separating the waters above from the waters below. It happened *just as God said.* 8And God called the *vast* expanse "sky." Evening gave way to morning. That was day two.

God: 9Let the waters below the heavens be collected into one place *and congregate into one vast sea,* so that dry land may appear.

It happened *just as God said.* 10God called the dry land "earth" and the waters congregated below "seas." And God saw that His *new* creation was *beautiful and* good.

God: 11Earth, sprout *green* vegetation! *Grow all varieties of* seed-bearing plants and all sorts of fruit-bearing trees.

It happened *just as God said.* 12The earth produced vegetation—seed-bearing plants of all varieties and fruit-bearing trees of all sorts. And God saw that His *new* creation was *beautiful and* good. 13Evening gave way to morning. That was day three.

God: 14-15Lights, come out! Shine in the *vast* expanse of heavens' *sky* dividing day from night to mark the seasons, days, and years. Lights, warm the earth with your light.

It happened *just as God said.* 16God fashioned the two great lights—the brighter to mark the course of day, the dimmer to mark the course of night—and *the Divine needled night with* the stars. 17God set them in heavens' *sky* to cast *warm* light on the earth, 18to rule over the day and night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that His *new* creation was *beautiful and* good. 19Evening gave way to morning. That was day four.

God: 20Waters, swarm with fish and sea creatures. Let birds soar high above the earth in the broad expanse of sky.

21So God created huge sea creatures, all the swarm of life in the waters, and every kind *and species* of flying birds—each able to reproduce its own kind. And God saw that His new creation was *beautiful and* good. 22And God spoke this blessing over them:

God: Be fruitful and multiply. *Let creatures* fill the seas. Let birds reproduce and cover the earth.

23Evening gave way to morning. That was day five.

God: 24Earth, generate life! Produce a vast variety of living creatures—domesticated animals, *small* creeping creatures, and wild animals that roam the earth.

It happened *just as God said.* 25God made earth-creatures *in a vast variety of species*:

wild animals, domesticated animals *of all sizes,* and *small* creeping creatures, each able to reproduce its own kind. God saw that His new creation was *beautiful and* good. *And God paused.*

God: 26Now let Us conceive *a new creation*—humanity—*made* in Our image, *fashioned* according to Our likeness. And let *Us grant* them authority over all the earth—the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, the domesticated animals and the *small* creeping creatures on the earth.

27So God did *just that.* He created humanity in His image, created them male and female. 28Then God blessed them and gave them *this directive*: "Be fruitful and multiply. Populate the earth. *I make you trustees of My estate,* so care for My creation and rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that roams across the earth."

► The crown of God's creation is a new creature, a creature that can sound the heartbeat of its Creator. That creature, made male and female, reflects God's own relational richness. The human family is to join God in the ongoing work of creation. The earth below and the sky above with all their inhabitants are too beautiful and too good to be left alone. They need the tender care and close attention that only God's favored creature can give.

God *(to humanity)***:** 29Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant that grows on the earth and every fruit-bearing tree. They will be your food *and nourishment.* 30As for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and every *small* creeping creature—everything that breathes the breath of life—I have given them every green plant for food.

And it happened *just as God said.* 31Then God surveyed everything He had made, savoring *its beauty and appreciating* its goodness. Evening gave way to morning. That was day six.

2 So *now* you see how the Creator swept into being the *spangled* heavens, the earth, and all their hosts *in six days.* 2On the seventh day—with the canvas *of the cosmos* completed—God paused from His labor and rested. 3Thus God blessed day seven and made it special—*an open time for pause and restoration, a sacred zone of Sabbath-keeping,* because God rested from all the work He had done in creation that day.

God's rest on the seventh day is a model for the kind of Sabbath rest He wants for His people.

4This is the *detailed* story of the Eternal God's *singular work in* creating all that exists. On the day the heavens and earth were created, 5there were no plants or vegetation to cover the earth. The fields were barren and empty, because the Eternal God had not sent the rains to *nourish* the soil or anyone to tend it. 6In those days, a mist rose up from the ground to *blanket the earth, and its vapors* irrigated the land. 7One day the Eternal God scooped dirt out of the ground, sculpted it into *the shape we call* human, breathed the breath that gives life into the nostrils of the human, and the human became a living soul.

► When human body meets divine spirit, soul is born. Divine breath and sculpted earth come together to make up the living soul. For thousands of years, philosophers and theologians have posed the question: what is a human being? Here God gives the answer.

8The Eternal God planted a garden in the east in Eden—*a place of utter delight*—and placed the man whom He had sculpted there. 9*In this garden,* He made the ground pregnant *with life—bursting forth* with nourishing food and *luxuriant* beauty. *He created* trees, and in the center of this garden *of delights* stood the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10A river flowed from Eden to irrigate the garden, and from there it separated into four smaller rivers. 11-12The first, the Pishon, flows around the land of Havilah—a rich land plentiful in gold

of premium quality, bdellium, and onyx stones. 13The second, the Gihon, flows around the entire land of Cush. 14The third, the Tigris, flows east of Assyria, and the fourth is the Euphrates.

15The Eternal God placed the *newly made* man in the garden of Eden in order to work the ground and care for it. 16He made certain demands of the man *regarding life in the garden.*

God: Eat freely from any *and all* trees in the garden; 17I only require that you abstain from eating the fruit of *one tree*—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *Beware:* the day you eat the fruit of this tree, you will certainly die.

After God gives man this directive, He realizes something is missing.

18It is not good for the man to be alone, so I will create a companion for him, a perfectly suited partner.

19So out of the *same* ground *the man was made from,* the Eternal God sculpted every sort of animal and every kind of bird that flies up in the sky. Then He brought them to the man and gave him the authority to name each creature as he saw fit: whatever he decided to call it, that became its name. 20Thus the man chose names for domesticated animals, birds, and wild beasts. But none of these creatures was a right and proper partner for Adam.

The authority to name something is unique to humanity. To name is to share in God's creative act.

21So the Eternal God put him into a deep sleep, removed a rib *from his side,* and closed the flesh around the opening. 22He formed a woman from the rib taken out of the man and presented her to him.

Adam: 23At last, *a suitable companion, a perfect partner.*
Bone from my bones.
Flesh from my flesh.
I will call this one "woman" as *an eternal reminder*
that she was taken out of man.

24Now this is the reason a man leaves his father and his mother, and is united with his wife; and the two become one flesh. 25*In those days* the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

► Genesis provides an image of the ideal marriage: One man. One woman. In a one-flesh relationship. For life. These four elements constitute the ideal, as Jesus reminds His followers (Matthew 19:4-5). Anything less, anything more, or anything other misses the ideal. In marriage two individuals, who once lived as "me," come together as "we" in one flesh and one life. No earthly bond can match the intimacy of this divinely sanctioned union.

3 Of all the wild creatures the Eternal God had created, the serpent was the craftiest.

Serpent *(to the woman)***:** Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat *fruits* from the trees of the garden?

Eve: 2*No, serpent. God said* we are free to eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3*We are granted access to any variety and all amounts of fruit* with one exception: the fruit from the tree found in the center of the garden. God instructed us not to eat or touch the fruit of that tree or we would die.

Serpent: 4*Die? No,* you'll not die. *God is playing games with you.* 5*The truth is that* God knows the day you eat the fruit from that tree you will awaken *something powerful in you* and become like Him: possessing knowledge of *both* good and evil.

6The woman *approached the tree,* eyed its fruit, and coveted its *mouth-watering, wisdom-granting* beauty. She plucked a fruit from the tree and ate. She then offered *the fruit* to her husband who was close by, and he ate as well. 7Suddenly their eyes were opened *to a reality previously unknown.* For the first time, they sensed *their vulnerability and rushed to hide* their naked bodies, stitching fig leaves into crude loincloths. 8Then they heard the sound of the Eternal God walking in the cool *misting* shadows of the garden. The man and his wife took cover among the trees and hid from the Eternal God.

► The story of humanity's sin begins with a tree and ends on a tree: first, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and finally, the cross on which Jesus dies. The first tree offers fruit that leads to death, but the second offers a death that leads to eternal life.

God *(calling to Adam)*: 9Where are you?

Adam: 10When I heard the sound of
You coming in the garden, I was afraid
because I am naked. So I hid *from You.*

God: 11Who told you that you are naked?
Have you eaten from the tree *in the center of the garden,* the very one I commanded you not to eat from?

Adam *(pointing at the woman)*: 12*It was she!* The woman You gave me as a companion put the fruit in my hands, and I ate it.

Since Adam and Eve, people have been blaming others for their mistakes. Adam has the audacity to blame God for his.

God *(to the woman)*: 13What have you done?

Eve: It was the serpent! He tricked me, and I ate.

God *(to the serpent)*: 14What you have done
carries great consequences.
Now you are cursed more than
cattle or wild beasts.
You will writhe on your belly forever,
consuming the dust *out of which man was made.*
15I will make you and your brood
enemies
of the woman and all her
children;
The woman's child will stomp your
head,
and you will strike his heel.

16(to the woman) *As a consequence of your actions,*
I will increase your suffering—the
pain of childbirth
And the sorrow of bringing forth the
next generation.
You will desire your husband; *but rather than a companion,*
He will be the dominant partner.

17(to the man) Because you followed
your wife's advice
instead of My command and ate of
the tree
From which I had forbidden you to eat,
cursed is the ground.
For the rest of your life,
You will fight for every crumb of food
from the *crusty clump of* clay *I made you from.*
18*As you labor,* the ground will produce
thorns and thistles,
and you will eat the plants of the
field.
19Your brow will sweat for your mouth
to taste
even a morsel of bread until the day
you return
To the very ground I made you from.
From dust you have come,
And to dust you shall return.

20The man named his wife Eve because she was *destined to become* the mother of all living. 21The Eternal God pieced together the skins *of animals* and made clothes for Adam and Eve to wear.

In Hebrew "Eve" sounds like the word meaning "life-giver."

God: 22Look, the human has become like one of Us, possessing the knowledge of good and evil. *If We don't do something,* he will reach out his hand and take *some of the fruit* from the tree of life, eat it, and live forever.

23So the Eternal God banished Adam *and Eve* from the garden of Eden *and exiled humanity from paradise, sentencing humans to laborious lives* working the very ground man came from. 24After driving them out, He stationed winged guardians* at the east end of the garden of Eden and set up a sword of flames which *alertly* turned back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

4 Now Adam and Eve discovered the pleasures of lovemaking, and soon Eve conceived and gave birth to *a son whom they named* Cain.

* 3:24 Hebrew, *cherubim*

Eve *(excited)*: *Look,* I have created *a new human,* a male child, with the help of the Eternal.

► One of the first things Adam and Eve do after being banished from the garden of Eden is to make a baby. Despite the pain of childbirth, Eve speaks with joy of the birth of her son. She certainly suffers and could have easily died in childbirth, but the desire to reproduce and the joy of joining with God in the creative process brings great reward. Every parent knows the risks and rewards of bringing forth the next generation.

2Eve went on to give birth to Cain's brother, Abel. Abel *grew up to* become a shepherd, and Cain *grew up to* become a farmer. 3After *he had learned how to produce food from the fields,* Cain gave the Eternal One an offering—some of the crops *he had grown* from the ground. 4For his part *of the offering,* Abel gave God *some tender lamb meat*—the choicest cuts from the firstborn of his flock. The Eternal One accepted Abel and his gift *of lamb,* 5while He had no regard for Cain and what he presented. Because of this, Cain became extremely angry and his face fell.

God notices Cain's reaction and confronts him.

Eternal One *(to Cain)*: 6Why are you angry? And why do you look so despondent? 7*Don't you know that* as long as you do what is right, then I accept you? But if you do not do what is right, *watch out, because* sin is crouching at the door, ready to pounce on you! You must master it *before it masters you.*

Jealousy is eating at Cain's heart. Left unattended, it consumes him.

8Cain spoke to his brother Abel. When they were in the field, Cain's *envy of his brother got the better of him, and he* attacked and killed Abel.

Eternal One *(to Cain)*: 9Where's your brother Abel?

Cain: I have no idea. Am I supposed to be responsible for where he goes and what he does?

Eternal One: 10What have you done? *Listen!* I can hear the voice of your brother's blood crying out to Me from the ground! 11And now you are cursed, *cut off* from the ground—the ground that opened up and received your brother's *innocent* blood, spilled by your own *murderous* hand! 12*From now on,* when you till the ground, it will no longer yield for you its strength *and nourishment.* You will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

Cain: 13My punishment is more than I can bear! 14Today You have banned me from the soil and hidden me from Your presence! I will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me will *want to* kill me!

Eternal One: 15That's not the case! Whoever kills you will suffer My vengeance *and pay the penalty* seven times!

Then God put a special mark on Cain, so that no one who came in contact with him would *try to* kill him.

16Then Cain went away from the Eternal's presence and settled in the land of Nod, *a place for wanderers,* to the east of Eden. 17Cain made love to his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Cain built a city there and named it Enoch after his son. 18*And this is how their family progressed:* Enoch's son was Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael. Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

19Now Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah. 20Adah gave birth to Jabal. His descendants are those who make their homes in tents and keep livestock. 21Jabal's brother's name was Jubal, and his descendants *are musicians who* play instruments such as the lyre and the pipe. 22Zillah, *Lamech's other wife,* gave birth to Tubal-cain. Now he was a bronze- and ironsmith, and his sister was Naamah.

23*One day,* Lamech announced to his wives:

Lamech: Adah and Zillah, listen to me!
Wives of Lamech, I need to tell you something!
I killed a man who struck me.
He was a young man who wounded me first.

24*Here's how I see it:*
if Cain is avenged seven times,
then *surely* Lamech *must be*
avenged seventy-seven times!

25*Meanwhile,* Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to another son and named him Seth.

Eve *(to herself)***:** God has given me another child to replace Abel, since Cain killed him.

26*After many years passed,* Seth became the father of a son and named him Enosh. This was *about the time* when people began to *worship and* call on the name of the Eternal One.

5 Here now is the account of Adam's descendants. *You remember,* when God created humans, He made them in His own likeness. 2He created them male and female; and after creating them, God put a special blessing on them and named them "humanity."

3When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son who looked just like him. He was Adam's spitting image, *and so resembled God too.* Adam named him Seth. 4After Seth was born, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters as well. 5So Adam was 930 years old when he died.

6When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered *a son named* Enosh. 7After Enosh was born, Seth lived another 807 years, and he also had other sons and daughters. 8He was 912 years old when he died.

9When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered *a son named* Kenan. 10After Kenan was born, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters too. 11He was 905 years old when he died.

12When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered *a son named* Mahalalel. 13After Mahalalel was born, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 14He was 910 years old when he died.

15When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he fathered *a son named* Jared. 16*After Jared was born,* Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he, *too,* had other sons and daughters. 17He was 895 years old when he died.

18When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered *a son named* Enoch. 19After Enoch was born, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 20He was 962 years old when he died.

21When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered *a son named* Methuselah. 22After Methuselah was born, Enoch lived in a close relationship with God for 300 more years; he also had other sons and daughters. 23He lived to be 365 years old, 24but Enoch had such a close and intimate relationship with God that one day he just vanished—God took him.

Enoch leaves this world in an unusual way. He is taken without experiencing death. But he is not the last.

25When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered *a son named* Lamech. 26After Lamech was born, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he also had other sons and daughters. 27He was 969 years old when he died.

28When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29named Noah. He named him this because he predicted, "From out of the ground the Eternal cursed will now come someone who will bring relief from our work and painful toil." 30After Noah was born, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 31He was 777 years old when he died.

32Now by the time Noah was 500 years old, he had fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

6 As human beings began to multiply *and spread* across the surface of the earth *as God commanded,* they had *lovely* daughters. 2The sons of God saw how beautiful the humans' daughters were, and they decided to take any daughters they wanted as their wives.

Eternal One: 3My *life-giving* Spirit will not sustain human beings forever because they are, after all, made of flesh. Therefore, I will put a limit on their lifespan of *about* 120 years.

► Throughout Scripture God is described as spirit and humans as flesh. God's statement emphasizes the eternal, life-giving nature of spirit and the mortal, dependent nature of flesh. Without God's Spirit-breath sustaining

humanity, life itself is not possible. Humans are totally dependent on God. The upper limit of human life is set at roughly 120 years; but the change comes gradually, and Aaron is the last of the patriarchs to live beyond the limit.

4Now at that time and for some time to come, a great warrior race* lived on the earth. Whenever the sons of God would have sex with the humans' daughters, the women bore them children *who became mighty warriors*. In the days of old, they became famous heroes, *the kind people tell stories about!*

By Noah's time nearly all people are drugged on the fumes of their egos. Wickedness has become the number one, all-consuming human addiction.

5The Eternal One saw that wickedness was rampaging throughout the earth and that evil had become the first thought on every mind, the constant purpose of every person. 6-7*At that point* God's heart broke, and He regretted having ever made man *in the first place.*

Eternal One: *I know what I'll do*. I will wipe humanity, My *special* creation, from the face of the earth—humans, animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I ever made them.

8But *there was one person whom the Lord could not let go of*—Noah—because this man pleased Him.

9Here is the account of Noah and his descendants. Noah was *a good man,* a right-living man, the best man of his generation; and he walked *closely* with God. 10Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11-12*They lived at a time when* the world had become *vile and* corrupt. Violence was everywhere. God saw that the earth was in ruins, *and He knew why:* all people on earth *except Noah* had lived corrupt lives and ruined God's plans for them. *He had to do something.*

Eternal One *(to Noah)*: 13*Noah,* I have decided to wipe out all the living creatures *I have made* because they are spreading violence throughout the earth. Watch! I will destroy them with the earth. 14I want you to build an ark. Build it out of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with tar. 15Here's how you will do it: build the ark 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. 16Put a roof* on the ark and leave a gap of 18 inches below the roofline *for air to circulate.* Put the door of the ark in its side, and build it with lower, middle, and upper decks. 17Look! I am going to unleash a torrent and flood the earth to destroy all flesh under the heavens which breathes the breath of life. Everything that is on the earth will die.

18But I will make *a pact* with you, *Noah*—a covenant agreement. *To survive, you and your family*—you, your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives—must go into the ark. 19And, out of all the living creatures *I have made,* you must bring two of each kind into the ark with you, to keep them alive. Bring one male and one female *of each kind.* 20Bring all kinds of birds, all sorts of animals, and all varieties of creatures that creep on the ground in pairs, so that each species will survive. 21Also, you must bring food with you. Bring every kind of food that may be eaten, and store it all *inside the ark*. That way, you and all of the creatures will have *enough* food to eat.

22So Noah listened to God, *and he built the ark*. He did everything God asked him to do.

7 **Eternal One** *(to Noah)*: *It's time!* Go into the ark now. Take your entire household with you, because I see that you are the only one in this generation who lives right before Me. 2*Take the animals with you.* Take seven pairs of all ritually acceptable animals, both the male and female; and take one pair of any animal that isn't acceptable, both the male and female. 3And take seven pairs of the birds of the sky, too, also male and female, so that we can keep each kind alive on the earth. 4Seven days from now, I will send *a massive* rain to cover the earth. *The rain will last* 40 days and 40 nights, and every living thing I have made will be wiped off the face of the earth.

* 6:4 Hebrew, *Nephilim* * 6:16 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

► In distinguishing between animals that are ritually acceptable and unacceptable, God is anticipating the instructions He will give His people later regarding holiness and purity (Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:4-20). Some animals are ritually acceptable for sacrifices, so they are suitable for food. Other animals are not to be offered to God or eaten. Ultimately, what enters human bodies matters to God; after all He made them.

5Noah did everything the Eternal One asked him to do.

6Noah was 600 years old when the flood waters swept over the earth. 7Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, all went into the ark in order to escape the waters of the flood. 8*Noah made sure to take along all of the animals* (both ritually acceptable and unacceptable), the birds, and all the *small* creeping creatures 9*in pairs* by males and females, just as God had told him to do. They all went into the ark with him, two by two. 10After seven days, the *rains began and* waters flooded the earth.

11On the 17th day of the 2nd month in Noah's 600th year, all of the *subterranean* waters erupted from the depths *of the earth and burst skyward, covering the land.* The casements of the heavens cracked open, 12dousing heavy rains over the *watery* earth for 40 days and 40 nights.

13On the same day, Noah, his wife, his sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), and his sons' wives went into the ark, *and all were secured within it.* 14*Inside the ark* they had with them all sorts of wild animals, domesticated animals, *small* creeping creatures, and all kinds of birds, that is, every winged creature. 15All of them went along into the ark to Noah in pairs—all flesh into which *God had* breathed the breath of life. 16All those in the ark, males and females of all living flesh, went in just as God had told them to do. And the Eternal One shut them all in *for the duration of the flood.*

17The deluge continued for 40 days on the earth. 18The waters kept rising until they lifted up the ark so it floated *safely* over the land; 19the torrent continued to swell and increase in momentum until the highest mountain peaks beneath the heavens were covered. 20*In fact,* the waters rose *and pitched so forcefully* over the earth that the mountain peaks disappeared beneath 22 feet of water. 21And all flesh that moved upon the earth died out—birds, domesticated animals, wild animals, all of the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all human beings. 22Everything *and everyone* on the dry land in which *God had* breathed the breath of life died. 23God wiped out every living thing from the face of the earth. *Every creature He had made*—humans, animals, creeping things, and birds—was wiped off the surface of the earth. Only Noah was left and those with him inside the ark. 24And the waters raged upon the earth for 150 days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all of the wild and domesticated animals with him in the ark. *When it was time,* God sent the wind to blow over all of the earth, and the waters began to subside. 2The *subterranean* waters from the depths *of the earth* and the casements of the heavens were again closed. The drenching rains that once fell from above finally stopped. 3*All of* the waters gradually receded from the land. At last, after 150 days, the waters abated; 4and on the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark at last came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5The waters continued to recede until the 10th month. On the 1st day of the 10th month, the tops of the mountains began to appear.

6After 40 more days, Noah opened a window he had built into the ark, 7and he sent one of the ravens out *into the sky.* The raven flew back and forth until all of the waters had dried up on the land. 8He then sent out a dove to see if the waters had subsided from the surface of the land. 9But the dove found no place to land *safely,* and it returned to the ark. The waters were still covering the surface of the whole earth. So Noah put out his hand and brought the dove back into the ark. 10Noah waited another seven days, and then he sent the dove out again from the ark. 11*This time* the dove came back to him in the evening, and there, in its beak, was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew then that the waters had begun to retreat from the land. 12*For good measure,* Noah waited another seven days. Once more, he sent out the dove. This time, it didn't return.

13On the 1st day of the 1st month in

Noah's 601st year, the waters had dried up from the land. Noah removed the covering of the ark, looked out, and saw that the land was nearly dry. 14By the 27th day of the 2nd month, the earth was completely dry. 15God came to Noah with a message.

Eternal One *(to Noah)*: 16*It's time.* Leave the ark *now,* you and your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. 17Release every animal with you *on the ark*—everything of flesh: birds, animals, and every creeping thing—so that they may be fruitful, multiply in great numbers, and fill the land *and the sky again.*

18So Noah left the ark with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. 19And every animal, every *small* creeping thing, and every bird—everything that moves on the earth—left the ark *with him* as new families—*a new generation.*

20*Once he was back on dry land,* Noah built an altar—*a special offering table*—for the Eternal One. He took some of every ritually acceptable animal and of every acceptable bird, and he gave them to God on the altar as a burnt offering. 21When the Eternal smelled the delicious aroma *of the sacrifice, He was moved.*

Eternal One *(to Himself)*: Never again will I curse the ground because of humankind, even though every *thought of the mind and* inclination of the heart is set on evil from the time they are young. Never again will I destroy every living creature as I have done. 22As long as the earth endures, nothing will put a stop to planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.

9 God spoke a blessing over Noah and his sons.

Eternal One: Be fruitful, multiply, and populate the earth! 2All the animals on the earth, all the birds in the sky, all the creatures that creep along the ground, and all the fish of the sea will now be afraid and run from you; they have been handed over to you. 3Every living thing that moves will be *available* to you as food. Just as I once gave you the green plants to eat, I now give you everything. 4But *listen carefully:* Do not eat any meat with its life-blood still in it. 5*More than that, do not spill the blood of any human.* If anyone spills your blood, I will hold him responsible. *It makes no difference* whether it is a man or an animal, both will be accountable to Me! If someone murders a fellow human being, then I will require his life *in return.*

6Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
that person's blood will be shed in return by another
for God made humanity in His own image.
7Now all of you, be fruitful and multiply;
spread out and populate the earth.

► All life is sacred. Human life is especially so. Protecting it is of utmost importance to God. He takes this so seriously and personally because He made humanity to reflect Him. We are His earthly representatives, made in His image. To murder another person is to mount an attack on the One who created him.

8But God *was not finished. He* had more to say both to Noah and his sons.

Eternal One: 9Look, for I am now going to make *a pact,* a special covenant, with you and all your descendants. 10*This covenant* also extends to every living creature *in the world*—the birds, the domesticated animals, and every wild animal on the earth—as many as emerged with you from the ark. 11As part of this covenant, I promise you I will never again wipe out all *living* flesh by means of flooding waters. Never again will a flood destroy the earth. 12As a sign of this *perpetual* covenant I now make between Me and you and all living creatures along with you, as well as all future generations, 13I will hang a rainbow among the clouds. It will serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14*And from now on,* whenever a cloud rises over the earth and a rainbow appears in the sky, 15I will remember My covenant—*My promise* I have made between Me and you and all living creatures. No waters will ever again turn into a flood *powerful enough* to destroy all living creatures. 16When that rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and

remember this eternal covenant I have made with all living creatures.

17*Look for the rainbow, and remember My promise.* With it I sign the covenant I have made between Me and all the living creatures residing on the earth.

18Now Noah's sons who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham, *by the way,* was the father of Canaan.) 19*Yes,* these three, Noah's sons, went on to populate the entire earth.

20Now Noah became a farmer and decided to plant a vineyard. 21One day he drank *too much* of the wine he had made and fell into a *deep,* drunken *sleep* in his tent. As he lay there stark naked, 22Ham (the father of Canaan) *peeked in and* saw his father's exposed body. After leaving the tent, he told his two brothers *what he had seen.* 23So Shem and Japheth took a *large* cloak and laid it across their shoulders, and they walked backward into the tent. *They never looked behind,* as they covered their father's nakedness. *Out of respect, they purposely kept* their faces turned away, so they wouldn't see their father *lying there* naked. 24When Noah regained consciousness and realized what his youngest son had done, 25he uttered *this curse*:

Noah: A curse upon *your son,* Canaan!
May he become the lowest of servants to his brothers.
26May the Eternal One, the God of Shem, be blessed,
and let Canaan be his slave!
27May God make plenty of room for Japheth's family
and give them homes among Shem's tents.
And let Canaan be his slave also!

► Noah's words are not idle words. As the story unfolds, the importance of this curse becomes clear. But as the ancients knew, and we now have forgotten, words have power. It was with a word that God created the heavens above and the earth below. Now Noah's words create a new reality, a harsh reality for Ham and his children.

28From the time the flood was over, Noah lived another 350 years. 29In all, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died.

10 Here is the account of the descendants of Noah's *three* sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who fathered many children after the flood.

2The descendants of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. 3Now the descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. 4The descendants of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. 5*The descendants of Japheth* became the peoples who settled the coastal *and island* regions. They developed their own languages, their own families *and cultures,* and they *would eventually* become separate peoples.

6The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. 7Cush's descendants were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. 8Cush also fathered Nimrod, who was *the first man* on earth *to be known as* a powerful warrior. 9He was also a skillful hunter before the Eternal One. That's why you often hear people say, "*So-and-so is* like Nimrod, a skillful hunter before the Eternal." 10The center of his kingdom was in Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh; *all are located* in the land of Shinar. 11From there, he traveled into Assyria and established *the cities of* Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, 12and Resen, which lies between Nineveh and Calah—and that is one magnificent city! 13Now Mizraim fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, 14Pathrusim, Casluhim (the ancestor of *the people known as* the Philistines), and Caphtorim.

15Canaan fathered Sidon (his firstborn), Heth, 16the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, 17the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, 18the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Soon all of the families of Canaan's descendants would spread abroad. 19*As a result,* the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar all the way to Gaza; and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim all the way to Lasha. 20*All of* these are descendants of Ham, *who grew* from a few initial families *into a great people* with their own languages, lands, and nations.

21Now Shem (Japheth's older brother) fathered *a great number of* children as

well. He was the patriarch of all of the people of Eber. 22His descendants include Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. 23Aram's descendants were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. 24Now Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. 25Eber had two sons: one was named Peleg, *which means "division,"* because in his days, the earth was divided *into many languages,* and his brother's name was Joktan. 26Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All of these peoples were descended from Joktan. 30They lived in the territory that extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the eastern hill country. 31Shem's descendants *also grew* from a few initial families *to become a great people* with their own languages, lands, and nations.

32So these are the families descended from Noah's sons according to their *known* genealogies. These cultures would soon spread farther and farther across the earth after the flood.

According to Genesis, the sons and daughters of Noah established the first known cultures of the world.

11 There was a time when everyone on the earth spoke the very same language. 2As *many of these* people began moving from the eastern regions *into the western part of Mesopotamia,* they settled down on a plain in the land of Shinar. 3Since stone was not readily available, they *discovered how to* make bricks and use tar for mortar *to build their structures.*

People *(to each other)***:** Come on, let's make bricks *out of mud* and bake them in the fire. *Then we can build all we want.* 4Let's go build ourselves a city with a *huge* tower that reaches into heaven. That way we will make a name for ourselves. If we don't, we'll run the risk of being scattered all over the earth.

► The desire to settle in one place and build a city runs counter to God's command to spread out across the earth. They want to make their mark on the world rather than conform to God's plan for their lives. They want power and prestige. They want to ensure that they will not be scattered; that is, they want to choose their own destiny. But God has a different plan and purpose. He is the One who determines destiny.

5The Eternal One came down and took a look at the city and the tower the children of Adam were building. *He was not pleased.*

Eternal One: 6*Will you* look at that! The people are all together *on this.* With one language *they are able to start this kind of project.* This is only the beginning of what they will do. Soon they will think they can accomplish anything *and everything* on their own. 7Let's go down *and break this up!* If We confuse their language, they won't be able to understand each other's words.

8This is how the Eternal scattered people from Shinar all across the surface of the earth. *Since they were unable to communicate,* they stopped working on the city *and went their separate ways.* 9So this is why the city was called Babel:* because it was there that the Eternal confused the language of all the peoples and scattered them across the surface of the earth.

Once again the generations are recorded. This time the purpose is to link those who survived the flood with Abraham. God has a special plan for him.

10Here is the account of the descendants of Shem, *Noah's son.* When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad. (This was *about* two years after the flood.) 11After Arpachshad was born, Shem lived another 500 years, and he had other sons and daughters.

12When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah. 13After Shelah was born, Arpachshad lived 403 more years, and he had other sons and daughters.

14When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. 15After Eber was born,

* 11:9 In Hebrew *Babel* sounds like the word for "confusion." Babel is also known as Babylon, a city which comes to symbolize every vile, arrogant, and corrupt human impulse.

Shelah lived 403 more years, and he had other sons and daughters.

16When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg. 17After Peleg was born, Eber lived 430 more years, and he also had other sons and daughters.

18When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu. 19After Reu was born, Peleg lived 209 more years, and he had other sons and daughters as well.

20When Reu had lived 32 years, he fathered Serug. 21After Serug was born, Reu lived 207 more years, and he had other sons and daughters.

22When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. 23After Nahor was born, Serug lived 200 more years, and he had other sons and daughters as well.

24When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. 25After Terah was born, Nahor lived 119 more years, and he had other sons and daughters.

26When Terah had lived 70 years, he had fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

27Here is the account of Terah's descendants. Terah, *as said,* had fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28While Terah was still alive, Haran died in the same land in which he was born—in Ur, the land of the Chaldeans. 29However, Abram and Nahor *lived on and* married. Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah. Now Milcah was the daughter of Haran, who fathered both Milcah and Iscah. 30But Sarai couldn't conceive and didn't have a child.

31Terah took his son Abram and grandson Lot (Haran's son) and his daughter-in-law Sarai (Abram's wife). They left Ur of the Chaldeans together and traveled in the direction of the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Haran, they settled there. 32Terah was 205 years old *at that time,* and he ended up dying in Haran.

12 One day, the Eternal One called out to Abram.

Eternal One: *Abram,* get up and go! Leave your country. Leave your relatives and your father's home, and travel to the land I will show you.* *Don't worry—I will guide you there.* 2I have plans to make a great people from your descendants. And I am going to put a *special* blessing on you and cause your reputation to grow so that you will become a blessing *and example to others.* 3I will also bless those who bless you *and further you in your journey,* and I'll trip up those who try to trip you *along the way. Through your descendants,* all of the families of the earth will find their blessing in you.*

► Out of all the descendants of Noah, God chooses Abram to have a special relationship with Him. He calls Abram to enter into a particular kind of relationship that changes the course of his life and the lives of his people forever. God has a plan to rescue the world from sin and destruction, and that plan begins with one man. He promises to make Abram a great nation, to bless and protect him, and ultimately to bring true and lasting blessing to the world through his children. To enter into that promise, Abram must do something daring; he must leave everything he knows and put his trust in God.

4-5*Without any hesitation,* Abram went. He did exactly as the Eternal One asked him to do. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. He took with him his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all of their possessions, and all of the persons they had acquired *for their household* while in Haran; and they all set off toward the land of Canaan. When they reached Canaan, 6Abram kept going through it to a *sacred* place called Shechem where the oak of Moreh stood. (At this time, the Canaanite people were living on this land, *so Abram could not take it as his own.*) 7There the Eternal appeared to Abram.

Eternal One: I am going to give this land to your future generations.*

So, *out of honor and respect,* there Abram built an altar table to the Eternal One, who had appeared to him *and spoken these words of promise.* 8After that, Abram traveled on to the hill country east of Bethel, and there he pitched a tent *and made a home for himself and his family* between Bethel in the west and Ai in the east. Here Abram built another altar table

* 12:1 Acts 7:3 * 12:3 Galatians 3:8 * 12:7 Galatians 3:16

for the Eternal One, where he called upon the name of the Eternal *frequently*. 9Then Abram journeyed *south* toward the Negev region.

This is the southernmost part of the land God promises to give Abram. One day his children will possess it.

10Now at this time, there came a severe famine in the land *of Canaan*. Food was scarce, so Abram made his way to Egypt to live there *for a while* as a foreigner. 11As Abram was about to enter Egypt, he pulled Sarai his wife aside.

Abram: *Sarai,* you are a very beautiful woman, and I am well aware that 12when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "*Look,* she's his wife"; then they will kill me and let you live *so they can have you for themselves.* 13Tell them you are my sister so that nothing will happen to me because of you. In this way you can save my life.

► Sarai is an unusually attractive woman. Even at her age of 65, Abram is afraid of what the Egyptian men might do when they see her and desire her. So he takes matters into his own hands and devises a half-truth to conceal their marriage. We learn later—when Abram repeats this half-truth to Abimelech (chapter 20)—that Sarai and Abram have the same father but a different mother.

14So when Abram came into Egypt *with Sarai and his family,* the Egyptians did indeed see that Sarai was very beautiful. 15And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they told Pharaoh just how beautiful she was. So Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's house *and made part of his harem.* 16She pleased the Pharaoh, so he treated Abram very well, giving him gifts of sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17But the Eternal One *was not pleased and* began afflicting the Pharaoh and his household with *skin* diseases because of *what was happening to* Sarai, Abram's wife. 18So Pharaoh summoned Abram *to come before him.*

Pharaoh: What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me this woman was your wife? 19Why did you say she was *only* your sister, so that I *felt free to* take her to be one of my wives? Here she is—take your wife, and get out of here!

20And Pharaoh gave his men orders to make sure Abram went on his way along with his wife and all of his belongings.

13 Abram left Egypt with his wife, Lot, and everything he owned, and he went back up into the Negev region. 2*Because of his experience in Egypt,* Abram had become quite rich. He had livestock, silver, and gold *to carry with him.* 3He journeyed *north* in stages from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where he had pitched his tent earlier between Bethel and Ai. 4*He returned* to one of the first altar tables he had made *in the land,* stopped there, and called on the name of the Eternal *once again.* 5Lot, who had gone with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6so the land was no longer large enough to support the two of them living together as one household. They each had so many possessions that they just couldn't stay together any longer. 7Arguments erupted between Abram's and Lot's livestock herders *as they tried to graze their flocks side-by-side.* (During this time, the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living on this land too.)

Abram *(to Lot)***:** 8*Let's not fight.* I don't want there to be any animosity between you and me, or between our herders. After all, we're family. 9A vast land is out there and available to you. It is time for us to go our separate ways. *You choose your land.* If you choose east, I'll go west. If you choose west, I'll go east—*it's your call.*

► Abram is an exemplary man of faith. Being older than Lot, he by custom has first choice of the property, but he waives his right and grants Lot the first choice. Given their recent experiences in the famine, it is no wonder that Lot chooses the lush, fertile soils of the Jordan Valley for his new home. But as Lot moves his family east, he moves farther from Abram and closer to danger.

10Lot looked around, and he noticed the *grassy plains in the* Jordan Valley looked well watered *and fertile,* just as *he imagined* the Eternal One's gardens might be or *as he knew* the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar *to be*. (This all happened before the Eternal destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11So Lot chose to settle *his family on the plains of* the Jordan Valley, and he journeyed eastward. This is how Abram and Lot separated from each other *and established two different households*. 12Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot settled among the cities of the *Jordanian* Valley. He eventually spread out and pitched his tent as far away as Sodom. 13(Now *you need to know that* the people of *the city of* Sodom were quite wicked—utterly defiant toward God.)

14After Lot had moved away, the Eternal spoke to Abram.

Eternal One: Look around you now, as far as you can see to the north, south, east, and west. 15All of the land you see is for you and your descendants to possess forever. 16I will make your descendants as many as there are specks of dust on the earth. If anyone could count the dust of the earth, then he could also count how many descendants *I'm talking about*! 17Go on now, and walk the entire expanse of the land, for *you need to see* what I am giving you!

18So Abram moved his family and belongings again, *this time* to Hebron, settling near the oaks of Mamre. Abram built yet another altar table to the Eternal here in this new place.

14 Back when King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim ruled the land, 2these *four* kings *formed an alliance and* made war on *five other* kings: Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (*a city now* known as Zoar). 3All of these joined forces in the valley of Siddim (*near the area now* known as the Dead Sea*). 4*You see,* the *five* latter kings had been conquered by Chedorlaomer and so they had served him for 12 years; but in the 13th year, they rebelled against him. 5In the 14th year, Chedorlaomer and the *three* kings *who were allied* with him squashed *rebellions of* the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in the hill country of Seir all the way to El-paran, which lies on the edge of the wilderness.

7Then Chedorlaomer and his allies turned back and did the same in En-mishpat (*a city also* known as Kadesh), and they conquered all of the country of the Amalekites and also the Amorites, who lived then in Hazazon-tamar. 8-9The five kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (that is, Zoar) all went and joined in battle in the valley of Siddim against the four kings (Chedorlaomer of Elam, Tidal of Goiim, Amraphel of Shinar, and Arioch of Ellasar). 10The valley of Siddim *held many dangers; it* was full of tar pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled *the battle,* some *of their soldiers* fell into the pits *and were killed*. The rest *managed to* make it out *alive* to the hill country. 11As a result, Chedorlaomer and his allies captured all of the spoils *of battle* from *the retreating forces of* Sodom and Gomorrah—their provisions, *weapons, and other supplies.* Then they left. 12But before they left they took Lot, the son of Abram's brother who lived in Sodom, prisoner along with all of his goods.

13Then one of the men who had escaped *the battle* went and found Abram, the Hebrew, who *at that time* was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite (brother of Eshcol and of Aner—some of Abram's allies). He told Abram *what had happened*. 14As soon as Abram heard that his nephew had been taken prisoner, he gathered a company of his *most reliable and* best-trained men (there were 318 of them, all born in his household) and pursued the enemy as far *north* as Dan. 15*When he caught up with them,* Abram divided up his men, *surrounded the enemy,* and attacked them during the night. He and his soldiers crushed the invaders and pursued any survivors all the way to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16*After the battle* Abram recovered all the spoils *the enemy had taken* and brought them back *with him.* He rescued his nephew Lot and brought him back, along with his goods; there were other captives, too, including some women whom he rescued.

17After Abram *and his men* defeated Chedorlaomer and the other kings allied with him, the king of Sodom went out

* 14:3 Literally, Salt Sea

to meet him *on his return* at the valley of Shaveh (*an area also* known as the King's Valley). 18The priest-king of Jerusalem,* Melchizedek, *came out to meet him as well and* brought out bread and wine for them. Melchizedek was a priest of the One whom he called the "the Most High God."* 19Priest-king Melchizedek offered a *special* blessing to Abram.

King Melchizedek: May Abram be blessed
by the Most High God,
Creator of the heavens and earth.
20Blessing *and honor* to the Most High God,
who has *clearly* delivered your enemies into your hands!

Abram gave the priest-king a tenth of all *of the captured goods he was bringing back with him.*

► This unusual encounter has sparked much interest over the centuries. Melchizedek, it seems, appears out of nowhere. There is no genealogical record for him; he is described simply as the priest-king of Salem, likely a reference to the city that will one day be known as Jerusalem. The Hebrew root of the name Salem means "peace" (*shalom*). Melchizedek comes in peace, offering the victors a meal to sustain them on their journey home. Abram, in return, gives Melchizedek ten percent of the spoils claimed in battle. There are two other scriptural references to Melchizedek in Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7. The writer of Hebrews compares the priestly role of Jesus to the ancient priestly order of Melchizedek showing that Jesus' role, like that of Melchizedek, is superior in every way to the later Levitical priests.

King of Sodom *(to Abram)***:** 21Give me the people, and you can take all of the spoils for yourself.

Abram: 22I have pledged a solemn oath to the Eternal One—the Most High God, Creator of the heavens and earth. 23I promised that I would not keep *any shred of* what belongs to you—not a thread *of a garment* or a strap of a sandal. That way you could never take credit for any wealth of mine. 24I will take nothing except the food my men have eaten. As for the men who fought with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre—let them take their shares, *but I will take nothing more.*

15 Some time passed. One day, the word of the Eternal One came to Abram through a vision—*a kind of waking dream.*

Eternal One: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am *always* your shield *and protector.* Your reward *for loyalty and trust* will be immense.

Abram: 2Eternal Lord, what could You *possibly* give to me *that would make that much of a difference in my life*? After all, I am still childless, and Eliezer of Damascus stands to inherit all I own.* 3Since You have not given me the gift of children, my only heir will be one *of the servants* born in my household.

4Immediately the word of the Eternal One came to him.

Eternal One: *No, Abram,* this man will not be your heir. No one but your very own child will be an heir for you.

5God took him outside *to show him something.*

Eternal One: Look up at the stars, and try to count them all if you can. *There are too many to count!* Your descendants will be *as many* as the stars.*

6Abram believed God *and trusted in His promises,* so God counted it to his favor as righteousness.*

Eternal One *(to Abram)***:** 7I am the Eternal One. *Remember, I am the One* who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to give you this land to possess *and to pass on to your descendants.*

Abram: 8But Eternal Lord, how am I supposed to know I really will possess it?

* 14:18 Hebrew, *Salem* * 14:18 Hebrew, *El Elyon* * 15:2 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 15:5 Romans 4:18
* 15:6 Romans 4:3, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23

Eternal One: [9]Bring to Me *the following*: a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

[10]Abram brought God all of these animals and cut them in two, laying each half next to the other, *making two rows*. Only the birds were not cut in two. [11]And when any birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, Abram swatted them away.

[12]As the sun was setting *in the west,* Abram fell into a deep sleep. A terrifying darkness descended upon him.

Eternal One *(to Abram)***:** [13]I will tell you this on which you can stake your life: Your descendants will *first* be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be made slaves there and will be oppressed for 400 years. [14]But then I will judge the nation that enslaves them.* When that time comes, your descendants will emerge from that land with many possessions. [15]As for you, you will rest with your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. [16]Not until the fourth generation will your descendants return here *to possess the land,* because the sin of the Amorite people has not yet reached its full measure.

[17]When the sun had gone down and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between the halves *of the animal carcasses.* [18]*With this ritual and* on this day, the Eternal One made a covenant with Abram.

► This ritual may sound strange, but it is a common way of making agreements between parties in Abram's day. The exact meaning is unclear, but the various elements and actions point to one undeniable fact: Abram and the Lord are entering into a relationship that has serious and long-lasting consequences. God's covenant with Abram changes not only Abram's future but the future of the world itself.

Eternal One: I *make a solemn promise to* give this land to your descendants—from the river of Egypt to the great Euphrates River, [19-21]the land where the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites all live. *All of this I will give to you.*

16 *Despite God's promise, years went by.* Still Abram's wife Sarai remained childless. But she did have an Egyptian servant girl whose name was Hagar. *Sarai had an idea so she approached her husband.*

Sarai *(to Abram)***:** [2]You can see that the Eternal One has still not allowed me to have any children. Why don't you sleep with my servant girl? Maybe I could *use her as a surrogate and* have a child through her!

Sarai's solution to her problem is not unique. Ancient Near Eastern custom allows for these kinds of arrangements.

Abram listened to Sarai *and agreed to follow her plan.* [3]After they had lived 10 years in Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took her servant girl Hagar, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. [4]So Abram slept with Hagar. *It was not long before* she conceived. But as soon as she knew she was pregnant *with Abram's child, Hagar's attitude changed and* she became haughty toward Sarai. [5]*Sarai would not tolerate her servant looking down on her, so she approached Abram again.*

Sarai *(to Abram)***:** This is all your fault. I allowed my servant girl to be intimate with you, and as soon as she saw she was pregnant *with your child,* she started behaving arrogantly and disrespectfully toward me! *I have done nothing to deserve this.* Let the Eternal One judge who is in the wrong here—you or me!

Abram *(to Sarai)***:** [6]*Sarai*—look, *she's still* your servant girl. Do whatever you want with her. She's under your control.

So Sarai clamped down on Hagar severely, and Hagar ran away. [7]The Special Messenger of the Eternal One found Hagar *alone* by a spring of water out in the desert. It was the spring *of water* along the road that went to Shur.

* 15:14 Acts 7:7

► When the Lord sends His Special Messenger, it is generally an important and sensitive mission (see, too, Exodus 3; Numbers 22; and Judges 6). This special agent bears God's unique, covenant name and speaks with divine authority in ways other messengers do not. In fact, by what Hagar says and does next, it is clear she thinks she has encountered the Lord Himself.

Special Messenger: 8Hagar, Sarai's servant girl? Where have you come from, and where are you planning to go?

Hagar: I am running away from my mistress, Sarai!

Special Messenger: 9Hagar, go back to your mistress, *and change your attitude.* Be respectful, and listen to her instructions. *You're pregnant, and you need to go home.* 10*Trust me:* I am going to give you *many children and* many descendants, so many you won't be able to count them!

The descendants from Hagar are included in the promise given to Abram that his family will be so large that he will not be able to count them.

11Look, you are pregnant,
and you're going to have a son.
I want you to call him Ishmael
because the Eternal One has heard
your anguished cries.
12*Just to warn you, though:*
Ishmael, your son, is going to be a wild
and rowdy man;
he'll put his fist in every face,
And everyone will turn against him,
and he will live at odds with all of
his relatives.

13As a result *of this encounter,* Hagar decided to give the Eternal One who had spoken to her a *special* name *because He had seen her in her misery.*

Hagar: I'm going to call You the God of Seeing* because in this place I have seen the One who watches over me.

14Because of this, the well between Kadesh and Bered is called Beer-lahai-roi, *which means, "Well of the Living One who watches over me."*

15So Hagar *returned home and* gave birth to Abram's son. Abram named his son (that is, the one born to Hagar) Ishmael. 16Abram was *already* 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.

17 When Abram was 99 years old, the Eternal One appeared to him *again, assuring him of the promise of a child yet to come.*

Eternal One: I am the God-All-Powerful.* Walk before Me. *Continue to trust and serve Me faithfully.* Be blameless *and true.* 2*If you are true and trust Me,* then I will make *certain* the covenant with you that I promised. I will bless you with a throng of descendants.

3Abram bowed low, his face *and body flat* on the ground.

Eternal One: 4Here is My covenant with you. I promise you will become the root of a huge family tree of multiple nations. 5*To symbolize your foundational role in this covenant, I hereby change your name.* You will no longer go by the name "Abram." Your new name will be "Abraham," *which means* "father of a great multitude of nations," because that is exactly what I will make of you.* 6Your descendants will be exceedingly fruitful. Nations and kings will descend from you. 7I hereby make this covenant—*this sacred bond*—between Me and you and all of your children and their children's children throughout the coming generations. It will be an eternal covenant. I will be your God and the God to all who come after you! 8I will *fulfill My promise to* give you and your descendants the land *of Canaan,* where you now live as foreigners. I will place all of Canaan into your hands to be yours forever. I will be *your God and* their God *forever.*

9(continuing to Abraham) As for your part *in the agreement,* you and your descendants must keep My covenant throughout the generations. 10-11The sign that you and your family keep My covenant is this: each male who lives among you shall be circumcised. The circumcised flesh of your foreskins constitutes a special "sign" of the covenant

* 16:13 Hebrew, *El Roi* * 17:1 Hebrew, *El Shaddai* * 17:5 Romans 4:17

I made with you, *a relationship bonded together by loyalty and love.* 12-13*From this point onward,* throughout coming generations, each male child born to you should be circumcised when he is eight days old. You must circumcise all male members of your household, even the slaves born within your household or the servants purchased from foreigners who aren't your flesh and blood; *anyone and everyone within your household* must carry this sign. This external mark on his body will be a sign of My everlasting covenant. 14Any male who is not separated from his foreskin will be cut off from his people *and excluded from these covenant promises* because he has broken My covenant.

15(continuing to Abraham) As for Sarai, your wife, *the covenant applies to her as well.* No longer will she be known as Sarai; her new name will be Sarah. 16She will receive My *special* blessing, and she will conceive a son by you. With My blessing on her, she will become the founding *princess* of nations to come. Kings of *many* peoples will be *counted* among her children.

► The Scriptures tell us that names matter. What we call people and places often describes and defines them in ways other kinds of words do not. People's names may recall the circumstances of their birth or reflect their character or perhaps depict their destiny. God changes Abram's name to Abraham to signify that he will become the founding father of many nations. The change in Sarah's name is a bit more complicated because both "Sarai" and "Sarah" mean "princess." Still the name "Sarah" becomes her covenant-name, the name by which generations know her. As the wife of Abraham's youth and old age, Sarah is destined to become the founding princess of many nations, a royal mother to many kings.

17Then Abraham fell on his face and erupted into laughter *in a moment of private absurdity,* as he thought to himself, "*Yeah, right!* How can a centenarian father a child? Am I supposed to believe that Sarah, *my* 90-year-old *wife,* is going to have a baby?"

Abraham *(to God)***:** 18*There's Ishmael of course.* May *my son* Ishmael *be blessed and* live a long life beneath Your watchful eye.

Eternal One: 19No, *Abraham. I mean what I am telling you.* Your wife Sarah will *certainly become pregnant and* bear a son. I want you to name him Isaac. I will *continue to* establish My covenant with him; through his line My covenant will last forever. 20As for Ishmael, I have heard your prayers *for him*! Look, *he is your son too*. I will bless him as well and make his lineage fruitful. His descendants will also be of a huge number. In fact, he will be the father of 12 princes. I will make sure that a great nation arises from his descendants *as well.* 21But My *special* covenant—this I will establish with Isaac. Sarah is going to give birth to him at this very time next year.

22When God was finished talking with Abraham about all of this, He left *and Abraham went home.* 23Abraham *immediately* took his son Ishmael and all *of the slaves* born in his household or bought with his money—every single male within his household—and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, just as God had told him to do. 24Abraham was already 99 years old when he was circumcised. 25His son Ishmael was 13 years old when he received the mark of the covenant. 26On the day Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised, 27all men of the household, no matter where they had come from, were circumcised along with them.

18 The Eternal One appeared once again to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, while he was resting at the entrance to his tent in the middle of a hot afternoon. 2Abraham glanced up and saw there were three men standing nearby. *They seemed to appear out of nowhere.* As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent out to where they were standing *and greeted them warmly, instinctively* bowing to the ground.

Abraham: 3My lord, if you would like to stay for a while, I beg you not to pass me by. I am your *humble* servant. 4Let me send *someone* for water in order to

wash your feet. Please go and sit down under that tree over there and rest. 5Meanwhile, let me send for some bread so that you can nourish yourselves. After that *I will not detain you further*—you may be on your way—since you have come *and honored* your servant with your presence.

Three Men: *Please,* go and do what you have suggested.

6*In spite of the heat,* Abraham hurried into his tent to Sarah.

Abraham *(to Sarah)*: Sarah, *we have guests.* Quickly prepare three measures* of our best flour, knead it, and make cakes.

7Then Abraham ran to *where* his herds *were pastured.* He took a tender calf and gave it to one of his servants, who rushed off to prepare the choice meat. 8When it was ready, Abraham took curds and milk, along with the meat, and he placed all of this *lavish* feast before his *honored* guests. He stood nearby under the tree while they ate *to their fill.*

Three Men: 9Where is Sarah, your wife?

Abraham: She's right in there . . . in the tent.

One of the Men: 10I will return here to you when life emerges from the womb* of your wife, Sarah. She will give birth to a son.*

Now Sarah was behind her guests, listening to all of this from the entrance of the tent. 11Abraham and Sarah were quite old at this time, well advanced in years, and Sarah had long ago gone through menopause. 12So Sarah laughed to herself, saying *under her breath,* "At my age—old *and decrepit,* as is my husband—both of us long past having any desire *to engage in lovemaking*?" 13But the Eternal *heard what Sarah said and* addressed Abraham.

Eternal One: Why does Sarah laugh and say *to herself,* "*There's no way* I'm going to give birth at my age!" 14Is anything too difficult for the Eternal One to accomplish? At a time that I will determine, I will return here to you when life emerges from her womb. *I'm telling you,* Sarah will give birth to a son.*

15Sarah *was embarrassed and* tried to deny laughing. She feared *these were no ordinary guests.*

Sarah: I wasn't laughing.

Eternal One: That is not true, *Sarah.* You did laugh.

16At that point, the three men set off *on foot* toward Sodom, and Abraham walked with them to start them on their way.

Eternal One *(to the other two men)*: 17I wonder if I should hide from Abraham what I am about to do. 18After all, Abraham will become *the father of* a great and powerful nation, and all the other nations of the earth will find their blessing in him.* 19I have chosen him *for a reason, namely* that he will carefully instruct his children and his household *to keep themselves strong in relationship to Me and* to walk in My ways by doing what is *good and* right in the world and by showing *mercy and* justice *to all others. I know he will uphold his end of the covenant,* so that he can ensure My promises to him will be fulfilled and upheld as well.

20(continuing *so Abraham could hear*) *I have heard terrible things*—urgent and outraged calls *for help*—coming from *the cities of* Sodom and Gomorrah, and their sin has become a serious problem. 21I must go down and see *for Myself* whether the outcries against them that My ears have heard are really true. If not, I will know.

22At this point the men turned and headed toward Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the Eternal One. 23Then Abraham approached Him *solemnly and pled for the city.*

Abraham *(to God)*: *God,* would You really sweep away the people who do what is right along with those who are wicked? 24What if there were 50 upright people within the city? Would You still wipe the place out and not spare it on behalf of the 50 upright people who live there? 25Surely it can't be Your nature to do

* 18:6 Literally, 3 seahs or about 28 cups * 18:10 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 18:10 Romans 9:9 * 18:14 Romans 9:9 * 18:18 Galatians 3:8

something like that—to kill the right-living along with those who act wickedly, to consign the innocent to the same fate as the guilty. It is inconceivable to me that You, *my God,* would do anything like that! Will not the *"Merciful and Loving* Judge" of all the earth do what is just?

Eternal One: [26]If I find 50 good and true people in the city of Sodom, *I give you My word* I will spare the entire city on their behalf.

Abraham *(emboldened)***:** [27]Look, I know I am just *a human being,* scooped from the dust and ashes *of the earth,* but if I might implore You, Lord, a bit further: [28]What if the city lacked 5 of those 50 right-living people? *What then?* Would You destroy the entire city because it lacked those 5?

Eternal One: I won't destroy the city if I find 45 *good and true people* there.

Abraham *(persisting)***:** [29]Suppose 40 are found there.

Eternal One: I won't destroy the city for the sake of 40.

Abraham: [30]Please don't be angry, Lord, *at my boldness.* Let me ask this: What if You found 30 there *who are good and true*?

Eternal One: I will not do it, even if I find only 30 there.

Abraham: [31]Since I have implored the Lord this far, *may I ask:* What if there were 20?

Eternal One: For the sake of 20, I will not destroy the city.

Abraham: [32]Please don't be angry, Lord, *at my boldness.* Let me ask this just once more: suppose only 10 are found?

Eternal One: For the sake of only 10, I still will not destroy it.

► Scripture records here an amazing exchange between the Lord and Abraham. In all of the Bible there is nothing quite like it. In these verses Abraham is negotiating with God over the fate of Sodom and its inhabitants. But this is no game. Abraham isn't bargaining with a peddler over the cost of his wares; the lives of many people hang in the balance. Abraham has followed God long enough and knows Him well enough to stand confident as he presses and probes the extent of God's mercy. God's mercy, he learns, runs deep; but there are limits, and Sodom has crossed the line.

[33]At this point the Eternal ended the conversation with Abraham and went on His way, and Abraham returned to his home.

19 The two heavenly messengers arrived in Sodom that evening, and Lot was sitting at the gate of the city. When Lot saw them, he went out to meet them and bowed low, his face touching the ground.

Lot: [2]Please, my lords, take time to come into your servant's house to spend the night and wash your feet. Then you can rise early and be on your way.

Messengers: No, we will be *fine* spending the night in the city square.

[3]But Lot persisted *and urged them to come home with him and enjoy his hospitality.* They agreed finally and came with Lot to his house. Lot prepared a huge meal for them, served with unleavened bread, and they ate *until they were full.* [4]But before they could lie down *to rest for the night,* the men of the city—that is, the men of Sodom, young and old alike, every last one of them—surrounded the house [5]and called out to Lot.

Men of Sodom: Where are the men who came *with you* to your house tonight? *We saw them go in with you!* Bring them out here. We want to have sex with them!

[6]Lot slipped out of the door to address the men, shutting it *firmly* behind him.

Lot: [7]*Look,* I beg you, brothers, don't do this. Don't sink to this level of depravity! [8]Look—I have two daughters. Both are virgins. How about this: I'll bring them out for you instead. You can do with them as you please. But please don't

do anything to these men. They are my guests. They deserve the protection of my home.

► Lot leaves the safety of his home to negotiate with the men of the city, all of whom seem determined to have sex with his guests. Although his courage is commendable, his solution is deplorable—offering his virgin daughters for the deviant pleasures of his neighbors. But Lot knows their sexual preference is for his guests, not his daughters; so the offer is safe, and he has bought some time.

Men of Sodom: 9Get out of the way, man!
(to each other) Look, this guy came to our city as a stranger. *He's not one of us,* and yet he thinks he has the right to judge *all of us*!
(to Lot) *You better watch out, or* we'll treat you far worse than we will your guests!

They came at Lot and pushed him hard against the door until it was about to break. 10Just then the men inside reached out and pulled Lot into the house with them, shutting the door *securely to block the men of Sodom out.* 11Then the *heavenly* messengers struck all of the men pressing at the door with blindness—both young and old alike. *It wasn't long before* they exhausted themselves *blindly* groping for the door.

Messengers *(to Lot)***:** 12Do you have anyone else here in the city—sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any other members of your family—*whom you want to save?* If so, you need to get them out of here right now! 13We are going to destroy this place. Because of the immense outcry the Eternal One has received regarding the depravity of this city, the Eternal has sent us here to destroy it.

14So Lot went out and found the young men who had pledged to marry his daughters.

Lot: Get up, and get out of this place. The Eternal One is going to destroy the city!

But his sons-in-law thought he was kidding *and wouldn't budge.* 15At dawn, the heavenly messengers urged Lot to action again.

Messengers: *Lot,* you need to get up and take your wife and two daughters out of here. Otherwise you will be consumed along with the rest of the city.

16But Lot kept procrastinating, so the two heavenly messengers grabbed him, his wife, and his two daughters by the hand. They took them outside the city, *a safe distance away,* because the Eternal decided to show mercy to Lot *and his family.* 17As they were leading them *to safety,* one of the messengers gave this instruction:

Messenger: *Now run!* Run for your lives! Don't look back or stop anywhere in the plain. Head for the hills, or you'll die along with everyone else.

Lot: 18My lords, no. 19I realize you have shown me great kindness and favored me by saving my life. But please—I can't run that far. The devastation will surely catch up with me, and I'll die anyway. 20Look, over there is a city. It's not too far. I could escape there. It's just a little one. Please, let me go there instead. Then my life will surely be saved!

Messenger: 21Look, as a favor to you, I won't destroy the little city you're talking about. 22But hurry now; escape there, because I can't do anything until you arrive there safely!

Because of this, the little city *Lot escaped to* was called Zoar, *which means, "little."*
23Lot *and his family* arrived in Zoar just as the sun was coming up. 24Then the Eternal One rained sulfur and fire from out of the heavens onto Sodom and Gomorrah. 25He destroyed both cities, along with the other villages and towns in the valley and all of the people who lived there—even the vegetation *was wiped out*! 26But Lot's wife *never made it; she* lagged behind her husband and looked back—*despite the messenger's advice*—and turned into a pillar of salt.

► Lot's wife makes a fateful turn. She stops and looks back. No one knows why. Perhaps it is to mourn the past.

Perhaps curiosity gets the better of her; but instead of looking ahead to her destination—a place of safety and security—she turns around and looks back at what she has left behind. In that instant, as the messenger warned, she perishes. All that is left of her is a standing pillar of salt.

27Meanwhile, Abraham rose early in the morning and went out to the place where he had stood at *the feet of* the Eternal One. 28He looked down toward where Sodom and Gomorrah *had been.* He looked up and down the valley, and *everywhere he looked* clouds of smoke were billowing up—*black,* like smoke from a giant furnace. 29Now *you know the story of* how God destroyed the cities of the valley, but remembered Abraham *and His covenant with him.* So He sent Lot out of the destruction—out of the cities where he had been living.

30After a brief time, Lot left Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters. He was afraid to stay in Zoar, so he and his daughters made their home in a cave. 31One day, the firstborn daughter took her younger sister aside to discuss *the future.*

Firstborn Daughter: Our father is getting old. *We'll never find a suitable husband around here.* There's no one to father our children according to accepted custom. 32Come on—let's get him drunk on wine. Then we'll each sleep with him. That way, we'll be sure to have children to continue the family line.

33So they got Lot drunk that night, and the firstborn daughter went in and slept with her father. *He was so drunk,* he had no idea when she entered or when she left. 34On the next day, the firstborn told her younger sister *what had happened.*

Firstborn Daughter: Look, *I did it.* I slept with my father last night. *Now it's your turn.* Let's get him drunk again tonight. Then you go in and sleep with him too. That way we'll *both have children* through our father to ensure our family line.

35So they made their father drink wine *until he was drunk* a second time, and the younger daughter slept with him that night. Again Lot had no idea when she entered or when she left. 36As a result, both daughters became pregnant by their father. 37The firstborn daughter gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He became the ancestor of the Moabites that you know of today. 38The younger daughter also gave birth to a son and named him Ben-ammi. Ben-ammi is the ancestor of the Ammonites that you also know of today.

► Scripture is brutally honest when it comes to people. It never sugarcoats the depths of human degeneracy. Here is a prime example: Lot's daughters conspire to commit incest with him, an act so reprehensible it is universally condemned. They do so in order to guarantee their future and security, but as a result they create a future where insecurity and trouble are guaranteed. The nations which they birth become two of the most troublesome enemy nations God's people will ever have to deal with. As time goes on, the Moabites and Ammonites become fierce adversaries to the children of Abraham.

20 After spending a period of time in the hill country, Abraham moved on into the region of the Negev and settled in the land between Kadesh and Shur. Then he moved on to Gerar. 2*Because he was living in Gerar as a foreigner,* Abraham *once again* told everyone that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her *into his harem.* 3But God spoke to Abimelech in a dream during the night and warned him.

Eternal One: Look, you are a dead man because the woman you have taken *into your harem* is a married woman.

4Up to this point, Abimelech had not physically approached her.

Abimelech: Lord, would You jeopardize a nation by killing its innocent *king*? 5The man himself said to me that she was his sister. Even she said he was her brother.

I took her *in my harem* without knowing the truth. I acted with integrity. I am completely innocent.

6Then God replied to him still in his dream.

Eternal One: Yes, I know you did this with integrity in your heart. It was I who prevented you from crossing the line. I protected you *from yourself* by not letting you touch her. 7Now *do the right thing.* Return the man's wife. He is one of My prophets. He will pray *and intercede* for you, and you will live. But if you do not give her back, I assure you, you will die—you and everyone associated with you.

The first person in Scripture to be called a "prophet" is Abraham. Prophets often speak for God; here he speaks to God on behalf of another.

8Abimelech got up early the next morning and called all of his servants together. He told them his dream, and the men became very afraid. 9Then Abimelech called for Abraham *to meet with him.*

Abimelech *(to Abraham)***:** 10What have you done to us? *What were you thinking?* What have I ever done to deserve your bringing such great *shame and* guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done *to another human being.*

Abraham: 11*I did it for my own protection.* I did it because I thought this was not a God-fearing place, and *I was afraid* you would surely kill me to possess my wife. 12Besides *it isn't entirely a lie.* She really is my sister. She's the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother. But, *of course,* she did become my wife. 13Ever since God called me away from my father's house *years ago,* I told her, "I need you to do this favor for me—whenever we visit or stay in some *strange or foreign* place *you need to* tell people I am your brother."

14*For good measure* Abimelech took sheep and oxen, as well as male and female slaves, and he gave them to Abraham when he gave back his wife Sarah to him.

Abimelech *(to Abraham)***:** 15Look, my land is your land; make your home wherever you please.

16(to Sarah) Look now, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. This is to make up for what has happened. Everyone will see that you are completely vindicated of any wrongdoing.

17Abraham prayed to God *on Abimelech's behalf,* and God healed Abimelech. He also healed *the infertility that plagued* Abimelech's wife and female slaves enabling them to again bear children 18because God had *temporarily* sealed the wombs of all *of the females* of Abimelech's household—all because of *what happened to* Sarah, Abraham's wife.

► Once again Abraham and Sarah take matters into their own hands. Although God has promised to protect and prosper them, they choose half-truths and deception in order to stay in Abimelech's favor. The results could have been disastrous; but God's intervention stops Abimelech from violating Sarah's marriage, and in the end obedience preserves them all. Abraham, it seems, is rewarded, not because of his deception but in spite of it. Since Abimelech does the right thing, God brings hope and healing to his family as well. Does good then result from evil? Not at all. The good comes from God's action and everyone's eventual obedience. What is clear through these narratives is that God has a plan, and He can manage any contingency in achieving His purpose. When God is on the move, even evil can be turned into good.

21 The Eternal One kept His promise, 2and Sarah conceived and gave birth to Abraham's son (in their advanced age) exactly as the Eternal had indicated. 3Abraham named his child, who was born to Sarah, Isaac; 4and Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, just as God had told him to do. 5Abraham was already one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born.

Sarah: 6God has graced me with the gift of laughter! *To be sure,* everyone who hears *my story* will laugh with me.

7Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would *one day* nurse children? Yet I have given birth to his son at this late stage in his life!

8*Time went on,* and Isaac grew and was weaned *from his mother*. Abraham prepared a special feast *in Isaac's honor,* to celebrate the day he was weaned. 9But *a damper was put on the day when* Sarah saw the son Hagar (the Egyptian girl) bore for Abraham laughing and teasing *her son.* 10She *became jealous and* demanded of Abraham:

Sarah: Throw this slave woman and her son out *right now*! The son of this slave is not going to share the inheritance along with my son, Isaac, *if I have anything to do with it!**

11Sarah's demand was extremely distressing to Abraham, since Ishmael was also his son. 12But God assured Abraham.

Eternal One: Don't worry about the young man and your servant. Go along with whatever Sarah says, for through Isaac your *covenant* children will be named.* 13As for the son of the slave woman, *I will take care of him.* I will raise up a nation through him as well because he is also your son.

14So Abraham got up early in the morning, took bread and a container of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulder, gave her the child—*his firstborn*—and sent her away. She left and wandered in the wilderness near Beersheba. 15When the water in the container was all gone, *in desperation* she left the child under *the shade of* one of the bushes. 16Then she walked off and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away.

Hagar: I can't bear to watch my child die.

Though Ishmael is about 16 years old at this time, she still considers him her child.

As she sat there, she cried loudly. 17God heard the voice of young Ishmael, and a messenger of God called out to Hagar from heaven.

Messenger: Why are you so upset, Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the voice of young Ishmael. 18Come now, lift him up, and take him by the hand. I have plans to make a great nation from his *descendants*!

19Then God opened Hagar's eyes. She looked up *from her grief* and saw a well of water *not far away*. She went over to it, filled the container she carried with water, and gave the young man a drink. 20God watched over him *for the rest of his life*. Ishmael grew up, lived in the wilderness, and became an expert archer. 21So Ishmael went on to live *out his life* in the wilderness of Paran. *When the time was right,* his mother obtained a wife for him from *her homeland* Egypt.

22Meanwhile, Abimelech, along with Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke *confidentially* to Abraham.

Now that Abraham's people are so numerous and powerful, Abimelech wants to see whether Abraham will remain loyal to him.

Abimelech: God *seems to* bless everything you do. 23So swear to me right now on *the name of your* God that you *and your people* will *be honest with me and* never try to deceive me, my children, or my descendants. *Promise that* you will always treat me and this land where you have resided as a foreigner with kindness *and grace,* as I have treated you.

Abraham: 24I swear.

25Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about *a time when he wasn't treated so kindly*: a well of water *Abraham's men had dug* had been seized by Abimelech's servants.

Abimelech: 26I don't know who has done this. You didn't tell me before; this is the first I have heard about it.

27Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant-treaty together. 28Abraham took seven female lambs from the flock and set them aside.

Abimelech *(to Abraham)***:** 29Why have you set these seven female lambs apart from the others?

Abraham: 30These seven female lambs I am presenting to you represent your

* 21:10 Galatians 4:30 * 21:12 Romans 9:7; Hebrews 11:18

personal and public acknowledgment that I am the one who dug this well, *and that it belongs to me.*

31From then on, the place where the well was located was called Beersheba because it was there that the two of them swore this oath together. 32After they had made the covenant-treaty at Beersheba, Abimelech, along with Phicol, the commander of his army, left and went back to the land which *now* belongs to the Philistines. 33And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba at the site, and he used it as yet another place to *honor and* call upon the name of the Eternal One, the Everlasting God.* 34For many years Abraham lived *in peace* as a foreigner in *what would become* the land of the Philistines.

22 After a period of time, God decided to put Abraham to the test.

Eternal One: Abraham!

Abraham: I am right here.

Eternal One: 2Take your son, your only son Isaac whom *I know* you love *deeply,* and go to the land of Moriah. *When you get there,* I want you to offer Isaac to Me as a burnt offering on one of the mountains. I will show you which one.

3Abraham did *as he was told.* Early in the morning he got up, saddled his donkey, and taking two of his *trusted* servants with him and his son Isaac, he cut the wood for the burnt offering and traveled to the place God had told him about. 4On the third day *of the journey,* Abraham looked up and saw the place far in the distance.

► Abraham leaves Beersheba as he left Haran many years earlier. God calls and he leaves. It is as simple as that. No map. No directions. Just an unwavering trust that God will lead him where he needs to go. Mount Moriah becomes one of the most important places in all of the promised land, the one place in the world set apart for the worship of the one True God. According to 2 Chronicles 3:1, Solomon builds his temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, not far from where God tests Abraham.

Abraham *(to his servants)***:** 5Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to meet you *here.*

6Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and set it on *the shoulders of* his son Isaac *to carry.* Abraham himself carried the fire and the knife. The two of them walked on together.

Isaac *(to Abraham)***:** 7Father!

Abraham: I am right here, Son.

Isaac: Look, we have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

Abraham: 8God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.

The two of them continued to walk on together.

9When they finally arrived at the place God had shown him, Abraham *took some stones and* built an altar there and arranged the wood carefully on top of it. Then he bound up his son Isaac *with rope* and laid him on the altar on top of the stack of wood. 10Just as Abraham reached over to grab the knife that would kill his son, 11the special messenger of the Eternal One called his name from heaven.

Special Messenger: Abraham! Abraham!

Abraham: I am right here!

Special Messenger: 12Don't lay your hand on the boy or do anything to *harm* him. I know now that you respect *the one True* God *and will be loyal to Him and follow His commands,* because you were willing to give up your son, your only son, to Me.

13Abraham glanced up and saw a ram behind him with its horns caught in the thicket. He went over, dislodged the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14*From that day forward,* Abraham called that place, "The Eternal

* 21:33 Hebrew, *El Olam*

One will provide." Because of this, people still today say, "On the Mount of the Eternal, all will be provided."

15The special messenger of the Eternal One called out to Abraham yet a second time from heaven.

Special Messenger: 16*Listen to* the solemn vow the Eternal One has spoken: "Because you have done what I asked and were willing to give up your son, your only son, 17I will reaffirm My *covenant of* blessing to you *and your family*.* I will make sure your descendants are as many as the stars of the heavens and the *grains of* sand on the shores. *I reaffirm My earlier promises that* your descendants will possess the *lands and sit in the* gates of their enemies, 18and from your descendants all the peoples of the earth will discover true blessing.* All this is because you have obeyed My voice.

► We reach the climax of Abraham's covenant story. God tests Abraham, and he passes with flying colors. Somehow he knows God will provide, for he tells his servants that he and his son will come back from the mountain. He also knows that God's covenant promises are going to be fulfilled through Isaac and not another. Although Abraham is willing to sacrifice him, he expects Isaac to still be the one through whom God's blessings come to the world. How could it all happen? Only God knows, and Abraham trusts in God and His promises. Abraham's level of trust is unmatched in all of Scripture. This is why he stands as the founding father of our faith.

19Then Abraham returned to *the place where he left* his *trusted* servants. They traveled together—*Abraham, Isaac, and his servants*—back to Beersheba where Abraham lived on *for some time.*

20After this happened, Abraham was informed that Milcah had also given birth to *many* children by his brother, Nahor. 21Uz was the firstborn, then came his brother Buz, Kemuel (Aram's father), 22Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel. 23Bethuel fathered Rebekah. Nahor, Abraham's brother, had eight children in all by Milcah. 24*Not only that, but* Nahor's concubine (whose name was Reumah) also gave birth to Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

23 When Sarah reached the end of her life, she was 127 years old. 2She died at Kiriath-arba (*a city* now known as Hebron) in Canaan. Abraham went *in where her body was laid out* to mourn and weep over her. 3When he got up from his place beside her, he spoke to the Hittites *who had been his neighbors for many years.*

Abraham: 4I am a stranger and an outsider living here among you. *In my heartache, I am asking you please to* allow me to obtain some property here among you as a grave site for my dead *wife. This would allow me to give her a proper burial.*

5The Hittites *conferred and* answered Abraham.

Hittites: 6Listen, my lord. *We recognize* you are a powerful prince among us, *and God is certainly with you.* Bury your dead in the best of our burial places. None of us will deny you any tomb so that you might *properly* bury your dead.

7Abraham got up and bowed in respect to the people of the land, the Hittites.

Abraham *(to the Hittites)*: 8If you are really willing for me to give my dead *wife* a proper burial, then would you please ask Ephron (Zohar's son) for me 9if I might buy the cave of Machpelah. *It is a tract of land* he owns located at the end of his field. With you as my witnesses, I will offer him full price for the property as a place to bury my dead.

10Now *it happened that* Ephron was sitting right there among the Hittites. He *personally* answered Abraham so that all those present at the city gate could hear.

Ephron: 11No, my lord, listen: *I will not sell it to you;* I will give you the field and the cave that lies on the property. In the presence of all of these people, my

* 22:17 Hebrews 6:13-18 * 22:18 Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8

This account reveals the complex and rather ambiguous Near Eastern way of negotiating a purchase. The transaction takes place publicly at the city gate in the presence of the community leaders who could serve as advisors to the deal or witnesses if the deal goes awry. Initially Ephron offers to give the land to Abraham for a burial site, but in true Near Eastern style the patriarch indicates respectfully that he desires to purchase it instead. Ephron's true motive may be seen in his counteroffer; the property is worth 10 pounds of silver, a not-so-insignificant price for a tract of land on the edge of his property. Abraham's motive is clear enough. He wants to own outright a parcel of land near where he and his family have lived for many years, a land promised to him by God, a land where now Sarah has died and needs a proper burial. Gifts come with strings attached, and Abraham does not want to owe Ephron or anyone else for that matter. He knows full well he owes everything to God.

people, I give it to you so that you can go and bury your dead.

12Abraham *again* bowed in respect to the people of the land 13and replied to Ephron so all those present could hear.

Abraham: Please, listen to what I have to say. I will gladly pay you a fair price for the field. Please accept it from me. That way I can bury my dead *in peace*.

14Ephron answered Abraham.

Ephron: 15My lord, listen to me. The property is worth 10 pounds of silver. Surely that is an amount we can agree on. So go, and bury your dead *in peace*.

16So Abraham accepted Ephron's offer, and he weighed out the silver for him in the amount they had agreed upon in the presence of the Hittites—10 pounds of silver, according to the weights among the merchants of that time.

17So it was that the field of Ephron in Machpelah, east of Mamre, the field with the cave in it and the trees on it all passed 18to Abraham and became his *legal* possession in the presence of the Hittites and all those *officials* present at the city gate. 19After the agreement was made, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah, east of Mamre (*an area* now known as Hebron) in Canaan. 20The field and the cave in it became Abraham's property with the approval of the Hittites; now he had a proper place to bury his dead.

24 Abraham was now very old. He had seen many years come and go. The Eternal One had blessed his life in every *imaginable* way. 2*One day,* Abraham spoke to his oldest *and most-trusted* servant, the man in charge of all his affairs.

Abraham: Put your hand here underneath my thigh. 3Swear by the Eternal One, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not arrange for my son to marry any of the Canaanite daughters here where I am living. 4Instead *promise me* you will go to my own country and my *own* relatives to find a wife for my son Isaac.

Servant: 5But what if the woman is not willing to follow me here to this *unfamiliar* land? Do you want me then to take Isaac back to your homeland?

Abraham: 6Absolutely not! *Isaac's future is here.* Do not take my son back there. 7The Eternal One, the God of heaven, the God who led me from my father's house and from the land of my birth *long ago,* the God who spoke to me and swore to me, "I am going to give this land to your future generations"—that God will send His messenger to guide *and help* you find a wife for my son from there. 8If *for some reason* the woman is not willing to follow you, then I free you from the obligation of my oath. But you must never take my son back there!

9The *trusted* servant took the oath, holding in his hand Abraham's power to give life. He swore to do what his master required.

This solemn oath, sworn with the servant's hand beneath Abraham's thigh, binds the servant to carry out the request.

10Then the servant gathered together
10 of his master's camels and left, taking
all kinds of valuable gifts from his master
to give to his relatives. He traveled all the
way to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.
11Outside of the city, he made the camels
kneel down by a well of water *to rest after
the long journey*. It was nearly dusk, the
time when *all of* the women were coming
out to draw water *from the well*. 12He said
a prayer.

Servant: O Eternal One, God of my master
Abraham, please make me successful
today and show Your loyal love to my
master Abraham. 13You see that I am
standing here by the spring as the young
women of the city are coming out to
draw water. 14Let the girl to whom I say,
"Please dip your jar *in the water* that I
may drink," and who will reply, "Drink,
and I will draw water for your camels"—
let her be the one You have chosen *to be
a wife* for Your servant Isaac. When You
do this, I will know of Your loyal love for
my master.

15Before he could finish his prayer, it
happened that Rebekah, the daughter of
Bethuel (Milcah's and Nahor's son—*Nahor,
you remember, was* Abraham's brother)
approached *the spring* with her water jar
on her shoulder. 16She was a very beauti-
ful girl and still a virgin. No man had ever
touched her. *He watched* her go down to
the spring, fill her jar, and come back up
the hill. 17The servant *wasted no time*; he
ran down to meet her.

Servant: Please let me have a little water
to drink from your jar.

Rebekah: 18Drink, my lord.

She quickly lowered her jar onto her hand
and tipped it for him to drink. 19After she
had finished giving him water, *she offered
to do more.*

Rebekah: I'll draw some water for your
camels too. I'll make sure they drink all
they need.

20She quickly emptied her jar into the
trough and ran again to the well to draw
more water. She continued to draw water
until all of the camels had drunk their fill.
21The man gazed at her in silence, waiting
and wondering if *she was the one* the Eter-
nal One intended *for Isaac, the one who
would* make his journey a success. 22When
the camels had finished drinking, the man
took out *from his things* a gold *nose* ring
weighing about a fifth of an ounce, plus
two gold bracelets for her arms weighing
four ounces.

Servant: 23Please tell me, whose daugh-
ter are you? Is there any room in your
father's house for us to spend the night?

Rebekah: 24I am the daughter of Bethuel
(son of Milcah, Nahor's wife). 25We have
plenty of straw and feed *for your camels*
and also space for you to spend the
night.

26The servant bowed his head and wor-
shiped the Eternal One.

Servant: 27Blessed be the Eternal One,
the God of my master Abraham, who
has not failed to show His loyal love and
faithfulness to my master, for the Eternal
has led me directly to the house of my
master's relatives.

28The girl ran ahead and told her mother's
household everything that had happened.
29-30Now Rebekah had a brother named
Laban. As soon as Laban saw the *nose*
ring and bracelets on his sister's arms and
heard what his sister, Rebekah, had to say
about how this man had spoken to her, he
ran to the man and found him waiting by
the spring with the camels.

Laban: 31Come in, *please,* you who are
blessed by the Eternal One! Don't stand
outside. I have prepared the house *for
guests* and have a place for the camels.

32The servant *did exactly as Laban asked.
When they* arrived at the house, Laban
unloaded the camels, gave the man straw
and feed for his camels, and gave him
enough fresh water to wash his feet and
the feet of the men who traveled with him.
33Then food was prepared and set in front
of him to eat.

Servant: I will not eat until I tell you why
I am here.

Laban: Please, tell us!

Servant: 34I am Abraham's servant. 35The
Eternal One has blessed my master in
a multitude of ways; he has become a
great *and wealthy* man. The Eternal has

given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, camels and donkeys. 36Sarah, my master's wife, gave birth to his son when she was quite old, and Abraham has passed on all he has to him.

37My master made me swear, saying, "You will not arrange for my son to marry any of the Canaanite daughters here where we are living; 38instead, you will go to my father's house—to my own relatives to find a wife for my son." 39I asked my master, "What if the woman won't follow me *to this unfamiliar land*?" 40But he told me, "The Eternal One, with whom I walked *all these years,* will send His messenger with you to guide *and help* you along the way. *I know* you will find a wife for my son among my relatives, from my father's family. 41When you reach my family, then you will be free from my oath. Even if they won't give her to you, you will still be free from my oath."

42I arrived here today and came to the spring and said a prayer: "O Eternal One, God of my master Abraham, if You will only make my trip successful! 43You see that I am standing here by the spring. Let the young woman who comes out to draw water and to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' 44and who will reply to me, 'Drink, and I will draw water for your camels,' let her be the woman the Eternal has chosen *to be a wife* for my master's son." 45Before I could even finish speaking *to God* from my heart, Rebekah approached *the spring* with her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew *water*. I said to her, "Please let me have a drink," 46and she quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, "Drink, and I will also give your camels some water." So I drank, and she made sure my camels had enough water. 47Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" And she said, "The daughter of Bethuel (son of Milcah, Nahor's wife)." That's when I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. 48Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Eternal, and blessed the God of my master Abraham because He led me in the right direction *and to the right place* in order to find the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son.

49Now then, if you intend to show loyal love and faithfulness to my master, tell me. If not, also tell me, so that I know which way to go from here.

Laban and Bethuel: 50*There is no doubt* this comes from the Eternal One. We cannot find fault or add anything to what you have said. 51Look, you've found Rebekah here. Take her, and go. Let her marry your master's son as the Eternal has intended.

52When Abraham's servant heard this, he bowed low to the ground before the Eternal. 53He brought out silver and gold jewelry and beautiful clothes, and *the servant* presented them to Rebekah. He also gave her brother and her mother expensive ornaments *to pay her bride-price*. 54Then he and the men who traveled with him ate and drank *heartily,* and they spent the night there. After everyone had risen the next morning, he asked his hosts for permission to leave and return to his master *with Rebekah.*

Laban and Rebekah's Mother: 55Allow Rebekah to remain with us just a little while longer—perhaps 10 days. After that, she may go.

Servant: 56Please don't delay my journey. Since the Eternal One has made me successful in my mission, grant me permission to leave and return to my master.

Laban and Rebekah's Mother: 57We'll call Rebekah *now* and ask her what she wants to do.

58They called for Rebekah.

Laban and Rebekah's Mother *(to Rebekah)***:** Are you willing to go with this man?

Rebekah: *Yes,* I will go.

59So the family *gathered and* sent Rebekah, their sister, along with her nurse to go with Abraham's servant and his men. 60They all blessed Rebekah, saying,

> May you, our *dear* sister,
> be blessed with thousands upon
> thousands of children,
> And may your descendants possess
> the cities of their enemies.

61At last Rebekah and her maidservants all went out, mounted the camels,

and followed Abraham's *trusted* servant *back toward Canaan*. This is how the servant found Rebekah and took her *to be Isaac's wife*.

62Meanwhile, Isaac had come back from a trip to Beer-lahai-roi and was living in the Negev. 63Isaac went outside toward evening to *take a walk in* the field. As he was deep in thought, he looked up and saw the camels coming *toward him*. 64*At the same time,* Rebekah looked up; and when she saw Isaac, she slipped down quickly from the camel 65and spoke *softly* to the servant.

Rebekah: Who is that man *over there,*
walking in the field to meet us?

Servant: *Ah,* it is my *young* master.

So she took her veil and covered herself *so as to be in proper attire to meet her future husband*. 66*When Isaac reached them,* the servant told him all of the *amazing* things that had happened. 67Then Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent. He took her as his wife *and slept with her,* and grew to love her *deeply*. In this way, Isaac found comfort in the wake of his mother's death.

25 *In time,* Abraham married another woman named Keturah. 2Keturah gave birth to *additional children*: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. Dedan's sons were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. 4Midian's sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All of these were Keturah's children *and grandchildren*. 5*In the end, though,* Abraham gave everything he owned to Isaac. 6To the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still alive. But then he sent them away to the east, far away from *what would now be his son* Isaac's *household*.

7Abraham lived a total of 175 years. 8By the time Abraham took his last breath and joined his ancestors in death, he had reached a ripe old age and had lived a full life. 9His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron (the son of Zohar the Hittite) to the east of Mamre. 10This was the field Abraham had purchased from the Hittites. Here he was buried with his wife Sarah *by his side*. 11After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled into his home at Beer-lahai-roi.

12This is *how* the lineage of *the two brothers progressed.* Ishmael, Abraham's son born to Hagar the Egyptian (Sarah's slave girl), 13fathered sons in this order: Nebaioth (his firstborn), Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 16These are the names of Ishmael's 12 sons; they became the princes of 12 villages and camps named after them. 17Ishmael lived to the age of 137. When he breathed his last and died, he joined his ancestors *in death.* 18His descendants settled into the regions from Havilah to Shur, opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. They lived *on the fringes of civilization,* at odds with all his relatives.

19This is the lineage of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham was of course his father, 20and Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean). 21Isaac prayed to the Eternal One on behalf of his wife because she wasn't becoming pregnant. The Eternal granted his prayer, and Rebekah conceived *after 20 years*. 22But the children she carried struggled *and fought* with each other until, *in great pain,* she exclaimed, "What is going on? Why is this happening to me?" *In frustration* she inquired of the Eternal One *why this civil war was occurring inside of her*.

Eternal One *(to Rebekah)*: 23"Two nations
are *growing* inside of your womb,
and the two peoples will be divided
in the future.
One will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the
younger.*

24When it was time for Rebekah to give birth, she saw that she was carrying twins. 25The first came out red—his entire body like a hairy blanket—so they named him Esau. 26His brother followed with his hand clutching Esau's heel, so they named him Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when Rebekah gave birth to the twins.

27When the boys grew up, *they could not have been more different*. Esau became a skillful hunter and preferred to be outdoors. Jacob, on the other hand, grew up to be a contemplative man, content to stay at home. 28Esau was Isaac's favorite

* 25:23 Romans 9:11-12

because he was fond of good meat, but Jacob was Rebekah's favorite.

29One day, while Jacob was cooking a stew *for dinner,* Esau came in from the field. He was tired and hungry.

Esau *(to Jacob)*: 30Please let me have some of that red stew you have there. I'm famished!

(That's why he was nicknamed Edom, *which means "red.")*

Jacob sees Esau's weakness and decides to take advantage of the situation.

Jacob: 31First, you have to sell me your birthright.

Esau: 32Look! I am about to die *of starvation*! What good is my birthright to me *if I am dead*?

Jacob: 33Swear to me first!

And so Esau swore to Jacob and handed over his rights as the firstborn son. 34Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank. When he was satisfied, Esau went his way *as if nothing had happened.* Esau treated his *valuable* birthright contemptuously.

26 Once again, a famine spread through the land, similar to the one that occurred in Abraham's time. Isaac went to *the land of* Gerar to *appeal to* King Abimelech of the Philistines. 2The Eternal appeared *in a vision* to Isaac.

Eternal One: Don't go down to Egypt, *Isaac. Instead* settle in the land I will show you. 3Live in this land as a foreigner, *but don't worry.* I will be there with you. I will put a blessing on you, and I will *one day* bestow this land on you and your descendants. *You can be assured that* I will honor the solemn vow I made to your father, Abraham: 4I will make your children and their children's children as numerous as the stars in the sky. *One day* I will give them all of these lands. Through your descendants all the peoples of the earth will discover *true* blessing,* 5because Abraham obeyed My voice, stayed loyal to Me, and kept My commands, statutes, and teachings.*

6So Isaac settled into *the land of* Gerar. 7When the men of the area asked him about his wife, he was afraid to say, "Rebekah is my wife," because he thought, "The men here might kill me in order to have her *for themselves.* She is *after all* an attractive woman." So Isaac said instead, "She is my sister." 8After they had lived there for a while, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of his window *one day* and saw Isaac *affectionately touching and* caressing his wife Rebekah. 9So Abimelech called Isaac *to his court.*

Abimelech: I see that she is your wife! Why did you say then, "She is my sister"?

Isaac: Because I thought I might die because of her!

Abimelech: 10*What's the matter with you?* What have you done to us? One of my people might easily have slept with your wife. Then you would have brought *great shame and* guilt upon me and my kingdom!

11(warning his people) Whoever *so much as* touches this man or his wife will be put to death.

► Isaac repeats the ruse his father used in Egypt and Gerar many years earlier. Abraham told another Abimelech (likely the father or grandfather of this Philistine king) that Sarah was his sister to avoid being killed. Isaac tries the same trick for the same reason but is soon found out. Many rulers in that day would have killed or severely punished a man for telling such tales and jeopardizing their reign. Somehow, however, Abraham and Isaac not only survive, but they grow rich from the experiences.

12Isaac *settled in and made a place for himself* in the land, sowing seeds and reaping one hundred times what he had planted that year. The Eternal One indeed put a blessing on him, 13and Isaac became very rich. He prospered more and more until he became enormously wealthy. 14He had so many flocks and herds and servants that

* 26:4 Acts 3:25 * 26:3-5 Genesis 22:16-18

the Philistines began to envy him. 15(*For spite,* some of the Philistines filled with dirt all of the wells his father's servants had dug in the days when Abraham was *living there.*) 16Even Abimelech *was threatened by his prosperity.*

Abimelech *(to Isaac)***:** *It is best you* leave our land. Your success has made you more powerful than we are. *You can't live here any longer.*

17Isaac left there, set up camp in the valley of Gerar, and decided to live there *for a while.*

18Isaac had to re-dig all of the water wells that his father had installed because the Philistines had filled them in after Abraham's death. He renamed them with the names his father had given them. 19But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found a *new* well of fresh water, 20the herders of Gerar began quarreling with Isaac's herders.

Herders of Gerar: This water is ours!

So Isaac named this well Esek, *which means "contention,"* because of the arguments he had with the herders. 21Isaac's men dug another well, and the water wars started again. So Isaac called it Sitnah, *which means "enmity."* 22Isaac *didn't want any more trouble, so he* moved on from there and dug yet another well. *At last,* they didn't quarrel over this one, so Isaac named this well Rehoboth, *which means "wide spaces."*

Isaac *(explaining)***:** Now the Eternal One has provided this *wide* space for us. We will become *numerous and* prosperous in this land.

23From there, Isaac traveled to Beersheba. 24The night they arrived, the Eternal One appeared to him.

Eternal One: I am the God of your father, Abraham. Don't be afraid because I am there with you. I will bless you with many descendants according to the promise I made to My servant, Abraham.

25*Inspired by this vision,* Isaac built an altar at that place. He invoked the name of the Eternal *and sacrificed to Him* there, pitched his tent, and directed his servants to dig a well.

26One day Abimelech came from Gerar to see him along with Ahuzzath, his advisor, and Phicol, the commander of his army.

Isaac: 27Why are you coming to see me? *You made it clear that* you hate me and want me banished from your kingdom.

Abimelech and his Advisors: 28It is not hard to see that the Eternal One is with you. So we agreed *among ourselves that it is in our best interests* for us to enter into a binding treaty with you. Let us make a covenant 29that you would *pledge to* do us no harm, just as we have not harmed you. We have behaved honorably toward you and sent you away in peace. You clearly have the hand of the Eternal resting on you.

Isaac agreed to take the oath. 30He prepared them a feast, and they all ate and drank. 31In the morning, they got up early and exchanged oaths. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left in peace. 32That very same day, Isaac's servants came and *excitedly* told him about a *new* well they had dug.

Servants: We found water!

33Isaac named this well Shibah, *which means "oath,"* and that's why the name of the city there is called Beersheba to this day.

34Meanwhile Esau (Isaac's son) was turning 40. He married Judith (the daughter of Beeri the Hittite) and also Basemath (the daughter of Elon the Hittite). 35They would make life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah.

27 When Isaac grew old, his eyes were so bad he could see only shadows. He called his eldest son, Esau, *to his side.*

Isaac: My son.

Esau: I'm here.

Isaac: 2You see that I am growing old now. I may die any day. 3Take your *hunting* weaponry—your quiver and your bow—and go out to the field and hunt game for me. 4Then prepare for me some savory food, just the way I like it. Bring it to me to eat so that I may speak a blessing over you before I die.

5Rebekah was listening *at the doorway* as
Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau
went into the field to hunt for game to
bring to his father, 6Rebekah called her
son Jacob.

Rebekah: I heard your father say to your
brother Esau, 7"Bring me game and pre-
pare for me some savory food to eat, so
I can bless you before the Eternal before
I die." 8My son, listen and do what I tell
you: 9Go to the flock, and bring me two
of the best young goats. I can prepare the
savory food for your father from them. *I*
know just how he likes it. 10Then you take
it to your father to eat so that he speaks
a blessing over you before he dies.

Jacob *(to Rebekah, his mother)***:** 11Look, my
brother Esau is a hairy man, and I have
smooth skin. 12If father *reaches out and*
touches me, he'll *figure it out and* think
I'm mocking him. Then I'll bring a curse
upon myself instead of a blessing!

Rebekah: 13*If that happens,* then let the
curse be on me and not you. Just listen
to me. Go, and get them for me.

14Jacob went and brought the young goats
to his mother, who prepared a mouth-
watering meal just as his father liked it.
15Then Rebekah took the best clothes of
her older son Esau, which were with her
in the house, and she put them on her
younger son Jacob. 16She affixed the skins
of the young goats onto the back of his
hands and on the smooth part of his neck.
17Then she handed him the delicious food
and the *fresh* bread she had prepared.
18Jacob went in to his father.

Jacob: My father.

Isaac: I'm here. Who are you, my son?

Jacob: 19I'm Esau, your firstborn *son.* I
have done as you asked. Now sit up and
eat the game I have brought for you so
that you can speak a blessing over me.

Isaac: 20How did you manage *to hunt the*
game and cook the food so quickly, my son?

Jacob: The Eternal One, your God, gave
me success today.

Isaac: 21Please come over here so I can
feel you, my son, so that I know it is
really you, Esau.

22So Jacob went over to his father, and
Isaac *reached out* and felt *his hands. He*
was a bit confused.

Isaac: Your voice sounds like Jacob's, but
your hands feel like Esau's.

23Because of the *young goat's* fur on *the*
back of his hands, his father did not recog-
nize him, and so Isaac proceeded to bless
Jacob *instead of Esau.*

Isaac: 24Are you really my son, Esau?

Jacob: I am.

Isaac: 25Then bring the food to me, and
I'll eat my son's game and give you my
blessing.

Jacob brought Isaac the food, and Isaac
ate it. Then Jacob brought him some wine
to drink. 26When he finished it, his father,
Isaac, told him *to approach.*

Isaac: Please come near and kiss me,
my son.

27Jacob went over and kissed his father,
and Isaac breathed in the scent of *the*
outdoors on Esau's clothes. Then he gave
Jacob the blessing, *passing on the promise*
of God's covenant.

Isaac: Ah, the smell of my son, *Esau,*
is like the smell of a field the
Eternal One has blessed.
28*Therefore,* may God grant you gentle
showers from heaven
and the fertile soils of the earth,
and rich harvests of grain and wine.
29May *many* peoples *come and* serve you,
and may nations bow down to you.
May you be the master of your
brothers,
and may your mother's sons *all* bow
down before you.
May anyone who curses you be cursed,
and may everyone who blesses you
be blessed!

30Now as soon as Isaac had finished bless-
ing Jacob and when Jacob had barely left
his father, his brother Esau returned from
hunting. 31He had also prepared a sumptu-
ous meal and brought it to his father.

Esau: Father, sit up now and eat the game
I have brought for you, so that you can
speak a blessing over me.

Isaac: 32Who are you?

Esau: I am your son, Esau, your firstborn!

33*It began to dawn on Isaac what had happened.* Then Isaac began trembling violently.

Isaac: Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me to eat before you came? I have already given him my blessing! *It's now too late.* He has already received the blessing.

34When Esau realized what happened, he cried out in an angry, loud, and bitter voice.

Esau: Bless me—me also—Father!

Isaac: 35*I cannot my son.* Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.

Esau: 36"Jacob" is certainly the right name for him! *He has once again grabbed me by the heels!* He has deceived me now two times. He took away my birthright, and now he has taken away my blessing! Have you no blessing reserved for me as well?

Isaac: 37Understand that I have already made him your master. I have declared all of his brothers are subject to him. I have *granted him prosperity,* sustained him with grain and wine. What then could I possibly do for you, my son?

Esau: 38Have you only one blessing, Father? Bless me—me also—Father!

Esau *realized the futility of his pleas. He* raised his voice, and he cried pitiably.
39Isaac spoke over him *the only blessing he thought he could*:

Isaac: You will make your home far from
the richness of the earth,
far away from the gentle showers of
heaven above.
40You will live by your sword,
and you will serve your brother.
But when you grow restless *to be free,*
you will break his yoke from your
neck.

41Esau hated Jacob *with a fury,* because his brother now carried the blessing his father meant for him.

Esau *(to himself)***:** The days of mourning for my father are approaching. When he has died, I will kill my brother, Jacob.

42But someone overheard him speaking of this and informed Rebekah. She called for Jacob, her younger son, *and told him to flee.*

Rebekah *(to Jacob)***:** Listen to me. Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. 43Do as I say. Get up and go to my brother Laban's house in Haran. 44Stay with him for a while until your brother has calmed down.
45Wait until his anger against you subsides and he forgets what you've done to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back. I don't want to lose both of you—*one to death and one to punishing exile*—in one day!

Rebekah comes up with a plan to send Jacob away. But it must look like Isaac's idea.

46Rebekah then went to Isaac *complaining about Esau's Hittite wives.*

Rebekah *(to Isaac)***:** These Hittite women *Esau is married to* are making my life miserable. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like one of these, a woman from here in this land, *what good can come of that?* Why should I even go on living?

28 Isaac called Jacob to him, blessed him again, and instructed him.

Isaac: You are not to marry one of the Canaanite women. 2Get up *and pack your things,* go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel (your mother's father), and find a wife there among Laban's daughters. (Laban is your mother's brother.) 3May the All-Powerful God* bless you, make you fruitful, and multiply your descendants so that you will give rise to nation after nation! 4May God give to you and to your children *in this inheritance* all of the blessings of Abraham, so that you might *someday* possess the land where you now live as a foreigner—a land that was promised by God to Abraham.

► When the Lord told Abraham to leave Haran and travel to Canaan,

* 28:3 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

most of his relatives remained in Northern Mesopotamia in towns between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The area southwest of Haran becomes known as Paddan-aram (the plain of Aram). Abraham and some of the other patriarchs continue to see this land and its people as their own. This is why Jacob and his family are known as Arameans (Deuteronomy 26:5).

5So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean and brother of Rebekah (Jacob and Esau's mother).

6Now Esau saw that *his father,* Isaac, had *again* blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to find a wife there, instructing him not to marry any of the Canaanite women. 7He learned, too, that Jacob had gone there just as his father and mother both wanted. 8So, realizing his father did not like his Canaanite wives, 9Esau went to see Ishmael and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael (Abraham's other son) and the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the *two* others.

10Meanwhile Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. 11As dusk approached *one day,* he came to a place where he could stay for the night. He saw stones *scattered* all around and put one of them under his head; then he lay down to sleep. 12*During the night, God gave* him a dream. He saw a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to the heavens. He saw some messengers of God ascending and descending on it. 13At the very top stood the Eternal One.

Eternal One: I am the Eternal One, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are now lying is the land I *have promised to* give to you and your descendants. 14Your descendants will be as many as there are specks of dust on the earth. You will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. Through your descendants, all the families of the earth will find true blessing. 15Know I am with you, and I will watch over you no matter where you go. *One day* I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all I have promised you.

► Dreams are a bit mysterious. There are many theories about what dreams are and why we dream, but no one knows for sure. What is sure is that at times in the Scriptures God uses dreams to reveal Himself to His covenant partners. Certainly not everyone has revelatory dreams, and not all dreams are revelatory. But sometimes, on special occasions, when it suits God's purposes, dreams can be a vehicle to see, hear, and experience reality as God knows it. It happens here with Jacob, who has not yet fully embraced the Eternal as his God; and it continues to happen in both testaments with Joseph, Daniel, Peter, and others.

16*The dream ended, and* Jacob woke up from his sleep.

Jacob *(to himself)***:** There is no doubt in my mind that the Eternal One is in this place—and I didn't even know it!

17*But even as he said this,* a bit of fear came over him.

Jacob: This place is absolutely awesome! It can be none other than the house of God and the gateway into heaven!

18So early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had put under his head, set it up as a pillar, and then poured oil on top of it *to commemorate his experience with God.* 19He named that place Bethel, *which means "house of God."* Before that the name of the city had been called Luz. 20Then Jacob made a vow.

Jacob: If God is going to be with me, keeping me *safe* on this journey and giving me bread to eat and clothing to wear 21so that I return to my father's house in peace, then the Eternal will be my God. 22And this stone I have made into a pillar will be *the first stone laid in* God's house. And *Lord,* of everything You give me, I will give one-tenth always back to You!

29 Jacob continued on his journey until he came to the land of the people *who lived* in the east.

2As he approached, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying beside it because the flocks were used to being watered from the well. The stone on the well's mouth was large; 3and when all of the flocks were gathered, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, give water to the sheep, and then roll the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well. 4Jacob spoke to them *as he approached.*

Jacob *(to the shepherds)***:** Brothers, where do you come from?

Shepherds: We are from Haran.

Jacob: 5Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?

Shepherds: We do.

Jacob: 6Is he well?

Shepherds: Yes, he is. Look, here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep right now.

Jacob: 7Look, it's still broad daylight, too early to gather the livestock together *for the evening. Why don't you* water the sheep and take them out to *graze in the* pasture?

Shepherds: 8We can't—not until all of the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well. Then we water the sheep.

9While Jacob was still speaking to the shepherds, Rachel came with her father's sheep for she, too, was a shepherd. 10Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, along with Laban's sheep, he went up *to the well,* rolled the stone from the well's mouth *by himself,* and watered Laban's flock. 11Then Jacob greeted Rachel with a kiss and cried *for joy.* 12Jacob told Rachel he was her father's relative—Rebekah's son—and she ran and told her father.

13When Laban heard the news *about the arrival* of his sister's son, Jacob, he ran to meet him. He hugged him and kissed him, and he brought Jacob to his house. Jacob told Laban everything.

Laban: 14You are surely my flesh and bone!

And Jacob stayed with Laban for a month *and helped out with all his livestock.*

15Then Laban spoke one day to Jacob.

Laban: Just because you are my relative, that doesn't mean you should be working for me for nothing! Tell me what I can pay you.

16Now Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah, and her younger sister was Rachel. 17There was no brightness to Leah's eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful shape and was lovely to look at. 18Jacob truly loved Rachel.

Since Jacob has no money to pay a bride-price, he offers a creative solution to the problem.

Jacob: *I'll make a deal with you.* I'll serve you for seven years in exchange for *the hand of* your younger daughter Rachel *in marriage.*

Laban: 19*Agreed.* I'd rather you have her than any other man I know. You may stay here *and work.*

20So Jacob served *Laban for* seven years in exchange for Rachel. The years *went by quickly and* seemed to him to be only a few days because of the *immense* love he had for her.

21When the time came, Jacob approached Laban.

Jacob: I have now completed seven years of work for you. *I ask you now to* give me my wife so that I may consummate my marriage.

22So Laban gathered together all of the people in the area and prepared a *great* feast. 23But in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob slept with her *thinking she was Rachel.* 24Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant. 25When morning came, Jacob realized Leah was the one *with him in the marriage bed.*

Jacob: What have you done to me? Did we not have a deal—*seven years of* labor in exchange for *your daughter* Rachel? Why have you deceived me?

Laban: 26That isn't something we do here in this country—giving the younger daughter in marriage before the first-born. 27If you complete this wedding week *with Leah,* then I will also give you

Rachel. But in return, you must serve me another seven years.

Wedding celebrations last seven days, plenty of time for Leah to become pregnant with Laban's first grandchild.

28Jacob agreed and completed his week with Leah. And then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel in marriage. 29Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant. 30Then Jacob also slept with Rachel, and he clearly loved Rachel more than Leah. *As agreed,* he served Laban for another seven years.

31When the Eternal One saw how Leah was unloved, He made her fertile, but Rachel remained barren. 32Leah conceived and gave birth to a son, and she named him Reuben.

Leah: Because the Eternal One has been compassionate to me in my painful predicament, *allowing me to bear this child,* surely now my husband will love me.

33*In time,* she conceived again and gave birth to another son.

Leah: Because the Eternal One has heard I am unloved, He has given me this son too.

So Leah named the *second* son Simeon. 34Then she conceived *for the third time* and gave birth to her *third* son.

Leah: Surely now my husband will be more attached to me, because I have given him three sons.

Leah named the third son Levi. 35And once again, she conceived and gave birth to her *fourth* son.

Leah: This time I will praise the Eternal One!

So Leah named this son Judah. After Judah, Leah didn't have any more children *for a while.*

30 When Rachel realized she couldn't have Jacob's children, she grew envious of her sister and complained to Jacob.

Rachel: I'll just die if you don't give me children!

2Jacob became angry with Rachel.

Jacob: Am I God? He's the One responsible for you not getting pregnant, *not me!*

Rachel: 3Here's my servant, Bilhah. Sleep with her so she can be a surrogate for me. I'll have my children through her.

► What Rachel suggests is not at all improper for her time. As you may recall, Sarah and Abraham had a similar situation with Hagar (16:1-4). Custom allows for these kinds of arrangements, just as technology today allows for an infertile woman to have a child through a surrogate. Any child born to Bilhah is regarded as Rachel's, because she has the right to name the child. As we have seen, the naming of a child carries great significance.

4So she gave Jacob her servant Bilhah to be another one of his wives, and Jacob slept with her. 5Bilhah conceived and gave birth to Jacob's son.

Rachel: 6God has absolved me. He has heard my plea and has given me a son *after all*!

So this is why Rachel named her son Dan. 7Rachel's servant Bilhah *soon* conceived again and gave birth to a second son for Jacob.

Rachel: 8I have had to wrestle with my *own* sister *as I've wrestled with God,* but I have prevailed.

So Rachel named this son Naphtali.

9When it seemed Leah was not going to have any more children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob to be a wife *as well.* 10So Leah's servant Zilpah gave birth to a son for Jacob.

Leah: 11Good fortune has arrived!

This is why she named him Gad.

12Then Leah's servant Zilpah gave birth to a second son for Jacob. 13Leah named him Asher *to express her joy.*

Leah: I am so happy! All of the women can see how happy I am!

14When it came time to harvest the wheat, Reuben went out and found some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel *heard about this and* approached her sister.

Rachel: Would you please give me some of the mandrakes your son found?

Leah: 15You know it is no small matter that you've stolen *the attentions of* my husband. Now you want my son's mandrakes too?

Rachel: Then he can sleep with you tonight in exchange for *some of* your son's mandrakes!

16So when Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him.

Leah: Tonight you must sleep with me because I have hired you *for a good price*—some of my son's mandrakes.

So he slept with her that night. 17God listened to Leah *and showed her His favor,* and *after many years* she again conceived and gave birth to her fifth son for Jacob.

Leah: 18God has paid me my wages, since I gave my servant to my husband.

This is why she named her son Issachar.
19And *God's favor didn't stop with him;* Leah conceived again and gave birth to a sixth son for Jacob.

Leah: 20God has given me a plentiful gift. Now my husband will surely honor me, because I have given him six sons.

This is why she named her sixth son Zebulun. 21And *at last* after that, she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.
22Then God remembered Rachel. He heard her *prayer* and made her fertile. 23She conceived and gave birth to her *first* son.

Rachel: God has taken away my shame.

24She decided to name him Joseph.

Rachel: May the Eternal One add to me another son!

25-26After Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob asked Laban *for release.*

Jacob: It's time for me to return home, to my own people and country. Please release me with my wives and my children. I have worked for you *a long time* to obtain them, and you know how well I have served you.

Laban: 27If you look upon me with favor, please stay here. You are a good omen. The Eternal One has blessed me because of you. 28Name your price, and I will give it *to you.*

Jacob: 29You know how well I have served you. You have seen your livestock flourish *and your herds grow* under my supervision. 30You had little before I arrived, but your wealth has increased *significantly* since the Eternal One has blessed you in whatever I did *for you.* But now, when will it be time for me to provide for my own household?

Laban: 31What do you want me to give you?

Jacob: I don't want you to give me anything. I only ask for one favor. Do this for me, and I'll keep on feeding and taking care of your flocks. 32Let me go through the flock today and put aside *for myself* every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and also the spotted and speckled goats, and this is how you can pay me. 33My honesty will be evident when you come to check on me. If you find one lamb or goat *among my flocks* that isn't speckled, spotted, or black, then you may count it as stolen.

Laban: 34Agreed. Do this exactly as you have said.

35But that day, Laban *secretly* removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted—every one with any white on it at all—and every lamb that was black. He put them under the watch of his sons. 36Then he set off *with his sons and those mottled animals* a three-day distance away from Jacob *to make sure the flocks would stay separated.* Meanwhile Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.

Jacob soon figures out what Laban has done. The deceiver has once again been deceived.

[37]But Jacob cut some fresh branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees; and he striped off the bark in streaks exposing the white wood beneath. [38]He set the striped branches in front of the flocks in the troughs—the water troughs, that is—where they came to drink. Since they would mate when they came to drink, [39]the flocks mated in front of the branches and produced *young that were* striped, speckled, and spotted. [40]Jacob separated these *newly born* lambs from Laban's flock, and *when they mated again* he faced Laban's animals toward the striped and black animals. He kept his own droves separate from Laban's. This is how he increased his own flock. [41]Whenever the stronger *females* of the flock were ready to mate, Jacob laid the striped branches in the troughs right in front of them, so that they would breed among them. [42]But when he saw the feebler animals *ready to mate,* he didn't lay the rods out so that in the end, the feebler of the animals became Laban's and the stronger became Jacob's. [43]In this way, Jacob grew extremely rich, and he ended up with very large flocks, male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys too.

► Jacob, the heel-catcher, has met a kindred spirit. Both men are deceivers and manipulators. Both do whatever they can to get the better of the other. It just comes naturally. Laban tricks Jacob first by marrying him to Leah before Rachel. Then, after Jacob and he agree on a clear strategy to separate the flocks, Laban goes behind his back and takes away the animals that rightfully belong to Jacob. But Jacob is crafty, too, and he devises a way to produce striped, speckled, and spotted animals from Laban's flocks. After the many years of service, Jacob finally outwits Laban and gains a more valuable flock in the process. Deception may work for a while, but there are dire consequences that come with it. Jacob's situation is about to change, and it isn't long before his deceptive days are behind him.

31 *As time went on,* Jacob overheard what Laban's sons were saying *about him.*

Laban's Sons: Jacob has taken everything that belonged to our father; he gained all his wealth from *taking advantage of* him.

[2]And Jacob also noticed a change in how Laban looked at him and treated him. He seemed colder toward him than before.

Eternal One *(to Jacob)*: [3]*You must now* return to the land of your ancestors and to your own family. I will be with you *always.*

[4]So Jacob called his wives Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field where his flock was grazing.

Jacob: [5]I notice your father's attitude toward me has changed; he doesn't regard me with the same respect as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. [6]You *both* know *how well* I have served your father—with all my strength. [7]However your father cheated me by changing *the terms of* my salary 10 times, but *beyond that my* God did not allow him to harm me. [8]If your father said, "The speckled will be your payment," then all of the flock became speckled; and if he said, "the striped will be your payment," then all of the flock became striped. [9]In this way, God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me. [10]During the mating season of the flock, I once paid attention to a dream, and in the dream, I saw the male goats that mated with the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled. [11]Then God's messenger said to me in the dream, "Jacob!" and I answered, "I'm here." [12]And the messenger said, "Look up right now, and see all of the goats that are mating with the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled because I have noticed everything Laban is doing to you. [13]I am the God of Bethel, the place where you poured oil on a pillar and made a vow to Me.* Now get up, leave this land, and return to the land where you were born."

Rachel and Leah: [14]Is there any inheritance at all left for us from our father's house? [15]He regards us as foreigners *now that we've married you.* He sold us *in*

* 31:13 Genesis 28:18

exchange for your years of labor, and he has been using up all of the money *that should have been ours.* 16All of the property God has taken from our father *and given to you actually* belongs to us and to our children *anyway*! So do whatever God said to do.

17So Jacob got up, and he put his children and his wives on camels *for the journey.* 18He rounded up all of his livestock and all of the property he had gained, including the livestock he had acquired in Paddan-aram, and he began to drive them to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. 19*Meanwhile* Laban had gone off to shear his sheep. While he was out, Rachel stole her father's household idols. 20And Jacob *likewise* deceived Laban the Aramean by hiding from him the fact that he was leaving. 21He just left quickly with everything he had. He crossed the Euphrates River and set pace *south* toward the hill country of Gilead.

22Three days later, Laban was told that Jacob had left. 23So he gathered *a group of* his relatives, and together they pursued him for seven days until they closed in on Jacob in the hill country of Gilead. 24Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream during the night with a message.

Eternal One: Be careful what you say and do to Jacob.

25Laban caught up to Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent *and set up camp* in the hill country; and Laban, along with his relatives, also camped in the hill country of Gilead. *Laban went out to meet Jacob.*

Laban *(to Jacob)***:** 26What have you done, deceiving me and carrying off my daughters as if they were your prisoners of war? 27Why did you run out on me and *try to* trick me? Why didn't you just tell me *you were going*? I would have sent you off with celebration and songs, with the *joyful* sounds of the tambourine and lyre. 28And why didn't you even allow me to kiss my daughters and grandchildren good-bye? What you have done is foolish. 29It is *certainly* in my power to punish you, but the God of your father *Isaac* spoke to me last night and said, "Be careful what you say and do to Jacob." 30Now you have left because you missed your father's household—*I can understand that*—but why did you have to steal my *family* gods?

Jacob *(answering Laban)***:** 31*I left* because I was afraid, and because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. 32But *I pledge to you that* anyone who stole your gods will not live. *I certainly did not take them.* Here in the presence of all of our relatives, *search the camp* and let's see if anything I have is yours. If there is, you can take it back!

Of course, Jacob had no idea Rachel had stolen the idols.

33So Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two female servants' tent; *he searched,* but he did not find them. Then he came out of Leah's tent and into Rachel's. 34Now Rachel had taken the household gods and concealed them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. Laban *looked around and* felt everything in the tent, but he did not find them.

Rachel *(to her father)***:** 35Please don't be angry that I cannot get up for you, sir, but I am in the midst of my "time of month."

Rachel has learned the art of deception well from her father and her husband.

So Laban searched, but he did not find the household gods.

36When Jacob *saw that Laban's search had come up empty, he* became angry and confronted Laban.

Jacob: What is my offense? What have I done that is so wicked to make you pursue me like a common criminal? 37You searched through all of my things, and what have you found that belonged to you? *Whatever it is,* set it down here between your family and mine, and they can decide whose it is. 38I've worked for you for 20 years. Your ewes and your female goats have never miscarried *under my care.* I have never feasted on any of the rams in your flocks. 39When wild animals attacked, I didn't bring the carcass to you *to deal with*; I bore the cost myself. You required me to cover any losses, whether the animals were stolen by day or night, *and I did so.* 40There I was—*at your service*—during the day I was hounded by heat; during the night I was cold and couldn't get a good night's sleep. 41For 20 years, I have been in your household. I served you 14 of those years in return for your two

daughters, and six years for your flock. And you have altered my payment 10 times. 42If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God knows my plight and how hard I've labored for you, and it was He who reprimanded you last night!

Laban: 43The daughters *you speak of* are my daughters; the children are my grandchildren; the flocks are my flocks; all you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine and the children from their wombs? 44Come, let's make a covenant between us, you and me, and let there be a witness to our agreement.

45So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46He told his relatives to gather up more stones. So they all took stones and made a *large* pile of them. Then they ate there by the pile. 47Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha *(Aramaic for "witness-pile")* and Jacob called it Galeed *(Hebrew for "witness-pile")*.

Laban: 48This pile *of stones* stands as a witness to the agreement we have made today.

This is why he called it Galeed. 49The pillar was called Mizpah, *which means "watch post."*

Laban: May the Eternal One watch us when we are away from one another. 50If you *in any way* mistreat my daughters or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, even though no one else is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me.

51See this pile *of stones* and this pillar which I have set between us. 52This pile is a witness and this pillar is a witness that I will not pass beyond this pile *of stones* to harm you, and you will not pass beyond this pile and this pillar to harm me. 53May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor (the God of their father *Terah*) serve as judge between us.

► This is no sweet farewell. It is a parting of the ways between two men who don't trust one another. Both are tricksters, but they are family. It is probably best from now on if they avoid each other completely.

So Jacob swore an oath on the Fear of Isaac, his father; 54and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the hill there and called all of his relatives together to eat bread. And they all ate bread and spent the *rest of the* night in the hill country. 55Early the next morning, Laban got up, kissed his grandchildren and his daughters, and blessed them; and then he left and returned home.

32 Jacob went on his way as well. As he went, messengers of God met him *along the way*. 2When Jacob saw them, he acknowledged that this was God's camp, so he named that place Mahanaim, *which means "two camps."* 3-4Jacob *knew he* had to pass by the territory of Edom where his brother Esau lived in the land of Seir. He sent messengers ahead with a message for Esau.

Jacob *(to his messengers)***:** This is what I want you to say to my master Esau: "Your servant Jacob says this: 'I have lived with Laban as a foreigner and stayed *there working for him* until now. 5I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female slaves. I have sent my messengers to inform you, my master, of all this so that I might regain your trust and favor.'"

6The messengers *went out to Esau and then* returned to Jacob *with a troubling report*.

Messengers: We went to your brother Esau *and gave him your message*. He is coming to meet you, but 400 men are with him.

7When Jacob heard *their report*, he was afraid and *extremely* distressed. He divided up the people who were with him, the flocks, the herds, and the camels into two camps, 8thinking, "If Esau comes to one camp and crushes it, at least then the other might escape." 9Then Jacob prayed.

Jacob: O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Eternal One who said to me, "*You must now* return to the land of your ancestors and to your own family. I will make good things

Jacob has come to the end of himself. He has struggled with his brother and the rest of his family for his entire life. He was born a "heel-catcher," a deceiver, and he lived the part well. But he can't go on like this any longer. With Esau on his way, by this time tomorrow he could well be dead and his family killed or captured. He desperately needs God's blessing and protection, so he grieves and agonizes through the night. Through stabbing pain Jacob demands a blessing from his unknown assailant, but he cannot receive it until he confesses his name. Once he does, his name is changed. No longer is he known as Jacob; from now on he is "Israel," he who wrestles with God. This is the turning point in Jacob's life. He lays aside his former self and takes up a new name, a new identity. If Jacob is to be the one to carry on God's covenant and the source of universal blessing, he has to change.

happen for you." 10*I know* I am not worthy *of even a little* of all of the loyal love and faithfulness You have shown to me, Your servant. *You have already blessed me* because I *left home and* crossed the Jordan with nothing except my staff. Now I have grown into two large camps. 11Rescue me now, please, from the hand of my brother, from the grip of Esau. I am afraid that he may come and crush us all, the children alongside their mothers. 12*Remember* You told me, "I will make good things happen for you and make your descendants as many as the *grains of* sand on the shores, which are too numerous to count."

And Jacob prayed on. 13He spent the night there, and from his possessions he prepared a gift for his brother Esau: 14200 female goats and 20 male goats, 200 female sheep and 20 rams, 1530 milk camels and their colts, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys. 16*When he had rounded them up,* he made *various* servants responsible for driving each herd. He gave them instructions.

Jacob: Travel on ahead of me, and put some distance between each herd.

17(to the leader) When Esau, my brother, meets you and asks you, "To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose herds are these?" 18then say, "They belong to your servant, Jacob, and are a gift sent to my master, Esau. Jacob is coming along behind us."

19Jacob instructed *those responsible for* the second and third herds, as well as those who followed behind *to help*:

Jacob: When you meet Esau, say the same thing these other herdsman have said, 20and make sure you tell him, "Your servant Jacob is coming along behind us."

(to himself) I might be able to appease Esau with these gifts. He will see them before he sees me. When I see his face, I'll know whether he'll accept *and forgive* me.

21So the gifts were driven on ahead, and he stayed the night in the camp, *waiting.*

22*Later* that same night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his 11 children; and he crossed the Jabbok River. 23He sent them all *ahead* across the stream along with everything he had; 24but Jacob *stayed behind,* left alone *in his distress and doubt. In the twilight of his anguish,* an *unknown* man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25When the man saw he was not winning the battle with Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was thrown out of joint as he continued to wrestle with him.

Man: 26Let me go; the dawn is breaking.

Jacob: I will not let you go unless you bless me.

Man: 27What's your name?

Jacob: Jacob.

Man: 28You will no longer go by the name Jacob. From now on, *your name will be* Israel because you have wrestled with God and humanity, and you have prevailed.

Jacob: 29Please, tell me your name.

Man: Why do you ask what my name is?

Right then and right there the man blessed Jacob. 30So Jacob called the place Peniel because as he said, "I have come face to face with God, and yet my life was spared." 31The sun began to rise as Jacob passed by Penuel, limping because of his *dislocated* hip. 32And to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached near the hip socket *of any animal,* since that is where God struck Jacob when He dislocated his hip.

33 Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and 400 men were with him. Jacob quickly divided the children among Leah and Rachel and their two servants. 2He put the female servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3He himself went on ahead of them, and he bowed to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. 4But Esau ran to meet him. He embraced Jacob, kissed his neck, and they both cried. 5Esau looked up and saw the women and children.

Esau: Who are these people with you?

Jacob: These are the children God has graciously given your servant.

6Then the female servants came closer, along with their children, and they bowed down. 7Leah did likewise; she and her children approached and bowed down. Finally Joseph and Rachel came forward, and they bowed down *as well.*

Esau: 8What was your intent in sending all of your men and herds ahead of you?

Jacob: *I hope* to find favor with you, my master.

Esau: 9I have enough, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.

Jacob expects trouble from Esau, but he finds the pain of the past healed. Now Esau wants nothing from his brother.

Jacob: 10No, please. If I have found favor with you *after all these years,* please accept the gifts I offer. Seeing your face *again* is like seeing the face of God, so graciously *and warmly* have you welcomed me. 11Please accept the blessing I bring. God has graciously provided for me *and my family*. I have everything I could want.

Jacob kept insisting that Esau accept the gift. Finally he did.

Esau: 12Now let's be on our way, and I will walk on ahead of you.

Jacob: 13My master knows that the children are very small and the nursing flocks and herds are under my care. If they are driven too hard for even one day, I'm afraid I'll lose all the flocks. 14Please, my master, go on ahead of me, and I will keep on at a slower pace—the pace of the animals up ahead and the children—until I come to you in Seir.

Esau: 15Let me leave some of my people to accompany you.

Jacob: Why go to all that trouble? *You have done enough already.* Just let me find favor with my master.

16Esau agreed and set out that day to go back to Seir. 17But Jacob journeyed *instead* to Succoth, and he built himself a house there and put up some shelters for his cattle. That's why this place is called Succoth, *which means "shelters."*

18At last Jacob came to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. Overall it had been a safe *and peaceful* journey from Paddan-aram. He camped outside of the city 19and purchased the land on which he had pitched his tent from the sons of Hamor (who was Shechem's father) for one hundred pieces of money. 20And there also he built an altar he called El-Elohe-Israel, *which means "God, the God of Israel."*

34 One day Dinah, Leah and Jacob's daughter, went out to visit some of the women who lived in the land. 2But when Shechem (son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region) saw Dinah, he grabbed her and raped her. 3His soul was drawn to Dinah, Jacob's daughter. He fell in love with her and spoke tenderly to her. 4Shechem went then and spoke with his father, Hamor.

Shechem: *I need you to* arrange for this girl to be my wife.

5Now Jacob found out that Shechem had dishonored *and raped* his daughter,

Dinah, but *at the time,* all of his sons were out in the field *working* with the livestock. So Jacob *stayed calm and* did not react until they came back. 6Meanwhile Hamor, Shechem's father, had come to speak with Jacob *to arrange a marriage*. 7When news of the attack reached Jacob's sons, they came in from the field. The *young* men were appalled and extremely angry because Shechem had done such a horrible thing in Israel by raping Jacob's daughter. Something like this should never happen.

8Hamor tried speaking with them.

Hamor: My son's soul longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. 9*In fact,* let's intermarry our families. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10We'll live together. The entire land will be open to you. You can live on it, trade on it, and buy property on it.

Shechem *(to Jacob and his sons)*: 11Please, let me find my way into your favor! Whatever you ask, I will give it to you. 12Set the bride-price and gift as high as you like, and I will give you whatever it takes. Just please allow me to marry the young woman.

13Jacob's sons *were still angry* that Shechem had defiled their sister Dinah, so they answered him and his father Hamor deceitfully.

Jacob's Sons: 14We can't agree to this arrangement: to give our sister to someone who isn't circumcised would bring shame on all of us. 15We will consent to allow you *to marry our sister* on one condition: you must be *circumcised* as the rest of us have been. Every male among you must be circumcised.* 16Then we will give our daughters to you and will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you *in peace* and become one people. 17But if you don't agree to this condition and be circumcised, then we will take our sister* and go.

18Hamor and his son Shechem were willing to go along with the demand, 19and the young man wasted no time in fulfilling the requirement since he was so taken with Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored man in all of his family, 20so Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of the city and addressed all of the men.

Hamor and Shechem *(to the men of the city)*: 21These men are peaceful and friendly to us, so let's allow them to live in the land and trade in it. You see this land is large enough for them *too*. Let's take their daughters in marriage, and let's give them our daughters. 22They will agree to live among us *in peace* and become one people on one condition: every male among us must be circumcised, just as they already are. 23Wouldn't we have much to gain—their livestock, property, and animals? Let's agree to their condition, and they will live among us *and increase the vitality of our city*.

24So everyone who passed by the city gate listened to Hamor and his son, Shechem, and they all were circumcised—every single man who went out the city gates *that day*. 25Three days later, when the men of the city were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons (Dinah's brothers Simeon and Levi) took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting *people of the* city, killing all of the men. 26They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword as well; they took Dinah out of Shechem's house—*where she had remained during the negotiations*—and then went away. 27Jacob's *other* sons saw those who were killed, and they plundered the city. *All of this was done in anger,* because it was here that their sister had been *raped and the family* dishonored. 28They took all of the flocks, herds, donkeys, and whatever was in the city and the field. 29All of their wealth, all of their children, and all of their wives—everything they could find in the houses—they plundered and made it their own.

Jacob *(reacting to Simeon and Levi)*: 30You have brought *a lot of* trouble to me. The people of this land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, can smell the stink *of my sons' actions*. I don't have huge armies of men *to defend us*. If they all *decide to* gather against me and attack me, I will be destroyed along with my *entire* household.

Simeon and Levi: 31Would you rather have our sister treated as a whore?

* 34:15 Genesis 17:10 * 34:17 Hebrew manuscripts read, "our daughter."

► Genesis is filled with moral failures and ethical dilemmas, the kinds of things that happen in real life. Abraham's children are not perfect people; they—like the rest of us—are deeply flawed and conflicted over the tough moral choices we all have to make. After Dinah is forcibly raped, what are her brothers to do to protect her and restore their family honor? How is justice to be done? How can they make things right? These are important questions. The desire to protect those you love and to make things right is a noble impulse, but ignoble deeds follow. Skilled in deception, her brothers use circumcision—their covenant obligation—to temporarily disable the men and make them vulnerable to attack. After the carnage, Jacob, the older, wiser head of the family, knows the score: actions like these have consequences. Violence only breeds more violence. If they are to survive, they must leave . . . soon.

35 **God** *(to Jacob)***:** Get up, go *back* to Bethel, and settle there. Build an altar *to Me,* to the God who appeared to you when you ran away from your brother, Esau.

2Jacob told his household and those with him *to get ready to move.*

Jacob: Get rid of any foreign gods you have in your possession. Purify yourselves: *bathe and* change your clothes. 3Then come with me. We're going to Bethel so that I can build an altar there to the God who answers me whenever I am in distress and who is with me wherever I go.

4So they handed over to Jacob all of the foreign gods they had, as well as the rings in their ears. Jacob buried them in the shadow of a mighty oak that was near Shechem.

5As they traveled, God struck terror into *the hearts of* all of the cities along the way so that no one pursued Jacob's family. 6Jacob, and all those who were with him, arrived in Luz (which is also known as Bethel) in the land of Canaan. 7There he built an altar and called the place El-bethel because it was there that God had revealed Himself to Jacob when he was running away from his brother. 8Along the way, Deborah (Rebekah's nurse) died, and they buried her under the *branches of a stately* oak below Bethel. *Since that day,* it has been known as Allon-bacuth, *which means "oak of weeping."*

9Now that Jacob had come back from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again *at Bethel* and blessed him.

God: 10Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be known as Jacob. Israel will be your name.

From then on, God addressed him by *his new name*: Israel.

God: 11I am the God-All-Powerful.* Be fruitful and multiply. You will give rise to a *great* nation; indeed nation after nation will come from you. Kings *and rulers* shall be numbered among your descendants. 12Your children will *one day* possess the land I promised to Abraham and Isaac.

13Then God ascended from the place where He had spoken with Jacob. 14And Jacob set up a pillar of stone in that same spot. He poured wine on it as an offering *to God* and doused it with oil. 15Jacob named this place where God had spoken with him "Bethel."

16After that, they all traveled on from Bethel. While still a long way from Ephrath, Rachel began having labor pains, and it was a hard labor. 17And when the labor pains were most intense, the midwife tried to comfort her.

Rachel's Midwife: Don't be afraid. You're going to have another son.

18But as her life slipped away, just before she died, Rachel named her son Ben-oni, but his father decided to call him Benjamin instead. 19So Rachel died, and they buried her on the way to Ephrath (which is also known as Bethlehem). 20Jacob set up a pillar to mark Rachel's tomb, and the pillar at her tomb still stands to this day.

21Israel then continued on the journey, and he pitched his tent beyond the

* 35:11 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

tower of Eder. 22During the time Israel
lived in this land, Reuben slept with his
father's concubine, Bilhah, and Israel
found out about it.

23*Now Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons.*
Leah's *six* sons were Reuben (Jacob's first-
born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and
Zebulun. 24Rachel's *two* sons were Joseph
and Benjamin. 25Rachel's servant, Bilhah,
had *two* sons: Dan and Naphtali. 26Leah's
servant, Zilpah, had *two* sons: Gad and
Asher. These were the sons born to Jacob
in Paddan-aram *and on the journey home.*

27Jacob *finally* arrived at his father
Isaac's house at Mamre not far from
Kiriath-arba (which is also known as
Hebron). This is where Abraham and Isaac
had resided as foreigners.

28Isaac lived 180 years. 29By the time
he took his last breath and joined his
ancestors in death, he had reached a ripe
old age *and lived a full life.* His sons, Esau
and Jacob, buried him.

36 Here is an account of Esau's
descendants (*his nation is*
known as Edom).

2Esau had taken his wives from the
Canaanites: Adah (daughter of Elon the
Hittite), Oholibamah (daughter of Anah,
granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite),
3and Basemath (Ishmael's daughter and
Nebaioth's sister). 4Adah gave birth to
Eliphaz. Basemath gave birth to Reuel.
5Oholibamah gave birth to Jeush, Jalam,
and Korah. All of these were Esau's sons,
born in the land of Canaan.

6Esau took his wives, sons, daughters,
all of the members of his household, his
cattle, his livestock, and all of the property
he had acquired while living in Canaan;
and he moved to a land some distance
from his brother, Jacob. 7Since they were
too wealthy to live in close proximity—
that is, the land couldn't support both of
their vast numbers of livestock—8Esau
settled in the hill country of Seir. (Esau is
also known as Edom.)

9Here is an account of Esau's descen-
dants. He was the founding father of
the Edomites, *a people who lived* in the
hill country of Seir.* 10Esau's sons were
Eliphaz (son of his wife Adah) and Reuel
(son of his wife Basemath). 11Eliphaz's
sons were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam,
and Kenaz. 12(Timna was a concubine of
Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she gave birth to
Amalek.) These were the grandsons of
Adah, Esau's first wife. 13Reuel's sons were
Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.
These were the grandsons of Basemath
(Esau's wife). 14These were the sons of
Esau's wife Oholibamah (daughter of
Anah, Zibeon's granddaughter): Jeush,
Jalam, and Korah.

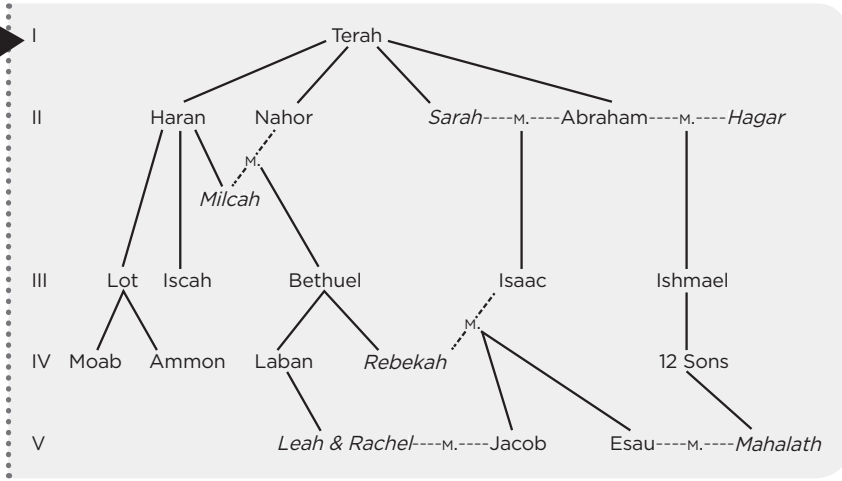
As the number of Esau's descendants grows, they settle into different tribes. Each tribe has its own leader.

15These are the chiefs among Esau's
descendants: From the sons of Eliphaz
(Esau's firstborn) were Teman, Omar,
Zepho, Kenaz, 16Korah, Gatam, and Ama-
lek. These grandsons of Adah became
tribal leaders in the land of Edom. 17From
the sons of Reuel (Esau's son) were
Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.
These grandsons of Basemath (Esau's wife)
became tribal leaders in the land of Edom.
18From the sons of Oholibamah (Esau's
wife and Anah's daughter) were Jeush,
Jalam, and Korah. They became tribal
leaders. 19These were the tribes and tribal
chiefs descended from Esau (who is *also*
known as Edom).

20-21The sons of Seir the Horite,
who also inhabited the land, were Lotan,
Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and
Dishan. They became the tribal chiefs of
the Horites (who were the sons of Seir)
in the land of Edom. 22The sons of Lotan
were Hori and Hemam, and Lotan's sister
was Timna. 23The sons of Shobal were
Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and
Onam. 24The sons of Zibeon were Aiah
and Anah. (This is the same Anah who
found the hot springs in the wilderness,
as he was pasturing his father Zibeon's
donkeys.) 25The children of Anah were
Dishon and Oholibamah (Anah's daugh-
ter). 26The sons of Dishon were Hemdan,
Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 27The sons
of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.
28The sons of Dishan were Uz and Aran.
29-30These descendants of the Horites were
the tribal chiefs of their respective tribes
in the land of Seir: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon,
Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan.

31There were kings who reigned in
the land of Edom *long* before any king
ruled over the Israelites: 32Bela (Beor's son)
ruled in Edom from his city Dinhabah.
33Bela died, then Jobab (son of Zerah's
son from Bozrah) succeeded him as king.

* 36:9 Edom was southeast of the Dead Sea and south of Moab, and it straddled the caravan route known as the King's Highway.



[34]Jobab died, then Husham from the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. [35]Husham died, then Hadad (Bedad's son, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab) succeeded him and ruled from his city Avith. [36]Hadad died, then Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. [37]Samlah died, then Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates River succeeded him as king. [38]Shaul died, and then Baal-hanan (Achbor's son) succeeded him as king. [39]Baal-hanan (Achbor's son) died, then Hadar succeeded him and ruled from his city Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel (daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab).

[40]These are the names of the *tribal* chiefs among Esau's descendants, according to their families and where they lived: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, [41]Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, [42]Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, [43]Magdiel, and Iram. These were the *tribal* chiefs of Edom (who is *also known as* Esau, the father of Edomites) according to the land they owned and where they settled.

► God's promises are not exclusive. As Isaac's son, Esau becomes great in the land of Seir, a land to the south and east of the Dead Sea. He has sons and daughters, many of whom go on to become tribal chiefs and influential leaders among the people known as the Edomites. But the story now returns to Jacob, for he has a special place in God's plan.

37 Jacob ended up settling in the land where his father had lived as a foreigner *for many years*—in the land of Canaan. [2]Here now is the story of Jacob and his family:

Joseph, when he was a young man of 17, often shepherded the flocks along with his brothers. *One day* as he was with Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons (his half-brothers), he decided to report back to their father about things they were doing wrong. [3]Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children because he came along when he was an old man. So Israel presented Joseph with a special* robe he had made for him—*a spectacularly colorful robe with long sleeves* in it. [4]But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than the rest, they grew to hate him and couldn't *find it in themselves to* speak to him without resentment or argument.

[5]One day Joseph had a dream. When he told the dream to his brothers, they hated him even more.

Joseph: [6]Please listen to this dream I had! [7]There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood up, and then your sheaves all gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.

* 37:3 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. Greek and Latin manuscripts read, "many-colored"; similar Aramaic words mean, "long-sleeved."

Joseph's Brothers *(annoyed)*: 8*Are you serious?* You think you are somehow *destined* to reign over us? You think you are going to be our king?

This dream and what he told them about it made them hate him even more.

9But Joseph had another dream, and he *made the mistake of* telling them about this dream too.

Joseph: Listen! I've had another dream: I saw the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowing down to me.

10When he told this dream to his father and brothers, even his father scolded him.

Israel: What kind of dream is this? Do you actually think your mother and I and your brothers are going to bow down before you?

11Joseph's brothers had become *extremely* jealous of him. But his father—*though he scolded Joseph*—kept this dream in *the back of his* mind.

12About this time, Joseph's brothers went *north* toward Shechem in search of better pasture for their father's flocks.

Israel *(to Joseph)*: 13Aren't your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come on then, I will send you out to them *to see how they are doing.*

Joseph: I'm ready, *Father.*

Israel: 14Get going then. See if they're doing all right, and make sure the flocks are well. When you get back, give me a report.

With that, Israel sent Joseph out to the valley of Hebron. When he came to *the area around* Shechem, 15a man found him wandering around in a field. The man asked him what he was looking for.

Joseph: 16I'm looking for my brothers. Please tell me where they are pasturing our flock.

Man: 17They've already gone. I heard them say they were going to Dothan.

So Joseph hurried off and followed his brothers to Dothan.

18They saw him coming even though he was still a long way off. Before he was near *enough to hear* them, they conspired to kill him.

Joseph's brothers are tired of his arrogant pretense. Each and every one of them has a bill of complaint against Joseph.

Joseph's Brothers *(to each other)*: 19Oh, here comes the *great* dreamer. 20Let's kill him and throw his body into one of the pits. Then we can tell everyone a wild animal *killed and* devoured him. We'll see then what becomes of his *stupid* dreams.

21When Reuben heard the plan, he tried to help Joseph.

Reuben: Let's not kill him. 22We don't need to shed any blood *to be free of him.* Let's just toss him into some pit here in the wilderness. We don't need to lay a hand on him.

Reuben thought perhaps he could *secretly* come back later and get Joseph out of the pit and take him home to their father *before any more harm came to him.*

The brothers agreed. 23When Joseph arrived, they ripped his robe off of him—the fancy, colorful* robe he always wore *that his father had made for him,* 24and they threw him into the pit. Now this pit happened to be an empty *cistern*; there was no water in it.

25Then they sat down to eat. Soon they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelite traders approaching from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with gum, balm, and a fragrant resin; and they were on their way down to Egypt with their goods.

Judah *(to his brothers)*: 26What profit will it be for us if we just kill our brother and conceal the crime? 27Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites *instead.* We won't have to lay a hand on him then. He is, after all, our brother, our own flesh *and blood.*

All of the brothers agreed. 28As the Midianite traders were passing by, they brought Joseph up out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for about eight ounces of silver, *the usual price of young*

* 37:23 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

male slaves. The traders set off with Joseph in the direction of Egypt.

29*Now Reuben had not been around when the caravan came by, so* when Reuben came back to the cistern later and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothing *in agony and despair*. 30He went back to his brothers.

Reuben: The boy is gone. What do I do now? *What am I supposed to tell Father?*

► As the oldest, Reuben is responsible for what happens to Joseph. Does he dare go home and face his father? After sleeping with his father's concubine, he has little chance now of being confirmed as Israel's firstborn.

31-32The brothers took Joseph's *fancy, colorful* robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped it in the blood. Then they took the special* robe to their father.

Joseph's Brothers: We found this, *Father*. Tell us if you think this is Joseph's robe.

Israel *(recognizing the robe)*: 33This is my son's robe! A wild animal must have *killed and* eaten him. Joseph is without a doubt torn to shreds!

34Then Jacob *wailed in agony and* tore his clothes *with the depth of emotional pain only a father could feel upon losing a child.* He dressed in sackcloth and mourned his son for a long time. 35All of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.

Israel: No, I will go to the grave grieving for my son.

Israel is inconsolable. His grief over his son transcends even death itself.

This is how deeply Joseph's father grieved for him. 36Meanwhile, the Midianites arrived in Egypt and sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers and the captain of the guard.

38 It was about this time that Judah *decided to leave home, so he* parted company with his brothers and went to see Hirah, a fellow from Adullam. 2When he was there, Judah laid eyes on the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and slept with her. 3She conceived and gave birth to her *first* son. Judah named him Er. 4She conceived again and gave birth to her *second* son, whom she named Onan. 5She then gave birth to her *third* son, and she named him Shelah. (Judah was away in Chezib when she gave birth to him.)

6Now Judah arranged for Er, his firstborn, to marry a woman named Tamar. 7But Er, Judah's firstborn, was a *particularly* wretched human being in the eyes of the Eternal One, and so the Eternal ended his life. *Judah summoned his second son, Onan.*

Judah *(to Onan)*: 8You know *our customs and* the duty of a brother-in-law *in a situation like this.* You must go and marry your brother's wife and make sure your brother has an heir.

9*Resentful that* any child born in this kind of marriage would not be his, Onan would *interrupt intercourse and* spill his semen onto the ground whenever he slept with his brother's wife. That way he would not father a child that would belong to his brother. 10Onan's *selfish* behavior was as wretched *as his brother's* to the eyes of the Eternal One; so the Eternal ended Onan's life like his brother. 11Judah summoned his daughter-in-law Tamar.

Judah: *Tamar, it is best if you* remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up.

Now Judah said this because he was afraid that Shelah, too, would die as his brothers had. So Tamar went and remained *a widow* with her father.

After losing two sons, Judah thinks Tamar must be a dangerous woman. What he isn't willing to admit is that his own sons were wicked.

12After a while, Judah's wife (Shua's daughter) also died. When Judah's time of mourning was over, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went to Timnah to *work with* his sheepshearers *and enjoy the festivities.* 13When Tamar learned that her father-in-law would be coming to Timnah

* 37:31-32 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

to shear his sheep, 14she took off her widow's clothes, put on a veil to conceal her *true identity,* and sat down at the entrance to Enaim along the road to Timnah. *You see, Tamar harbored deep resentment toward her father-in-law* because she knew *by this time* that Shelah had grown up, but she had not been given to him in marriage *as Judah had promised.* 15When Judah *passed by and* saw her, he thought she was a prostitute because she had her face covered. 16*He decided to proposition her, so* he walked over to her by the roadside.

Judah: Come on, I want to have sex with you.

He had no idea she was his daughter-in-law, *but she had a proposition of her own.*

Tamar: What will you give me in return if I do?

Judah: 17I'll send you a young goat from my flock. *How about that?*

Tamar: Only if you give me something to hold until you send it.

Judah: 18What should I give you as my personal guarantee?

Tamar: Your *personal* seal on the cord you wear *around your neck,* plus the staff you carry.

Tamar knows Judah cannot be trusted, so she asks for two items so personal and unique they can easily be linked to him.

Judah *did as she asked and* gave her his seal and walking stick. He then *went and* slept with her, and she conceived his child. 19Then she got up, took off the veil, and went *back home,* putting on her widow's clothes *once again.*

20Judah *kept his word and* sent his friend *Hirah* the Adullamite with the young goat so he could retrieve his seal and walking stick from the woman. But Judah's friend couldn't find her *anywhere.*

Hirah the Adullamite *(to Timnah's elders)***:** 21What happened to the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the side of the road?

Elders: We have not seen any temple prostitute here.

22*Bewildered,* the Adullamite returned to Judah.

Hirah the Adullamite: I couldn't find her, and *what's odd is that* the elders claimed they haven't seen any temple prostitutes around there.

Judah: 23Well let her keep my things then. If you go back, we'll be laughed at. *I did what I promised.* I sent the young goat, *and you tried* but could not find her.

24Approximately three months later, someone told Judah, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has been promiscuous. It's obvious her business has even made her pregnant."

Judah: Bring her out *and expose her for what she is,* and then let her be burned.

25As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law.

Tamar: It was the owner of these items who made me pregnant. Please, take a close look and tell me whose personal seal, cord, and walking stick these are.

26When Judah saw them, he realized they were his.

Judah: She is more in the right than I am. I did not *keep my word and* give her *in marriage* to my son, Shelah.

Judah didn't sleep with her again.

27When the time came for her to deliver, she discovered she was carrying twins. 28While she was in labor, one of them put out a hand; and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on it, so she would know which one came out first. 29But just then he drew his hand back *into the womb,* and his brother came out *first. The midwife had never seen anything quite like this.*

Midwife: What a breach you've made here, *little one!*

So the child was named Perez. 30His brother followed, the one with the scarlet thread on his hand. He was named Zerah.

► This disturbing chapter is artfully inserted at the beginning of Joseph's story for a reason. Though Joseph has

the key role in getting Israel to Egypt and saving his family from the upcoming famine, it is Judah's line that is chosen by God to play a crucial part in Israel's more distant future. Judah's son, Perez, is the ancestor to King David and ultimately to the Anointed One (Matthew 1). But Perez's strange birth is overshadowed by the sleazy events that lead to his conception. The sexually-charged atmosphere of this chapter may well upset some, but Scripture is brutally honest about people and what they do. Lust and lies, deception and prostitution do not frustrate God's plan; in fact God has a way of taking them, redeeming them, and including them within His greater will.

39 Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard, himself an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there *to sell along with their goods and wares.* 2The Eternal One was with Joseph, however, and he became successful *in his own right as a slave* within the house of his Egyptian master.

3Potiphar *could not help but* notice that the Eternal One was with Joseph and caused everything Joseph did to prosper. 4-5Joseph became the favorite of the household and rose in the ranks to become Potiphar's personal attendant. In time, Potiphar made Joseph overseer of the entire household and put him in charge of everything he owned. *From that moment,* the Eternal One blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake, a blessing which seemed to cover everything Potiphar possessed from house to field. 6Potiphar entrusted everything to the care of Joseph. With him in charge, Potiphar had no concern about anything except for *his private affairs, such as* the food he chose to eat!

Now Joseph was a well-built, good-looking young man. 7After a while, his master's wife began watching him, *and she tried to seduce him.*

Potiphar's Wife: *Come.* Sleep with me.

8But Joseph refused.

Joseph *(to Potiphar's wife)***:** Look, *please don't take offense,* but with me in charge, my master has no concerns for anything *that goes on* in his house. He has trusted me with everything he has. 9He hasn't treated me like I am any less than he is, and he hasn't kept anything from me—except, *of course,* for you because you are his wife. Why would I do something so *clearly* wrong and sin *so blatantly* against God?

Joseph's refusal to have sex with Potiphar's wife demonstrates how God wants His people to act. How different he is compared to Judah and Reuben!

10Although she pursued him day after day, Joseph would not consent to sleep with her and refused to be *alone* with her. 11One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work while no one else was in the house, 12she grabbed him by his clothes *and tried again to seduce him.*

Potiphar's Wife: *Come on.* Sleep with me.

But Joseph ran outside *away from her, as far and as fast as he could,* leaving her holding his clothes in her hand. 13When she realized *he rejected her again and* she had his clothes in her hand, 14she called out to the other servants of her household.

Potiphar's Wife: See here! My husband brought this Hebrew into our house to take advantage of us! He came to me and wanted to sleep with me. I screamed *as loudly as I could,* 15and when he heard me yell, he dropped his clothes here beside me and ran outside.

16She kept Joseph's clothes beside her until her husband came home. 17Then she told him the same story.

Potiphar's Wife: The Hebrew servant you brought into this household came in to take advantage of me. 18When I screamed as loudly as I could, he dropped his clothes here beside me and ran outside.

19When Potiphar heard his wife's account, his face flushed with anger. 20So *Potiphar,* Joseph's master, put him into prison and locked him up in the place where the king's prisoners were confined. Joseph remained there *for a time.* 21But the

Eternal One remained with Joseph and showed him His loyal love and granted him favored status with the chief jailor. 22The jailor put Joseph in charge of all of the prisoners who were confined there. Whatever needed to be done, Joseph was the one to do it. 23The chief jailor, *like Potiphar,* didn't need to worry about anything that was in Joseph's care because the Eternal One was with him. And whatever Joseph did worked out well because the Eternal made it so.

40 Some time later, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker both offended their lord, the king of Egypt. 2-3Pharaoh was angry with his two attendants, and so he put the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard in the same prison where Joseph was confined. 4The captain of the guard put Joseph in charge of the men, and Joseph took care of them *as he did the others*. They remained there in custody for some time.

5One night while they were in prison, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt had dreams. Each had his own dream, and each dream had its own meaning.

6When Joseph came to *check on* them the next morning, he saw that both men looked troubled.

Joseph *(to Pharaoh's prisoners)***:** 7Why do you both look so dejected today?

Cupbearer and Baker: 8We've both had dreams, and there is no one *here in prison* to interpret them.

The Egyptians thought that dreams were often moments of revelation, but they also thought it took special training to know how to interpret them.

Joseph: Interpretations belong to God, don't they? If you'd like, tell them to me!

9So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream.

Cupbearer: In my dream, there was a vine in front of me, 10and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms opened up and its clusters ripened into grapes. 11Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and then I placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

Joseph: 12This is what your dream means: the three branches are three days. 13Within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

14But *I ask one thing*. Remember me when things are going well for you. *If you have the opportunity,* do me a favor and mention me to Pharaoh. *Perhaps he will* get me out of this place. 15You see I was stolen from the land of *my people* the Hebrews, and I've done nothing to deserve being thrown into this pit.

16When the chief baker saw that the cupbearer received such a good interpretation, he told Joseph *his dream as well*.

Baker: I've also had a dream: There were three baskets of *fine* cakes *stacked* on my head. 17In the upper basket, there were all sorts of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds *swooped down and* kept eating Pharaoh's food out of the basket on my head.

Joseph: 18This is what your dream means: the three baskets are three days. 19Within three days, Pharaoh will lift your head and remove it *from you*. He will impale your body on a tree and vultures will *swoop down and* eat the flesh from your bones.

20-21On the third day, which also happened to be Pharaoh's birthday, he prepared a *huge* feast for all of his servants. As they were gathered together, he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and restored him to his former office. *That day* the cupbearer resumed placing the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But Pharaoh lifted off the head of the chief baker 22and impaled him *on a tree for the birds,* just as Joseph had interpreted. 23*Sadly* the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph *at this time*; instead, he forgot all about him.

► Although the text is not clear, the chief baker dies a particularly gruesome death. The way the story is told,

Pharaoh lifts up the baker's head—a gesture which would seem to signal royal favor—but in the next treacherous instant, his head is removed. Then his lifeless corpse is impaled on a tree, exposed to the elements. Because the body is left to rot outside and be eaten by birds—instead of being carefully embalmed and entombed—the Egyptians believe the victim's soul can never enter the afterlife. This is the worst form of capital punishment, leaving the cupbearer to fear not only death but also eternal oblivion.

41 Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream. He dreamed that he was standing by the Nile *River,* 2and out of the Nile came seven healthy, fat cows. They all grazed in the grassy reeds *at the river's edge.* 3Then, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile and stood by them on the bank of the river. 4And the ugly, thin cows ate the seven healthy, fat cows. And then Pharaoh woke up, *startled.*

5Again he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. This time, seven ears of grain, all plump and fine, were growing on one stalk. 6Then seven other ears that were shriveled and burnt by the east wind sprouted up after them. 7The shriveled ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh woke up again, realizing it was only a dream.

8In the morning he felt uneasy, so he sent for all of the magicians and all of the wise men of Egypt *to come and consult with him.* Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. *They had no idea what they could mean.*

9The chief cupbearer *remembered Joseph,* so he went to Pharaoh.

Cupbearer: I am reminded today of something I did wrong. 10Once when Pharaoh was angry with his servants, he put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. 11One night we both had a dream. The dreams were unique, and their interpretations were also unique. 12There was a young Hebrew there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us. 13Things turned out exactly as he had interpreted them: I was restored to my office, and the baker was impaled.

14Pharaoh sent for Joseph, *hoping he could also interpret Pharaoh's dream.* His officers rushed to the dungeon to get Joseph *ready to meet the king.* After he had been allowed to shave and change his clothes, he was brought before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh *(to Joseph)***:** 15I've had a dream, and I can't find anyone who can tell me what it means. But I've heard that when someone tells you a dream, you are able to interpret it.

Joseph: 16I cannot do this, but God will answer Pharaoh's request and relieve your concerns.

Pharaoh: 17In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile *River,* 18and seven healthy, fat cows came up out of the Nile *River* and grazed in the grassy reeds *at the river's edge.* 19Then seven other cows came up after them. They were miserable, very ugly and thin. Never had I seen such horrible-looking cows in all the land of Egypt. 20*Anyway,* the thin, ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows. 21But after they had eaten them, no one would have known they had done so because they were still as ugly as before. Then I woke up. 22*I fell asleep and dreamed* a second time. I saw in this dream seven ears *of grain,* all plump and fine, growing on one stalk. 23And then seven ears that were withered, shriveled up, and burnt by the east wind sprouted after them. 24The thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. When I told the magicians about these dreams, there was no one who could explain them to me.

Joseph *(to Pharaoh)***:** 25Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same. God is revealing to Pharaoh what He is going to do. 26The seven good cows are seven years and the seven good ears are *the same* seven years—*years of plenty.* Both dreams tell one story. 27The seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them are also seven years, as are the seven thin ears burnt by the east wind. These are seven years of famine. 28As I told Pharaoh, God is showing Pharaoh what He means to do *and what will come.* 29There will be seven years of great abundance throughout all the land of Egypt. 30But after that, there will be seven years of

famine. Whatever abundance was once enjoyed will be totally forgotten, because the famine will consume the land. 31The famine will be so severe that no one will know what it is like to have enough of anything. 32The doubling of Pharaoh's dream means this future is fixed by God, and He will make it happen very soon.

33*My advice is that* Pharaoh should select someone who is wise and discerning and put him in charge of the land of Egypt *during this time.* 34Pharaoh should appoint officers over the land and direct them to take one-fifth of all that the land of Egypt produces during the seven abundant years, 35gather it together, store it up, and guard it under Pharaoh's authority. That way each city will have a supply of food. 36The food would then be held in reserve for the people during the seven years of famine that are sure to come to Egypt. In this way, the people of Egypt will not starve to death during the famine.

37Pharaoh and all his advisors liked Joseph's suggestion.

Pharaoh *(to his advisors)***:** 38Is there anyone else *you know* like Joseph who has the Spirit of God within him?

39(to Joseph) Since God has shown all of this to you, I can't imagine anyone wiser and more discerning than you. 40Therefore you will be in charge of my household. All of my people will report to you and do as you say. Only I, because I sit on the throne, will be greater than you. 41I hereby appoint you head over all of the land of Egypt.

42*As a symbol of his power,* Pharaoh removed the signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's. Then he dressed him in fine linens and put a gold chain around his neck. 43He had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command, and servants ordered everyone, "Kneel!" as he rode by. So this was how Pharaoh appointed Joseph head over all of the land of Egypt. 44But Pharaoh had one more declaration.

Pharaoh *(to Joseph)***:** I am Pharaoh, and I decree that no one may do anything in the land of Egypt without your consent.

45Then Pharaoh gave Joseph an *Egyptian* name, Zaphenath-paneah, and arranged for him to marry *an Egyptian woman,* Asenath (daughter of Potiphera, priest of On). So this was how Joseph gained authority over all the land of Egypt.

► Pharaoh wants there to be no doubt that Joseph is his second-in-command. So he holds a formal ceremony and presents Joseph with special gifts, symbols of high office and power. He gives Joseph his signet ring, mounted with Pharaoh's personal seal. He dresses him in royal garb and provides him with the finest chariot available. He issues decrees that put Joseph in charge of all affairs in Egypt. Finally, to top it off and to make sure this son of Israel would be fully accepted into Egyptian society, he gives him an Egyptian name and arranges a marriage with a high-profile priestly family. Just a few hours before, Joseph was a prisoner. Now he is in charge of all the land.

46Now Joseph was 30 years old when he entered into Pharaoh's service. He left the king of Egypt's presence to travel throughout the land. 47For seven years—the years of plenty—the land produced abundantly. 48Joseph gathered up all of the food *he could* during those seven years *of plenty* in the land of Egypt and stored the grain in the cities. He arranged for every city to store the food grown in local fields. 49And he stored up so much grain—as much as the *grains of* sand on the seashore—that he stopped measuring it. It was more than anyone could measure!

50Now before the famine began, Joseph had two sons by his wife Asenath (daughter of Potiphera, priest of On). 51Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh because he said, "God has made me forget all about my hardship and all of my father's family." 52He named the second son Ephraim, because as he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortune."

53Eventually, the seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt came to an end, 54and the seven years of famine settled in, just as Joseph had predicted. Although the famine extended to all the surrounding lands, in Egypt there was still food *stored away*

in the cities. 55When the people in Egypt became famished, they appealed to Pharaoh for food; and Pharaoh directed them all to Joseph.

Pharaoh: Go to Joseph, and do what he tells you to do.

56So when the famine had spread across the land of Egypt, Joseph opened up the storehouses and sold *grain* to the Egyptians. *But he waited until* the famine had become severe in the land. 57When the surrounding peoples *heard Egypt still had food, they* journeyed to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because *by this time* the entire world was in the grip of a severe famine.

► Famine in this part of the world normally involves a drought that extends for years. Only those with access to bodies of fresh water can survive. The Egyptians are perfectly positioned to use the Nile River to irrigate their crops during a drought. Most of the land of Canaan, on the other hand—where Jacob and his sons still live—has little fresh water even when there is no drought. Although some grain can be moved up and down the Nile or across the Mediterranean over established trade routes, the amount of grain needed to keep large populations alive cannot be moved across land or sea. So people have to go where the food is, or they starve to death. Israel knows he is out of options at home, so he has to look abroad.

42 Now when Jacob found out there was grain *to be had* in Egypt, he talked to his sons about it.

Jacob: Why do you just keep *sitting here* looking at each other? 2Listen! I've heard they have grain *for sale* in Egypt! Go down there, and buy grain for us so that we *have enough to* live and won't die *of hunger.*

3So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4But Jacob didn't send Joseph's brother Benjamin with the others, because he was afraid something might happen to him. 5So the sons of Israel decided to go down and buy grain along with many others, because the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

6Since Joseph was in charge of Egypt, he was the one responsible for selling the grain to the people who came from the *various* lands. *When it was their turn,* Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the ground. 7The moment Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them *even though nearly 20 years had passed since last he saw them,* but he treated them like strangers and spoke gruffly to them.

Joseph: Where do you come from?

Joseph's Brothers: We come from the land of Canaan to buy food.

8Although Joseph recognized them, they did not recognize him. 9He then remembered the dreams he had *as a young man* regarding his brothers.

Joseph: You are spies! You have come to see how this famine has weakened our defenses *so you can attack us.*

Joseph's Brothers: 10No, my lord. We, your servants, have only come to buy food. 11We are all sons of one man, and we are honest men. We are not spies.

Joseph: 12No. *I think* you have come to scout out our land and defenses.

Joseph's Brothers: 13My lord, we are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. The youngest, however, is with our father *back home,* and one *brother* is no longer with us.

Joseph: 14*I don't believe you.* My accusation is true; you are *surely* spies! 15-16But let's see if your story is true. Here is how you will be tested: as surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Choose one of you to go and bring your brother *to me* while the rest of you remain locked up in prison. I want to see if you are telling me the truth. If he doesn't come back *with your brother,* as Pharaoh lives, then I know you are truly spies.

17Then Joseph put all *ten* of his brothers in prison for three days.

18Three days later, *Joseph had come up with a different plan.*

Joseph *(to his brothers)*: Do what I am about to say and you will live, because I am a man who respects God. 19If you really are honest men, then *I will* choose one of your brothers to stay here in prison. The rest of you may go and carry grain to your families *who are suffering* because of the famine. 20*Then all of you must return and* bring your youngest brother to me. In that way, I can see if you have been telling the truth, and you will not die.

They agreed to Joseph's conditions.

Joseph's Brothers *(to each other)*: 21Now *at last,* we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother. We saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we wouldn't listen. Now that very anguish has come to us.

Reuben: 22Didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? But you wouldn't listen. Now we will all pay for *spilling* his blood!

23Now Joseph's brothers *were speaking to each other in their own language and* had no idea that Joseph understood what they were saying, since he had been speaking with them through an interpreter. 24But *their words moved him, so* he withdrew from them and cried. When *he had composed himself,* he came back and spoke to them again. He selected Simeon *to remain behind* and had him bound *in ropes* right in front of them. 25Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return their money to each man's sack, and to give them food for their journey home. All of this was done for them.

26Then they loaded up their donkeys with the grain and left *for Canaan.* 27*Later,* when they arrived where they would stay the night, one of them opened up his sack to give his donkey some fodder, and he saw his money lying at the top of the sack.

One of the Brothers: 28Someone put my money back into the sack! Here it is, *right on top!*

When they heard this, their hearts sank. They looked at one another and trembled.

► The brothers of Joseph are in the dark. What does this mean? Is this some sort of trick? Has someone planted the money there only to later claim it or the grain has been stolen? Are the Egyptians even now bearing down on them? Is this part of the test? Should they go back and tell the gruff Egyptian governor what has happened? And if they do, will he believe them? What happens to Simeon? They have a thousand thoughts, but their most profound thought occurs next.

Joseph's Brothers *(nervously to each other)*: What is God doing to us?

29When they *finally* arrived in the land of Canaan at their father Jacob's house, they told him everything that had happened.

Joseph's Brothers: 30The man, the lord of the land, was very tough with us and accused us of spying on Egypt. 31But we told him, "We are honest men. We are not spies. 32We are twelve brothers, all sons of one father. One is no longer with us, and the youngest is with our father in Canaan right now." 33And then the man, the lord of the land, told us, "Here is how I will know if you really are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain back to your families suffering because of the famine, and go your way. 34*All of you must return and* bring your youngest brother to me, and then I will know you aren't spies but honest men. At that point, I will release your brother to you, and you may go about Egypt *freely* and buy as you wish."

35Now as all the brothers went to empty their sacks, each found his bag of money inside. And when they and their father saw the money there, they were very frightened.

Jacob *(to his sons)*: 36You have robbed me of my children: Joseph is gone, and Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything *and everyone* is against me!

Reuben: 37*Father,* you may kill my own two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back

to you. Put him in my care, and I promise to bring him back to you.

Jacob: 38*Absolutely not;* I can't let my son go with you. His brother *Joseph* is already dead, and he's all I have left *of Rachel.* If I put him in your care and any harm should come to him on that journey, the sorrow would kill me. *I can't allow* you to condemn this old, gray head to the grave.

43 Now the famine raged on across the land. 2And after Jacob and his sons had eaten up all of the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father *was ready to send them again.*

Jacob: Go *to Egypt* again, and buy us some more food.

3But Judah cautioned him.

Judah: The man *who rules Egypt* clearly warned us, *Father,* that he will not agree to see us again unless our brother *Benjamin* accompanies us. 4If you will send Benjamin along with us, then we will go down and buy the food. 5But if you won't allow him to go, we will not go either because the man *clearly* told us, "You will not see my face unless your brother is with you."

Jacob: 6Why did you do this to me? Why did you tell this man you had another brother?

Joseph's Brothers: 7The man questioned us about every detail of ourselves and our relatives. He asked if our father was still alive and if we had another brother. What we told him was only in answer to all of his questions. How could we in any way know he would tell us to bring our brother down there?

Judah *(to Israel, his father)***:** 8Send the boy with me, and let's be on our way. It's the only way we're going to live *through this famine* and not die *of hunger*—you, us, and all of our little ones. 9I will guarantee his safety. You can hold me personally responsible if I don't bring him back to you in one piece. *If anything happens to him,* I am *perfectly willing* to bear the blame forever. 10Had we not waited this long already, we could have made the journey twice now *and have enough food.*

Jacob: 11*All right.* If that's the way it has to be. But do this: take some of the best products our land has *to offer;* carry them in your bags and present them to the man as a gift—a little balm and honey, some gum and resin, some pistachio nuts and almonds. 12*This time,* take double the money with you. Carry back the money that was returned in the top of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight *on their part.* 13Take your brother, be on your way again, and go see the man. 14And may the All-Powerful God* grant you mercy from this man, so that he sends back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am to suffer the loss of my children, then what am I to do?

15So the brothers packed up the presents, and they took double the money and *their brother* Benjamin with them. Then they set off on their way down to Egypt, and they came before Joseph.

16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he spoke to his steward of his household.

Joseph: Bring the men into the house. Slaughter *an animal,* and prepare a feast. These men are to dine with me at noon *today.*

17The man did as Joseph told him, and he brought the men to Joseph's house. 18The brothers became very concerned when they realized where they were being taken.

Joseph's Brothers: It must be because of the money that was put back into our sacks the last time *we were here.* He's looking for an opportunity to arrest us, make us slaves, and take our donkeys.

19They went up to the steward of the house as he was standing at the door.

Joseph's Brothers: 20My lord, we came down *to Egypt* the first time to buy food, 21but *on our return to Canaan* when we came to our lodging place, we opened our sacks and *were surprised to* find each one's money in the top of his sack. All our money was returned *apparently,* so we have brought it back with us. 22We

* 43:14 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

also brought additional money to buy *more* food. We don't know who put our money back into our sacks *the last time we were here.*

Steward: 23There is no need to worry or be afraid. Be at peace. Your God and the God of your father must have filled your sacks with this treasure. I received your money *the last time.*

In a while the steward brought Simeon out to see them. 24After he had escorted all *eleven* men into Joseph's house, given them water, and made sure they had washed their feet, he gave their donkeys some fodder. 25The brothers prepared the presents they had brought for Joseph. It was almost noon, and they had learned they would be dining with him soon.

26When Joseph arrived home, they brought the presents into the house. With gifts in hand, they bowed to the ground before him. 27*This time* he greeted them *warmly.*

Joseph: Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?

Joseph's Brothers: 28Your servant, our father, is alive and well.

They bowed down *again* out of respect. 29Then Joseph looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son.

Joseph: Is this your youngest brother whom you told me about last time? God's grace be upon you, my son!

30Joseph hurried from the room because he was overwhelmed *with affection* for his brother and was afraid he would cry *in front of everyone.* So he went into a private room and wept there. 31After *he regained his composure,* he washed his face and came out. With a controlled voice, he commanded *his servants.*

Joseph: You may serve the meal.

32The staff served Joseph, *who was seated* separately, and then his brothers, who were seated apart from other Egyptians invited to eat with Joseph that day. (*You see* Egyptians do not eat with Hebrews *or any other foreigners* because they find the practice utterly offensive.) 33As the brothers were seated in front of him, the men *noticed the arrangement, and they* looked at each other amazed *and amused* for they were seated by age, the firstborn on one end, the youngest on the other. 34They were served their portions from Joseph's table, and *everyone noticed* Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. But they celebrated and drank freely *until everyone was quite relaxed.*

44 After *the meal was over,* Joseph commanded the steward of his house.

Joseph: Fill the men's sacks with food—as much as they can carry. Put each man's money back into the top of his sack. 2*One more thing: I want you to* put my *personal* cup, my silver cup, into the top of the sack of the youngest, along with his money for the grain.

The steward did everything Joseph told him to do.

3The *next* morning, as soon as it was light, the men were sent off with their donkeys *toward home.* 4But when they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph spoke to his steward.

Joseph: Go now, and follow them. When you catch up to them, say to them, "Why have you repaid kindness with evil? *My master's silver cup is missing, and you have it.* 5Isn't this the cup from which he drinks? Doesn't he use it for divination, *to discover secrets hidden from most men?* You have committed evil in doing this."

6*So the steward went after them.* And when he caught up to them, he repeated the words Joseph told him to say.

Joseph's Brothers: 7Why would my lord accuse us of something like this? We, your servants, would never do such a thing! 8Remember the money we found at the top of our sacks *after our first trip*? We brought it back to you from the land of Canaan. Why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house *this time*? 9If you find his cup with any one of us, let that man be put to death, and the rest of us will become my lord's servants.

Steward: 10Let it be as you say, *but I'll be more lenient:* whoever is found to possess the cup will become my servant. The rest of you will be considered innocent *and may go free.*

11Then they all moved quickly, retrieved
their sacks, lowered them to the ground,
and opened them *so the steward could see*
what was inside them. 12He searched *each*
sack, beginning with the eldest son and
ending with the youngest; *at last,* the cup
was found in Benjamin's sack. 13When the
brothers saw this, they tore their clothes
in anguish. They knew what had to happen.
They *had no choice but to* load their don-
keys and return to the city.

14Judah and his brothers all came to
Joseph's house while he was still there, and
they fell to the ground in front of him.

Joseph: 15What have you done? Don't you
know that someone in my position prac-
tices divination *and can discover secrets*
hidden from most men?

Judah *(speaking for the rest)***:** 16What can
we *possibly* say to you, my lord? How
can we explain this? How can we clear
ourselves *of this mistake*? God has found
your servants to be guilty. Here we are
then, slaves to you, my lord, all of us and
also the one in whose possession the
cup has been found.

► Judah speaks the truth. God has uncovered their guilt and exposed it for all to see. Not that someone in their party has stolen Joseph's cup—that's not what he means—but years ago they conspired and stole Joseph's freedom. Ironically they could now lose their freedom to Joseph.

Joseph: 17Far be it from me that I should
do something like that! Only the one in
possession of the cup will be my slave.
As for the rest of you, go in peace to your
father!

18But then Judah stepped up to Joseph *and*
begged him for mercy.

Judah: O, my lord, let your servant please
speak a private word to you. Please don't
be angry with me, for you are just like
Pharaoh himself. 19You asked us once if
we had a father or a brother, 20and we
told you, "*Yes.* We have a father, an old
man, and a young brother, the child of
his old age. His brother is dead, so he
alone is left of his mother's children, and
his father loves him *dearly.*" 21Then you
told us to bring the boy down to you, so
that you could see him. 22At first we said
to you, "The boy cannot leave his father
because his father would die without
him," 23but you told us that unless he
came with us, you wouldn't agree to see
us again.

24When we went back to your ser-
vant, our father, we told him what you
said, my lord. 25And when our father
asked us to go again to buy more food,
26we told him, "We cannot go without
our youngest brother, or we won't be
able to get in to see him." *So our youngest*
brother came with us. 27Then your ser-
vant, my father, responded, "You know
that my wife *Rachel* bore me two sons:
28one went off *and never came back,* and
I know he was without a doubt torn to
pieces. I haven't seen him since he left.
29But *now* if you take my youngest also
from me and any harm should come to
him, the sorrow would kill me. *I can't*
allow you to condemn this old, gray head
to the grave."

30-31So now if I go back to your ser-
vant, my father, without the boy, he will
die because his life depends completely
on the welfare of his boy. As soon as he
sees that Benjamin is not with us, the
sorrow will kill him and we, your ser-
vants, will condemn the old, gray head
of our father, your servant, to the grave.
32I gave my father my word that I would
take care of the boy *and return him safely*
home. I told him, "If I don't bring him
back to you *in one piece,* then I am per-
fectly willing to bear the blame forever."
33So please let me, your servant, remain
as your slave in place of the boy; and let
him go back with his brothers. 34For how
can I go back to my father without the
boy? I couldn't stand to see the terrible
suffering this would put him through.

► Judah has come a long way. He is no longer the selfish young man who conspired with his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery (37:26-27). Though he knew that decision would have a devastating effect on his father, Judah did not seem to care. Nor is he the lustful man who propositioned the prostitute who happened to be his

daughter-in-law (38:1-30). Now he is different. His priorities have changed. He is willing to sacrifice his freedom and future to save his father the grief of losing Benjamin. Judah's transformation is not immediate; it takes years to accomplish. But his place in the family and his selfless example impact the children of Israel for generations to come.

45 Then Joseph could no longer keep his composure. The room was crowded with people so he ordered *his attendants:*

Joseph: Send everyone out of the room!

Joseph didn't want anyone else in the room when he finally told his brothers his true identity. 2But he began to cry so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the Pharaoh's household heard it too! Joseph *turned and* addressed his brothers:

Joseph: 3I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?

But his brothers *were too shocked to speak. They* couldn't answer, for they were so overwhelmed that they were standing in Joseph's presence.

Joseph *(to his brothers)***:** 4Come closer to me.

His brothers approached him *cautiously.*

Joseph: I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5Don't be upset or angry with yourselves *any longer* because of what you did. You see God sent me here ahead of you to preserve life. 6For famine struck this land two years ago, and there are five more years in which there will be no plowing or harvesting. 7God sent me *here* ahead of you to make sure you *and your families* survive *this terrible ordeal* and have a remnant left on earth. 8So it wasn't *really* you who sent me here, but God; the same God who made me an advisor to Pharaoh, master of his household, and ruler over everyone in the land of Egypt.

9Hurry now, go to my father, and relay this message: "Here is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me master over all Egypt. Come to me and don't delay. 10*I'll arrange for* all of you to settle in the land of Goshen where you can be near me—you and all of your children and grandchildren, as well as your flocks and herds and everything you have. 11I will provide for you there. Since five more years of famine are still to come, I will make sure your household and everything you have will not descend into poverty.'"

12Now you see with your own eyes, and even my brother Benjamin sees, that it is really I who speak to you *even without an interpreter.* 13You must tell my father how honored I am here in Egypt. Tell him everything you've seen here. Hurry. Bring my father here.

14With that he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck. They embraced, and both wept. 15Then he kissed all of his brothers *one by one,* cried on their *shoulders as well,* and after that they talked *for a time* together.

16The news spread to Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come. When Pharaoh and *his other* advisors heard, they were pleased.

Pharaoh *(to Joseph)***:** 17Tell your brothers, "Do this: Load your animals, and go back to the land called Canaan. 18Get your father and your families; come here to me, and I will give you the prime properties of Egypt. You will enjoy the very best Egypt has to offer." 19Now, *Joseph,* I command you to tell them also, "Do this: Take wagons from the land of Egypt so that your little children, your wives, and your father can make the journey. Come *quickly*. 20Don't worry about bringing all your things, for *once you get here,* the best of Egypt will be spread out at your feet."

21-22The sons of Israel did exactly as Pharaoh ordered. Joseph followed Pharaoh's directive and made sure they had *enough* wagons. He gave them food and other supplies for their journey including an extra change of clothes. But to Benjamin he gave about seven and a half pounds of silver and five sets of clothes. 23To his father, he sent even more: 10 donkeys loaded with the best Egyptian gifts and 10 female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provisions for his father for the journey. 24Then he sent his brothers on their way. As they were leaving, he gave them one last piece of advice.

Joseph: Don't argue along the way!

► Once again Joseph and his brothers are parting company. But this time is much different: they know where he is and who he has become. Although Joseph has been separated from his brothers for many years, he remembers how they were; and he is counting on the fact that they are a quarrelsome bunch. He has intentionally given Benjamin more money and clothes than the others. That in itself is enough to cause bickering and squabbling among the crew. In addition, he knows they are worried. They have just received quite a shock. To learn after all these years that the brother they sold into slavery has become one of the most powerful men in the world takes time to process. The famine, the journey from Canaan, and the shock of seeing him again have taken a toll on them. Now they have to go back, get their families, and return. The road home leaves plenty of time to worry about what might become of them, plenty of time for nerves to fray and anger to stir. Joseph knows they have a hard journey ahead, and they need to pull together and not apart.

25The brothers traveled *east* out of Egypt
and *eventually turned north to* return to
their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan.
26They *couldn't wait to* tell him *the good*
news.

Joseph's Brothers: *Father,* Joseph is still alive! *But more than that,* he is ruler over all of the land of Egypt.

Their father was stunned; he couldn't
believe his ears. 27But when they told
him everything Joseph had said to them
and when he saw the wagons that Joseph
had sent to carry him *to Egypt,* his spirits
soared, *and he resolved to make the trip.*

Israel: 28I have seen enough. My son Joseph is alive! I must go and see him before I die.

46 Israel set out on his journey *to*
Egypt with all of his belongings,
and when he came to Beer-
sheba, he offered sacrificial gifts to the
God of his father, Isaac. 2God spoke there
to Israel in visions during the night.

God: Jacob, Jacob!

Jacob: I'm here. *I'm listening!*

God: 3I am the True God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt *and leave the land I promised you,* for I am going to make you into a great nation there. 4I will go down with you to Egypt, and *one day* I will be the One to bring you back again. *And something else*—Joseph's own hands will be the ones to close your eyes *at the time of your death.*

5Then Jacob got up *and continued on*
from Beersheba *toward Egypt,* and the
sons of Israel carried their father Jacob,
their little children, and their wives in the
wagons Pharaoh sent with them. 6-7They
also brought their livestock and the goods
they had acquired in the land of Canaan.
And *at last,* Jacob and his family arrived in
Egypt. His sons, his grandsons, his daugh-
ters, and his granddaughters—all of his
descendants came with him to Egypt.

8Here are the names of the descendants of Israel—*that is,* Jacob and his family—who settled in Egypt. Reuben (Jacob's firstborn *son*) 9and his sons: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. 10Simeon and his sons: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul (the son of a Canaanite woman). 11Levi and his sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12Judah and his sons: Er and Onan (who both died in the land of Canaan), Shelah, Perez, and Zerah; Perez and his sons *(Judah's grandchildren)*: Hezron and Hamul. 13Issachar and his sons: Tola, Puvvah, Iob, and Shimron. 14Zebulun and his sons: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. 15These sons, along with his daughter Dinah, are the 33 sons and daughters born to Jacob by Leah in Paddan-aram.

16Gad and his sons: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. 17Asher and his sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah; Beriah and his sons *(Gad's grandchildren)*: Heber and Malchiel. 18These are the 16 children born to Jacob by Zilpah. (Zilpah *was the servant* Laban

gave to his daughter, Leah, *when she married Jacob.*)

19Jacob's sons by Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. 20Joseph had Manasseh and Ephraim in the land of Egypt with his wife Asenath (daughter of Potiphera, priest of On). 21Benjamin and his sons: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. 22These are the 14 children born to Jacob by Rachel.

23Dan had only *one* son: Hushim. 24Naphtali and his sons: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. 25These are the 7 children born to Jacob by Bilhah. (Bilhah *was the servant* Laban gave to his daughter, Rachel, *when she married Jacob*.)

26So all of Jacob's children and grandchildren who came to Egypt—those who were in some way his offspring, but not the wives of his sons—were 66 in all. 27Joseph had two sons who were born in Egypt. All of the people directly related to Jacob who now lived in Egypt numbered 70 people.

28Now Israel decided to send Judah ahead to Joseph in order to learn the way into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, *they stopped.* 29Joseph got into his chariot and went out to meet his father, Israel. When he saw him, he fell on his neck and wept for a long time.

Jacob *(to Joseph)*: 30I can die now *in peace,* because I've seen your face and I know you are alive.

31Joseph gathered his brothers and his father's household and told them *his plans.*

Joseph: I'm going now to let Pharaoh know *you are here*. I will tell him, "My brothers and my father's household have arrived from Canaan. 32The men are shepherds. They make their living by keeping livestock, and they've brought their flocks and herds and all of their belongings." 33When Pharaoh calls you *to the court* and asks your occupation, 34tell him, "Your servants keep livestock. We start *in the family business* when we are just boys. That is what we and our ancestors have always done." That way, you'll be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen because Egyptians can't stand to be around shepherds.

47 So Joseph went to Pharaoh.

Joseph *(to Pharaoh)*: My father and brothers have arrived from the land of Canaan with their flocks and herds and the rest of their belongings. They are now *waiting* in the land of Goshen.

2Now Joseph had chosen five of his brothers and brought them along to present to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh *(to Joseph's brothers)*: 3What is your occupation?

Joseph's Brothers: Your servants are shepherds. *We tend sheep and goats* as our ancestors did before us.

4We've come to reside in this land as foreigners for a time because there is no place in the land of Canaan for us to pasture our flocks on account of the severity of the famine. Now please, allow your servants to settle in the land of Goshen *until this famine is over.*

Pharaoh *(to Joseph)*: 5Your father and brothers have come to you *for help.* 6You have the entire land of Egypt at your disposal. Settle your family in the best areas of the land. Let them live in Goshen, and if you know of any who are particularly good at what they do, then put them in charge of my livestock.

7Then Joseph brought his father, Jacob, and presented him to Pharaoh, and Jacob gave Pharaoh a blessing.

► Jacob blesses Pharaoh. As we have seen, words spoken as a blessing have great meaning at this time. It may be no more than a greeting spoken, such as "shalom," which means "peace." However the story of Genesis prompts us to consider another possibility. In God's plan to redeem and reclaim His creation, He chooses Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to all the families on earth. Jacob, Abraham's grandson and God's covenant partner, speaks a blessing over Pharaoh that creates a new reality for Egypt and its king. Little does Pharaoh know that this humble nomadic family in need of his help will one day change the course of history.

Pharaoh *(to Jacob)*: [8]How old are you now?

Jacob: [9]I have journeyed through life for 130 years. My life has been short and hard. But they don't compare with the many years my ancestors traveled this earth.

[10]Jacob gave Pharaoh a blessing *for a second time* and left his presence. [11]So Joseph settled his father and brothers on some of the best land in Egypt—granting them property of their own in a region known as Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. [12]And Joseph also provided them with food, according to the number of all of their dependents.

[13]*As time went on,* the famine became more severe, and food became scarce in the lands of Egypt and Canaan. The people were starving. [14]Everyone from the lands of Egypt and Canaan spent all the money they had to buy grain. Joseph collected all the money and stored it in Pharaoh's palace. [15]But when the people of Egypt and Canaan ran out of money, the Egyptians came to Joseph to plead with him.

Egyptians: Please, give us food! Why should we all die here in front of you? Our money is gone.

Joseph: [16]You can pay with livestock then. I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.

[17]So the people brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for horses, flocks, herds, and donkeys. That year, he supplied them with food in exchange for livestock. [18]But when that year was over, they came to him the next year.

Egyptians: My lord, we cannot hide the fact that our money is all spent, and now the *herds of* livestock all belong to you. We have nothing left to exchange for food except our bodies and our lands. [19]Why should we and our land perish now right before your eyes? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We will become slaves to Pharaoh. We will work the land for him. Just please give us seed, so that we can live and avoid dying *of hunger* and so that the land doesn't become wild and deserted.

[20]So Joseph *agreed. He* bought up all of the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians sold their fields because the famine was too severe for them *to get by on their own,* and so all of the land became the property of Pharaoh. [21]As for the people, he made slaves of them, from one end of Egypt to the other. [22]But he did not purchase the land belonging to the priests because they received an allowance from Pharaoh and were able to live off of it. So they didn't have to sell their land.

Joseph *(to the people)*: [23]See *I have done what you asked.* I have bought you and your lands for Pharaoh. Now here is the seed you need to sow the land. [24]When the harvest arrives, you will be required to give one-fifth of what you produce to Pharaoh; and four-fifths will be your own to plant the fields and feed your families, households, and children.

Egyptians: [25]You have saved our lives. If it pleases my lord, we are honored to serve as slaves to Pharaoh *under these terms.*

[26]So Joseph made a law regarding the land of Egypt—which stands to this day—declaring Pharaoh is due one-fifth *of all the land produces.* Only the land of the priests remained personal property.

[27]So *this was how* Israel *and his descendants* came to live in the land of Egypt, in the region known as Goshen. They acquired property in the area, had children, and their number increased rapidly. [28]Jacob lived another 17 years in the land of Egypt; he lived to be 147. [29]And when Israel was close to death, he called his son Joseph *to his side.*

Jacob *(to Joseph)*: If I have found favor with you, *I need a favor from you.* Put your hand here under my thigh. Swear to deal kindly and faithfully with me *by honoring my dying wish*: please do not bury me in Egypt. [30]When I *die let me* lie with my ancestors. Take my body away from Egypt, and bury me where they are buried.

Joseph: I will do as you ask, *Father.*

Jacob: [31]Swear to me.

And Joseph took the oath. Then, Israel bowed down at the head of his bed.

Jacob bows his final bow—perhaps in the weakness of old age or in thankfulness for Joseph's promise, or maybe in prayer to the Lord.

In the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, custom demands that the firstborn son become the next head of the family and inherit the name, status, and wealth of his father. But as we have seen throughout Genesis, God makes a habit of ignoring human customs, subverting tradition, and privileging the younger over the older. When it comes to the covenant, God typically chooses to pass its blessings and duties to the younger. The trend continues throughout Scripture as God selects David and then Solomon, both younger sons, as the two greatest kings over Israel. It is almost humorous the way Joseph tries to engineer the situation placing Manasseh, his firstborn, at his father's right hand to receive the greater blessing. But Israel has none of it. He crosses his hands and extends the right hand to Ephraim, the second-born. Joseph is sure his ailing father has made a mistake. But Jacob knows exactly what he is doing.

48 Soon after this, Joseph was brought word that his father was *gravely* ill; so he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, *to see Jacob.* 2When Jacob was told that his son Joseph had come to see him, he gathered his strength and sat up in bed.

Jacob *(to Joseph)***:** 3The All-Powerful God* appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan *many years ago* and spoke His blessing over me, 4telling me, "I am going to make you fruitful and multiply your descendants so that you will give rise to nation after nation. I will give this land to them after you to have as their possession forever." 5So *Joseph,* your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before I came here are mine. I claim Ephraim and Manasseh as my own, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. 6As for any children you father after them, you may regard them as your own. When it comes time for your other children to gain their inheritances, they will be given land within the regions granted to their brothers, *Ephraim and Manasseh.* 7When I left Paddan, *your mother* Rachel died on our journey in the land of Canaan. We were not far from Ephrath, so I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (which is also known as Bethlehem).

8Just then Israel noticed Joseph's sons.

Jacob: And who are these?

Joseph: 9These are my sons, *Father,* whom God has given to me here *in Egypt.*

Jacob: Please bring them here to me, so I can *lay my hands on them and* bless them.

10Israel's eyes were dim because of his old age, so he couldn't see well. Joseph brought the boys near to him, and Israel kissed them and hugged them *warmly.*

Jacob *(to Joseph)***:** 11I didn't know if I would ever see your face again, but now God *has given me more than I hoped: He* has let me see your children too.

12Then Joseph moved the boys aside—they had been at his father's knees—and he bowed down low with his face to the ground. 13Then Joseph took his sons and brought them near to his father. He took *his younger son* Ephraim in his right hand and put him to the left hand of Israel, and he took Manasseh in his left hand and put him to the right hand of Israel. 14But Israel stretched out his hands and crossed his arms, laying his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn. 15And he spoke this blessing over Joseph.

Jacob: May the God before whom my
ancestors Abraham and Isaac
walked,
the God who has been my shepherd
all of my life and still to this day,
16The messenger who has rescued me
from all harm,
bless these boys.
And let my name be perpetuated
through them,
as well as the name of my ancestors
Abraham and Isaac,
And let them grow into a *great*
multitude of people
throughout the world.

17When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, he

* 48:3 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

The Children of Jacob

Leah	*Zilpah*	*Bilhah*	*Rachel*
1 Reuben	7 Gad	5 Dan	11 Joseph
2 Simeon	8 Asher	6 Naphtali	12 Benjamin
3 Levi			
4 Judah			
9 Issachar			
10 Zebulun			
Dinah			

The Children of Joseph

Asenath
1 Manasseh
2 Ephraim

was troubled, and so he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's.

Joseph: [18]No, Father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.

[19]But Israel refused.

Jacob: I know, my son, I know. Manasseh will also become a people, and he will be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his children will give rise to many nations.

[20]So it was that Israel blessed Joseph and his sons that day.

Jacob: When *the people of* Israel speak blessings, they'll remember you: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."

So this is how Israel ranked Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Jacob *(to Joseph)***:** [21]Look, I am about to die; but *I know that* God will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your ancestors *someday*. [22]I *am going to* hand down to you more land than I give to your brothers. You will inherit a mountain ridge that I seized from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.

49 After this, Jacob called *all of* his sons to him.

Jacob: [2]Gather near to me, so I can let you know what to expect in the days to come.

Gather around and pay attention, you sons of Jacob.
Listen *carefully, my sons,* to Israel, your father.

[3]Reuben, you are my firstborn *son,*
my power and the vigor of my youth,
first in rank and first in power.
[4]But you are out of control, like floodwaters; you have forfeited your place
because you have lain with your father's wife
and defiled his bed—you climbed onto my couch!

[5]Simeon and Levi are *indeed* brothers, *kindred spirits*
who use their swords* for *cruelty and* violence.
[6]May I never enter their confidence;
from the two of them I must part company to retain my honor.
Because in their anger, they've killed men,
and they've hamstrung oxen on a whim.
[7]Their anger be cursed, for they have fierce tempers.
Their wrath *be cursed,* for they can be cruel.
I will scatter their *children* among Jacob's *descendants*
and spread them throughout *the land of* Israel.

[8]But Judah, your brothers will praise you.
Your hand will *firmly* grasp the neck of your enemy,

* 49:5 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

and your brothers will bow down
before you *in respect*.
9Judah is a lion cub;
my son, who rises from the prey,
Who crouches down and stretches out
like a lion,
and like a lioness—who dares to
rouse him?
10The scepter will not depart from Judah;
the ruler's staff will rest *securely*
between his feet.
Until the One comes to whom true
royalty belongs,
all people will *honor and* obey him.
11He ties his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the
choicest vine.
He washes his clothing in wine
and dips his robe in the blood of
grapes.
12His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth are whiter than milk.

► Israel's blessing speaks not only what is but what will be. His words establish Judah as the father to the royal line from which King David and his dynasty will one day come. They anticipate God's eternal covenant with David that brings peace and prosperity to the entire world. It is little wonder that early Christians referred to the risen Jesus as "the lion of the tribe of Judah," for they found in Him the fulfillment of Israel's blessing.

Jacob: 13Zebulun will settle near the
shores of the sea,
and he will be a safe harbor for ships.
His border will extend to Sidon.
14Issachar is a strong donkey,
lying down between its saddlebags.*
15He saw a good place to rest
and a land that seemed pleasant,
So he bent down to shoulder *another*
load
and embraced a life of hard labor.

16Dan will judge his people,
as one of the tribes of Israel.
17Yet Dan will also be a snake by the
road,
a viper along the path
That strikes at the horse's heels *as it
goes by*
so that its rider falls backward.

18I wait *patiently* for Your salvation,
Eternal One!

19Gad will be raided by thieves,
but he will raid them in return.

20Asher's food will be rich *and delicious,*
and he will produce royal
delicacies.

21Naphtali is a *beautiful* doe, wild and
free,
that bears lovely fawns.*

22Joseph is a fruitful plant* that grows
beside a spring,
its *fruitful* branches reaching over
the wall.
23The archers fiercely attacked him,
shot at him, and pressed hard
against him.
24But his bow remained taut and strong,
his arms *firm and* agile.
They were made so by the *strong* hands
of God—
by the Mighty One of Jacob, by the
Shepherd of the Rock of Israel,
25By the God of your father, who will
come to your aid,
by the All-Powerful One* who will
bless you
With the blessings from heaven above,
blessings of the deep that lie
beneath,
and blessings of the breasts and
womb.
26May the blessings of your father be
more potent
than the blessings of the ancient
mountains.
May they extend to the heights of the
everlasting hills,
and may these blessings *now* rest
on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of him who was set
apart from his brothers.

27Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
devouring prey by morning
and dividing spoil in the evening.

28Now all these are *the heads of* the twelve tribes of Israel. This is how their father

* 49:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 49:21 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 49:22 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 49:25 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

described them when he blessed them—blessing each one with a blessing that suited each son.

► When Israel's inheritance of the land is divided, Levi is not included; but Joseph's two sons become the leaders of two tribes descended from Joseph. Manasseh and Ephraim take Joseph's and Levi's places, filling out the twelve tribes.

Jacob *(charging his sons)*: 29-30I am about to join my ancestors *in death. Please do as I ask, and* bury me with my ancestors in the cave at Machpelah, near Mamre in the land of Canaan. It is located at the edge of a field owned by Ephron the Hittite. Abraham acquired the field from Ephron as a burial site *for his family*. 31This is where Abraham and his wife Sarah are buried, also Isaac and his wife Rebekah. I buried Leah there myself. 32The field and cave were purchased from the Hittites *long ago*.

33After Jacob finished with these instructions to his sons, he pulled his feet up onto the bed, breathed his last breath, and joined his ancestors *in death*.

50 *As his father passed on,* Joseph threw himself onto his father's face, crying and kissing him. 2Then Joseph told the physicians in his service to embalm his father *and prepare him for the journey.* So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3It took 40 days to embalm him because that's how long it takes to embalm a body *properly*. And the Egyptians *paid their respects by mourning and* weeping for him for 70 days.

4When the time of mourning had passed, Joseph addressed Pharaoh's household.

Joseph: If I have found favor with you, please speak to Pharaoh on my behalf. 5My father made me swear an oath. He said, "I am about to die. I want you to bury me in the tomb I made for myself in the land of Canaan." So I ask that you allow me to go out *of Egypt* to bury my father. *When I have honored his request,* I will return to Egypt.

Pharaoh: 6Go up *to Canaan,* and bury your father as he made you swear to do.

7So Joseph went up *to Canaan* to bury his father. And all of Pharaoh's servants went with him *in a long procession that* included the elders of Pharaoh's household and the land of Egypt. 8Joseph's own household, his brothers, and his father's household joined *in the solemn march.* Only their children, flocks, and herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9Both chariots and charioteers accompanied him as well. It was a grand procession. 10When they came to the threshing floor of Atad *near Canaan but still* beyond the Jordan *River,* the *great company of* mourners paused to observe seven days of mourning for Joseph's father. The weeping and lamentation grew so loud that 11the people who lived there, the Canaanites, could not help but notice the profound grief expressed on the threshing floor of Atad.

Canaanites: The Egyptians *must have experienced a terrible loss to* mourn so deeply.

This is why this place of mourning that lies beyond the Jordan was renamed Abelmizraim.

12So Jacob's sons carried out his last instructions as he had directed. 13They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite so he could have a place to bury *his family*. 14After he had buried his father, Joseph gathered his brothers and the *vast* company *of mourners* who had journeyed with him to bury his father, and they all returned to Egypt.

15When Joseph's brothers began to realize *the implications of* their father's death, Joseph's brothers *began to worry.*

Joseph's Brothers: What if Joseph still bears a grudge *in some way* against us and decides to pay us back in full for all of the wrong we did to him?

16So they sent a message to Joseph.

Joseph's Brothers' Message: Your father gave us this instruction before he died. 17He told us to say to you, "Please, I beg you. Forgive the crime of your brothers and the sins they committed against you. They were wrong to treat you so

badly." So please do *what your father asked and* forgive the crime that we, the servants of the God of your father, committed against you.

Joseph cried when they spoke these words to him. 18And his brothers approached and fell at his feet.

Joseph's Brothers: Look! We are your slaves.

Joseph: 19Don't be afraid. Am I *to judge* instead of God? *It is not my place.* 20Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it only for good, and through me, He preserved the lives of countless people, as He is still doing today. 21So don't worry. I will provide for you *myself*—for you and your children.

This same sentiment is expressed in Paul's letter to the Romans (8:28). God can take even the meanest intention and make it work for good for His devoted followers.

So Joseph reassured them and continued to speak kindly to them.

22Now Joseph remained in Egypt *for the rest of his life*—he and all of his father's household. He lived to be 110 years old, 23long enough to see Ephraim's children down to the third generation. Joseph adopted the children of Machir (Manasseh's son) and brought them up as his own. 24*One day,* Joseph told his brothers,

Joseph *(to his brothers)***:** I am about to die, but God will *someday* come to you, lead you out of this land, *and bring you* back to the land He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

25At that, Joseph made the rest of Israel's sons swear *to him an oath.*

Joseph: When God comes to you, you must take my bones along with you out of this place *and back to our homeland.*

26Then Joseph died. He was 110 years old, and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

► The story of Joseph ends with the children of Israel living in Egypt. They live there in peace and security through many generations knowing that their future is not in Egypt; their future is in another land, a land of promise, a land most of them have never seen.

EXODUS

The rescue of Abraham's children from Egyptian slavery

By Moses, the shepherd of God's people

01 02 03 04 05 06

The Book of Exodus continues the story of God's unique relationship with a people known as Israel. But the situation for Israel in Egypt has changed drastically. As Exodus begins, hundreds of years have gone by from the time when Joseph and his family settled in the land of Egypt. With Joseph as Pharaoh's second-in-command, Jacob (Israel) and his children enjoyed favored status. But Exodus announces that a new Pharaoh is in charge, and he wants to write his own history. Meanwhile, as God had promised, Israel has become a nation; but it is a nation living as aliens and outsiders within a land not their own. So, for many reasons Pharaoh and the Egyptians turn against these outsiders and cruelly oppress them.

Exodus then is a story of divine rescue. God remembers the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and He prepares a new prophet, Moses, to be His mouthpiece to Israel and to Egypt's powerful king. With miracle after miracle, God defeats the so-called gods of Egypt demonstrating that He is the True God and these slaves belong to Him. The title of the book, Exodus, is taken from the Greek translation and means literally "a going out." It is named for the central, miraculous event in the book, the "going out" of the Hebrew slaves from a land of oppression toward a new land that would become their home.

The book ends with the people of Israel on their way to this new land. But for a time they must discontinue their journey and camp at Mount Sinai, a special place where God chooses to reveal Himself initially to Moses and then to the rest of the people. At Mount Sinai, God establishes a new covenant with Israel, a covenant that builds upon and expands the earlier relationship He formed with Abraham and his descendants. At the heart of this covenant are God's directives to His people. They put into law His will and form a blueprint for a new kind of society that God intends to be an example to the rest of the world. These directives order their private and public lives; they form the basis for civil and religious society. They demonstrate God's perspective on right and wrong and set Israel apart from other nations.

Moses' greatness as God's prophet and the people's priest is demonstrated on nearly every page of this book. Although Moses stammers badly, God uses him and his brother Aaron to speak more clearly and effectively than any prophet in history. Moses is surely a giant in Israel's history, which may be why tradition ascribes this book—as well as the rest of the Pentateuch—to Moses as author.

1 These are the names of Israel's sons—
the ones who *traveled from Canaan and* entered into Egypt with Jacob *during the great famine.* Each of these men arrived in Egypt with his family:

2Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah;
3Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin;
4Dan and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

5*At that time,* Jacob had 70 children and grandchildren. All of them *came to* Egypt, except for Joseph; he was already there.* 6Joseph died, and so did all of his brothers. *It was not long before* that entire generation was gone. 7But the people of Israel were prolific; they had children *easily,* and their numbers increased *rapidly*. As their numbers grew so did their strength. Eventually, they filled the land.

► God has done what He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: He has made Israel's children fertile, productive, and strong. Over time Jacob's 70 children have become a nation within a nation, and the Egyptians are taking notice. History teaches the Pharaohs and the ruling classes to be wary of outsiders. So now that the Israelites are swarming all over the land like flies, and they are not fully assimilating into Egyptian life and culture, the Pharaoh thinks they pose a clear and present danger. So the Egyptian king decides that strong measures are necessary. The welcome that Joseph and his family once enjoyed turns into outright hostility.

8*One day,* a new king came to power *and ruled* over Egypt, but this king had no knowledge of Joseph.

Pharaoh *(to some of his advisors)***:** 9Look! There are more Israelites than ever before, and they are *growing* more powerful than we are. 10We need to be careful in our dealings with them. Otherwise, they may grow even greater in number, and in a time of war join forces with our enemies, fight against us, and then leave the land.

11So the Egyptian authorities *enslaved the Israelites and* appointed *cruel* slave drivers over them to oppress them with hard, *back-breaking* labor. They forced them to build the storage cities of Pithom and Raamses for Pharaoh.

12But the harder the slave drivers pushed the Israelites, the more rapidly they had children and spread throughout the land. Because of this, the Egyptians grew to detest the Israelites *even more* 13and violently forced them to work *until they were sore and tired—far beyond exhaustion.* 14The Egyptians made life bitter for all those Israelites forced to mix mortar, make bricks, and do all types of *grueling* work in the fields. They tormented their Israelite slaves until all the work was done.

15*Pharaoh,* Egypt's king, called for *some of* the Hebrew midwives. Their names were Shiphrah and Puah.

Pharaoh: 16*Listen closely.* Whenever you are looking after a Hebrew woman who is in labor and ready to deliver, if she gives birth to a son, then kill the baby. If it is a daughter, then allow her to live.

17But the midwives respected God *more than they feared Pharaoh,* so they did not carry out the Egyptian king's command. Instead, they let all the boys live. 18When Egypt's king heard this news, he sent for the midwives.

Pharaoh: Why have you disobeyed my orders and allowed the boys to live?

Midwives: 19Because unlike Egyptian women, Hebrew women are *hearty and* energetic, and they give birth before the midwife arrives to help.

20God was good to the midwives, and *under their care* the Israelite women had many more children. *Despite Pharaoh's orders,* the people of Israel became stronger and more powerful. 21Because the midwives respected God, He blessed them with families of their own. 22In response *to the rapid growth in the Hebrew population,* Pharaoh issued a command to his people.

Pharaoh: Every boy who is born *to the Hebrews* must be thrown into the Nile, and every girl is to be left alive.

* 1:5 Genesis 46:27

► Pharaoh wants the boys dead because he knows they may grow up to fight against him, but he wants the girls to live. He is sure he can find a use for them.

2 *One day* a man and woman—both from the tribe of Levi—married. 2She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that her son was *healthy and* beautiful, *she feared for his safety;* so she kept him hidden from view for three whole months.

3When she could no longer keep him hidden away, she took a basket made of reeds, sealed it with tar and pitch, and placed her baby boy in it. Then she wedged the basket among the reeds along the edge of the Nile River.

The Hebrew word for the "basket" that Moses' mother prepared is the word used in Genesis 6:14 for the "ark" that preserves Noah and his family from a watery judgment.

4*All the while,* the child's sister watched from a distance to see what might happen to her baby brother.

5*Later on* Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river while her young attendants walked along the bank *nearby*. Pharaoh's daughter noticed the basket *wedged* among the reeds *and wondered what it might contain.* So she instructed her maid to bring it to her. 6When Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket, she found the baby boy. He was crying, and her heart melted with compassion.

Pharaoh's Daughter: This is a Hebrew child.

Child's Sister *(coming out of her hiding place)***:** 7Would you like me to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?

Pharaoh's Daughter: 8All right. *Go find a nurse.*

So the baby's sister went and fetched his mother. *The boy's mother approached Pharaoh's daughter.*

Pharaoh's Daughter *(to the nurse)***:** 9*Here!* Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay you *for your services.*

So the woman took the child—*who was secretly her own son*—and nursed him *just as Pharaoh's daughter had instructed.*

This child is destined for greatness. Powerful people want him dead; instead, Providence intervenes.

10The boy grew, and *when the time was right,* the woman brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she adopted him as her own. She named him Moses because, *as she explained,* "I took him out of the water."

11Years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to observe his people—*the Hebrews*—and he witnessed the heavy burden of labor forced upon them. He also witnessed an Egyptian beating one of his Hebrew brothers. 12He looked around *to see if anyone was watching* but there was no one in sight, so he *beat the Egyptian just as the Egyptian had beaten the Hebrew. Moses ended up* killing the Egyptian and hid the dead body in the sand.

13He went out *again* the next day and saw two of his Hebrew brothers fighting with each other. Moses confronted the offender.

Moses: Why are you hitting your friend?

Offender: 14Who made you our prince and judge? Are you going to kill me as you did the Egyptian *yesterday*?*

Fear *immediately* gripped Moses.

Moses *(to himself)***:** The news of what I did must have spread. *I must get out of here quickly.*

15*Moses was right.* When the news reached Pharaoh, he sought to have Moses killed. But Moses ran away from Pharaoh until he reached the land of Midian. There he sat down beside a well.

16Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. *While Moses was sitting there, resting from his journey,* they came to get water *from the well* in order to fill the troughs with water for their father's flock. 17At that moment, a band of shepherds came and forced the priest's flocks away

* 2:14 Acts 7:27-28

from the well; but Moses stood up *for the young women,* came to their rescue, and even watered their *father's* flock *for them.* 18The women returned to their father Reuel *(he was also known as Jethro).*

Many people and places in the Scriptures have more than one name. Jethro is likely his given name, while Reuel is his priestly name.

Jethro: Why are you back so early today?

Women: 19An Egyptian *was at the well and he* saved us from the bullying of the shepherds. He even drew water *from the well* and watered the flock for us.

Jethro: 20Where is this man? Why did you leave him at the well? *Go find him, and* invite him over for a meal.

21*After experiencing Jethro's hospitality,* Moses agreed to come and live with him; and *eventually* Jethro arranged for one of his daughters, Zipporah, to marry Moses.* 22Later Zipporah became pregnant and gave birth to a son; and Moses named the child Gershom because, as he explained, "I have been an outsider in a foreign land."

► What begins as a dinner invitation turns into an adoptive home for this wandering fugitive. Through all the twists and turns in Moses' life, God is preparing him for a special task. Since he is raised by his Hebrew mother, he hears the stories of his people and learns to love them and identify with their suffering. Since he becomes part of Pharaoh's extended family, he knows how to gain access to power. Since he spends these years in the land of Midian taking care of Jethro's flocks, he has an intimate connection with a land through which one day he will lead a vast company of people. In the meantime, Moses must figure out who he is and whose he is, for soon there will be a job to do.

* 2:21 Greek manuscripts add, "for a bride."

23Many years later, Egypt's king died. The Israelites continued to moan because of their bondage, and they cried out *to be rescued* from their oppression. Their cry for help ascended to God. 24He heard their pleas and remembered the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25God saw *the situation* the people of Israel *were in,* and He was moved to take action.

3 Now *one day* when Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, he guided the flock *far away from its usual pastures* to the other side of the desert and came to *a place known as* Horeb, where the mountain of God stood. 2There, the Special Messenger of the Eternal appeared to Moses in a fiery blaze from within the bush. Moses looked again at the bush as it blazed; but *to his amazement,* the bush did not burn up in flames.

► Burning bushes in the desert are not uncommon. Dry plants make good tinder, and lightning strikes quickly set them ablaze. What is unusual is the fact that this bush continues to burn: a curiosity for this seasoned shepherd. As Moses draws close, he sees more than he expects; he encounters the one True God and His Special Messenger. But the form of the encounter is not completely clear. Moses hears directly from God, but he sees only fire and God's Special Messenger. The point here is not simply to amaze Moses with miracles but to call him to an important task. God's people are suffering, and they need someone willing to go and rescue them. God has already decided the right person for the job, but he needs to be persuaded.

Moses *(to himself)***:** 3Why is this bush not burning up? I need to move a little closer to *get a better* look at this amazing sight.

4When the Eternal One saw Moses approach *the burning bush* to observe it *more closely,* He called out to him from within the bush.

Eternal One: Moses! Moses!

Moses: I'm right here.

Eternal One: 5Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals *and stand barefoot on the ground in My presence,* for this ground is holy ground.* 6I am the True God, *the God* of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

A feeling of dread and awe rushed over Moses; he hid his face because he was afraid he might catch a glimpse of the True God.

Eternal One: 7I have seen how My people in Egypt are being mistreated. I have heard their groaning when the slave drivers torment and harass them; for I know well their suffering. 8I have come to rescue them from the oppression of the Egyptians, to lead them from that land *where they are slaves and* to give them a good land—a wide, open space flowing with milk and honey. The land is currently inhabited by Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 9The plea of Israel's children has come before Me, and I have observed the cruel treatment they have suffered by Egyptian hands. 10So go. I'm sending you *back to Egypt as My messenger* to the Pharaoh. *I want you to gather My people*—the children of Israel—and bring them out of Egypt.*

Moses *(to God)***:** 11Who am I to confront Pharaoh and lead Israel's children out of Egypt?

Eternal One: 12*Do not fear, Moses.* I will be with you *every step of the way,* and this will be the sign to you that I am the One who has sent you: after you have led them out of Egypt, you will return to this mountain and worship God.

Moses: 13Let's say I go to the people of Israel and tell them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to *rescue* you," and then they reply, "What is His name?" What should I tell them then?

Eternal One: 14I AM WHO I AM.* This is what you should tell the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to *rescue* you."

15This is what you are to tell Israel's people: "The Eternal, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is the One who has sent me to you." This is My name forevermore, and this is the name by which all future generations shall remember Me.

16Round up all the elders in Israel and tell them, "The Eternal, the God of your fathers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has revealed Himself to me and said, 'I have been watching over you, and I am *deeply* troubled by what has been done to you in Egypt. 17So I will rescue you from the oppression you have suffered in Egypt, and lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—a *rich and productive* land flowing with milk and honey.'" 18They will listen to all that you tell them; you and the elders will then go to visit Egypt's king and tell the king, "The Eternal, the Hebrews' God, has appeared to us. We ask that you allow us to travel three days' distance into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Eternal."

19But I *already* know that Egypt's king *will turn down your request. He* will not allow you to go, unless he is compelled by a hand stronger than his own. 20So I will stretch out My hand, *display My power,* and crush Egypt with a series of miracles I will perform. After that the king will send you out *of Egypt.* 21I will make it so the Egyptians treat *My* people favorably; and when you leave *Egypt,* you will not leave empty-handed. 22Every *Hebrew* woman will ask her *Egyptian* neighbor and any foreigner in her home for anything made of silver or gold or even *fine* clothing. You will give all the items you collect to your children to wear. In this way, you will strip these items from the Egyptians.

4 **Moses:** What if they don't trust me? What if they don't listen to a single word I say? They are *more likely* to reply: "The Eternal has not revealed Himself to you."

The Eternal One answered Moses.

Eternal One: 2What do you have in your hand?

* 3:5 Acts 7:33 * 3:6 Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:32 * 3:7-8, 10 Acts 7:34 * 3:14 "Eternal One" is derived from the Hebrew word meaning, "I am."

God has been called by many names and titles, and those reflect to some extent aspects of God's nature and character. In this encounter, God reveals to Moses His name. This is a special name by which God invites His covenant partners to know and call on Him for all time. It sometimes appears in books or translations as *YHWH* or Yahweh, but this is only a transliteration of the four letters in Hebrew; it's not a translation of its meaning. The name is built on the Hebrew verb "to be" and refers to the fact that God is the Self-existent One—"I AM WHO I AM." Many translations render the divine name "LORD" (in capital and small capital letters), but this translation uses "the Eternal One," for at the heart of the name is the notion that God has always been and always will be. God transcends time and existence; He is the ground of existence. Out of respect, the ancients would seldom speak or write the covenant name; they would use it only on the most solemn occasions. Still God is establishing a unique relationship with Abraham's descendants, and it is time to reveal to them His name.

Moses: My *shepherd's* staff.

Eternal One: 3Throw your staff down on the ground.

So Moses threw the staff on the ground, and it was transformed into a snake. Moses quickly jumped back *in fear*.

Eternal One: 4Reach out and grab it by the tail.

Despite his natural fears, Moses reached out and grabbed the snake; and as he held it, it changed back into a shepherd's staff.

Eternal One: 5This *sign* is so the people will believe that I, the God of their fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—have revealed Himself to you.
6Now *for the second sign.* Put your hand *on your chest* inside your shirt.

Moses did as the Eternal instructed; and when he pulled his hand out, his hand was covered with some disease *that made it look* as white as snow.

Eternal One: 7Put your hand back inside your clothes.

Moses again did as He instructed, and when he removed his hand from his shirt, it returned *to normal* like the rest of his skin.

Eternal One: 8-9If they refuse to believe you, and are not persuaded after *you perform* the first sign, perhaps they will be after the second sign. But if they refuse to believe you and are not persuaded after *you perform* the first two signs, then *here is a third sign:* Take some water from the Nile and pour it out onto the ground. The water you take from the Nile will become blood on the ground.

Moses: 10Please, Lord, *I am not a talented speaker.* I have never been good with words. I wasn't when I was younger and I haven't gotten any better since You revealed Yourself to me. I stutter and stammer. My words get all twisted.

Eternal One: 11Who is it that gives a person a mouth? Who determines whether one person speaks and another doesn't? Why is it that one person hears and another doesn't? And why can one person see and another doesn't? Isn't it *because of* Me, the Eternal? *You know it is.* 12Go now, and I will be there to give you the words to speak; I will tell you what to say.

Moses: 13Please, Lord, *I beg you to* send *Your message through* someone else, *anyone else.*

14Then the Eternal became angry with Moses.

Eternal One: How about your brother—Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks eloquently. And look, he is already on his way to meet you. When he sees you, his heart will be delighted. 15I want you to talk to him and put the *right* words in his mouth. I will guide your mouth and his mouth and instruct you both on what you should do. 16He will address the people as your spokesman. He will serve

as your mouth; and you will instruct him in what he is to say as if you were God to him.
17Take this staff in your hand, and use it to perform the signs I have shown you.

18*Barely convinced,* Moses went back to his father-in-law, Jethro.

Moses *(to Jethro)*: Please let me leave now, so that I can go back to my *Hebrew* brothers and sisters in Egypt and find out if they are still alive.

Jethro: You may go now with *my blessing and* peace.

19The Eternal spoke to Moses while he was still in Midian.

Eternal One: Go back to Egypt. *I assure you,* all the men who wanted to kill you are no longer alive.

20Moses placed his wife and sons on a donkey, and he started on the *long* journey back to Egypt. *As he walked,* he carried God's staff—*his shepherd's staff*—with him.

Eternal One: 21When you arrive in Egypt, I want you to pay Pharaoh a visit. Make sure you perform all the wonders that I have entrusted to your hand. But I am going to harden Pharaoh's stony heart, so that he will not free the people. 22Then I want you to give Pharaoh a message *for Me. Tell him,* "This is what the Eternal says: 'Israel is My firstborn son. 23I say to you, "Release My son, so that he may serve Me," but *in your stubbornness* you refused to free him; therefore, I am going to kill your firstborn son.'"

24While on their way *to Egypt,* they stopped at a place *to rest.* But the Eternal met Moses, and *it seemed like* He was about to kill him, 25when Zipporah grabbed a flint knife and *quickly* cut off her son's foreskin. She dropped it at Moses' feet.

Zipporah: Certainly you are a bridegroom of blood to me.

26So the Eternal released Moses *from this offense.* When Zipporah made the remark, "a bridegroom of blood," she was talking about the circumcision.

► This strange episode is difficult to understand. There is much here that is unexplainable. What is clear is that Moses has been called by God to challenge Pharaoh—one of the most powerful men in history—and to rescue hundreds of thousands of Hebrew slaves from lives of hard labor. On a human level, at least, this seems like risky business. But Moses' mission is something else entirely; it is God's business, involving promises made by a holy God to Abraham hundreds of years earlier, promises to provide for and protect His people. One key aspect of that covenant is the obligation of all males to be circumcised. Apparently Moses has neglected to circumcise his son, a fact that could jeopardize the entire mission. So when Zipporah realizes the gravity of the situation, she takes action and circumcises him. With their covenant responsibilities now met, Moses is free to continue the mission.

Eternal One *(to Aaron)*: 27Go into the wilderness and meet Moses.

So Aaron journeyed to meet Moses, and they met at the mountain of God. *When he saw his brother,* he kissed him. 28*During their joyful reunion,* Moses told Aaron everything that the Eternal had sent him to do, and he explained the miraculous signs He had instructed him to perform.
29Moses and Aaron then traveled *back to Egypt* and gathered together all of the elders of Israel's people. 30Aaron gave a speech that conveyed all the words that the Eternal had given to Moses and then performed the *miraculous* signs in front of the people. 31The people believed *Moses and Aaron.* When everyone heard that the Eternal was concerned about the Israelites and that He had observed their oppression, they bowed down and began to worship *with grateful hearts.*

5 Not long after, Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh.

Moses and Aaron: The Eternal, Israel's God, has a message *for you*: "Release

My people, so that they may go and celebrate a feast in My honor in the desert."

Pharaoh: 2And who is this *god you call* "the Eternal One" that I should heed His message and release His people Israel? I do not know any god by that name, and furthermore I do not intend to release Israel.

Moses and Aaron: 3The God of the Hebrews has visited us. We ask that you allow us to travel three days' distance into the desert to sacrifice to the Eternal our God. Otherwise, He may *become angry and* come after us with disease or sword.

Pharaoh: 4Moses and Aaron, why are you distracting people from their work? *Stop wasting time, and* get back to your labor!
5Look, there are vast numbers of people in this land *who should be working*; instead they are all idle because of you.

6That same day, Pharaoh gave instructions to the slave drivers who were over the people and their supervisors.

Pharaoh: 7Don't supply the people with any more straw to make bricks as you have been doing. Let them go out and find their own straw. 8But *I still want* you to expect the same number of bricks from them as before. *Even though the task will be harder,* do not lessen their load! They are lazy *and are asking for time off,* saying, "Release us so that we can go sacrifice to our God *in the desert and feast in His honor.*" 9*Therefore,* make the work so heavy that the men *don't have the energy to do anything but* work; perhaps then they won't be distracted by these lies!

Slave Drivers and Supervisors *(to the people)***:** 10Pharaoh has a message for you: "I am not going to supply you with any more straw. 11You must go out and get it for yourselves—wherever you can find it—*but you must produce the same number of bricks as before.* Your workload will not be reduced."

12The people *quickly and desperately* spread out across the land of Egypt looking for dry stalks *of grain* to use for straw. 13The slave drivers pushed them hard.

Slave Drivers: *Hurry,* you must meet your quotas. You must produce the same number of bricks as you did before when we provided you with straw.

14Plus they beat and interrogated the supervisors of the Israelites, the Hebrews whom the slave drivers had appointed over the workers.

Slave Drivers: *Why are you lagging behind?* Why haven't you met your quotas of bricks yesterday or today as you did before?

15The supervisors of the Israelites *were unable to meet the demands and so they* appealed to Pharaoh.

Supervisors *(pleading with Pharaoh)***:** Why are you treating your servants this way? 16No more straw is being provided to your servants, yet the slave drivers keep yelling at us, "Make bricks!" And then your servants are beaten; it is your people who are at fault here, *not us.*

Pharaoh: 17*No. It is you.* You are lazy! You are all so very lazy! *You try to escape your work by making up excuses,* saying, "Please release us so that we may go sacrifice to the Eternal." 18Leave me now, and get back to work, *you indolent whiners!* You will not be provided any straw, and you must make the same number of bricks as before.

19The supervisors of the Israelites knew they were in *deep* trouble when they were told, "You are not to lessen the workload. You must still make the same number of bricks every day *as you did before.*" 20After the supervisors left Pharaoh, they went directly to Moses and Aaron who were already waiting for them.

Supervisors *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** 21May the Eternal see and judge what you have done. Now because of you Pharaoh and all who serve him look on us as if we were some kind of disgusting odor. You *might as well* have put the sword in their hands *they will use* to kill us.

22Moses went back to *meet with* the Eternal One.

Moses: Eternal, these are Your people. Why have You brought *so much* trouble on them? And why have You sent me here? 23Ever since I approached Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done

more harm to them than ever before. And You have done absolutely nothing to rescue Your people.

6 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: Now you will see what I have in store for Pharaoh. When Pharaoh sees the power of My hand, he will not only send My people from this land, he will drive them out.

2(*pointedly* to Moses) I am the Eternal. 3I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God-All-Powerful;* but I did not reveal My name, the Eternal One, to them. 4I also made My covenant with them. I promised I would give them Canaan—the land where their *ancestors* lived as strangers. 5In addition, I have heard the *constant* cries of the Israelites who have been enslaved by the Egyptians. I have remembered My covenant; 6*go now and* tell the people of Israel, "I am the Eternal, and I will rescue you from the heavy load the Egyptians have laid on you. I will liberate you from their oppression. I will stretch out my powerful arm and free you with amazing acts of judgment. 7Then I will gather you to Me as My people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Eternal who rescued you from the heavy load the Egyptians have put on you. 8I will lead you into *Canaan*—the very land I promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession for I am the Eternal."

9So Moses *went and* told these things to the Israelites, but they turned a deaf ear to him because they were in such low spirits and *exhausted from* their harsh labor.

10The Eternal One *once again* instructed Moses.

Eternal One: 11Go speak with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and tell him to release the Israelites from his land.

Moses: 12The Israelites haven't paid attention to anything I've said. How do You expect Pharaoh to listen to me *if my own people won't?* I am not fit to speak for You.

13The Eternal then addressed Moses and Aaron and gave them instructions about dealing with the Israelites and Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The instructions had to do with bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.

14These are the heads of their fathers' families: The sons of Reuben, who was the firstborn of Israel—Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. This is the clan of Reuben. 15Simeon's sons—Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul (a Canaanite woman's son). 16Levi's sons (according to the genealogical records)—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Levi lived to be 137 years old. 17Gershon's sons—Libni and Shimei; each became the head of a clan. 18Kohath's sons—Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Kohath lived to be 133 years old. 19Merari's sons—Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of Levi according to the genealogical records. 20Amram married his father's sister, Jochebed, and she gave birth to his sons Aaron and Moses. Amram lived to be 137 years old. 21Izhar's sons—Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. 22Uzziel's sons—Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. 23Aaron married Elisheba (Amminadab's daughter and Nahshon's sister). Elisheba gave birth to his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 24Korah's sons—Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. The clans of Korah descended from these. 25Aaron's son, Eleazar, married one of Putiel's daughters, and she gave birth to his son Phinehas. These are the ancestors which founded the various clans of the Levites.

► Up until this point in the story, Moses has taken the lead in rescuing the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. But this genealogy signals that Aaron will play an increasingly important role in the days ahead. Both Moses and Aaron are descended from Levi—whose children are set aside to serve Israel as priests—but the genealogy traces Aaron's lineage, not Moses'. Later generations will look back at Aaron as the ideal priest.

26-27These are the *same* Aaron and Moses whom the Eternal directed, "Lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt like a *victorious* army." These two *brothers* spoke to Pharaoh, Egypt's king, about releasing the Israelites from Egypt.

* 6:3 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

28-29One day the Eternal visited
Moses in Egypt and said to him,

Eternal One: I am the Eternal. Go tell
Pharaoh, Egypt's king, everything that I
tell you.

Moses: 30Please, I am not fit to speak for
You. How do You expect Pharaoh to lis-
ten to me?

7 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: Look! I
have made it so that Pharaoh will
deal with you as a god and your
brother Aaron as your prophet. 2I want
you to tell *Aaron* everything that I com-
mand you. Then your brother Aaron
will tell Pharaoh to release My people
Israel from his land. 3But I am going to
harden Pharaoh's *stubborn* heart so that
I can perform sign after sign, wonder
after wonder in the land of Egypt. 4Still
Pharaoh will ignore *the message* you *give
him*. Then I will unleash the power of
My hand against Egypt and liberate My
vast armies—My people, the children of
Israel—from Egypt with *amazing* acts
of judgment. 5When I stretch out My
hand against Egypt and free the children
of Israel from *their oppressive grasp,* the
Egyptians will have no doubt that I am
the Eternal.

6Moses and Aaron did exactly what the
Eternal commanded. 7When they con-
fronted Pharaoh, Moses was 80 years old,
and Aaron was 83.

8The Eternal then continued His
instructions to Moses and Aaron.

Eternal One: 9When Pharaoh says,
"Do something wondrous *to prove
yourselves,*" then, *Moses,* tell Aaron,
"Take your staff and toss it at Pharaoh's
feet, and it will be transformed into a
snake."

10So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh
and did exactly what the Eternal told
them to do. Aaron threw his staff down
before Pharaoh and his servants, and it
was transformed into a snake.

11Pharaoh then sent for all the sages
and sorcerers; and the *most talented* magi-
cians in Egypt *stepped up and* performed
the same act with their own incantations.
12Each magician threw down his staff, and
each staff turned into a snake. But Aaron's
staff devoured all of the other staffs. 13And
still Pharaoh's heart was as hard *as stone*;
he did not pay any attention to what
Moses and Aaron said, just as the Eternal
had predicted.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 14Pharaoh's heart
is *as* hard *as stone*. He refuses to release
My people. 15Go visit him *again* in the
morning when he is walking out to the
water. Wait for him along the bank of
the Nile and carry the staff which turned
into a snake. 16Give Pharaoh My mes-
sage: "The Eternal One, the God of the
Hebrews, has sent me to you: 'Release
My people, so that they may serve Me in
the desert. You have not paid any atten-
tion until now. 17You will know that I
am the Eternal by the next miracle *I am
going to perform*. I will strike the water
of the Nile with this staff that is in my
hand, and the water will be turned into
blood. 18The fish in the Nile will die,
and this river will be fouled *with the rot-
ting mess* so that the Egyptians will no
longer be able to drink from it.'" 19Give
this instruction to Aaron: "Take your
staff in hand and raise it over *all* the
waters of Egypt—over the rivers, canals,
ponds, and lakes—so that the water
will be turned into blood. Blood will
appear throughout the land of Egypt,
even in the water kept in wooden and
stone vessels."

20Moses and Aaron did exactly as the
Eternal had instructed. In full view of
Pharaoh and all of his servants, Aaron
raised his staff and struck the water in
the Nile. *When he did,* all the water turned
into blood. 21The fish that lived in the Nile
began to die, and the river took on a foul
smell. The Egyptians were no longer able
to drink from it. The water-turned-blood
was everywhere in the land of Egypt. 22But
Pharaoh summoned the *most talented*
magicians in Egypt who performed the
same act with their own incantations. So
Pharaoh's heart remained as hard *as stone,*
and he paid no attention to Moses and
Aaron just as the Eternal had predicted.
23Then Pharaoh turned and went back to
his house without giving this *wondrous
miracle* a second thought.

24The Egyptians had to dig wells
along the *edge of the* Nile in order to have
water to drink, because they were no
longer able to drink from the Nile. 25Seven
days *and nights* went by after the Eternal
had struck the Nile *and turned the water
into blood.*

8 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: Go visit Pharaoh and give him My message: "The Eternal says *to you,* 'Release My people, so that they may serve Me. 2If you do not release them, I will send an infestation of frogs across your entire land. 3The Nile will swarm with frogs. They will hop up *from the river* to assault your palace, *make their way* into your bedroom, and even crawl into your bed. *The frogs will crowd* into the houses of your servants and *eventually* of all your people. *They will find their way* into your ovens and kneading bowls. 4*Mark My words,* these frogs will be all over you, your people, and all your servants.'"

5Give this message to Aaron: "Take your staff in hand and raise it over the rivers, canals, and ponds, and call forth the frogs to invade Egypt."

6Aaron reached out with his staff over all the waters of Egypt, and *countless* frogs came forth and soon covered the land. *They were everywhere.* 7The *most talented* magicians *in Pharaoh's Egypt* were called to perform the same act with their incantations and they, too, called forth the frogs into Egypt.

Pharaoh's magicians may be able to conjure up frogs, but they can't make them leave.

8Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron.

Pharaoh: Plead with the Eternal to remove the frogs from my *land, from my house,* and from *the houses of* my people. If He does this, I will release the people so that they can go sacrifice to the Eternal One.

Moses: 9You may have the honor of naming the time when I plead for you, your servants, and your people *and ask God* to get rid of the frogs that are plaguing you and your houses. There will be no frogs left except in the Nile.

Pharaoh: 10Tomorrow.

Moses: *Then tomorrow it is*—just as you have requested—so that you will know that there is no one like the Eternal our God. 11The frogs will leave you, your houses, your servants, and all your people. *After tomorrow,* there will be no frogs anywhere except those in the Nile.

12Moses and Aaron then left Pharaoh, and Moses pled with the Eternal about the frogs, which He had brought upon Pharaoh, *that He would rid the land of them.* 13He did as Moses asked of Him, and all the frogs that had infested the houses, streets, and fields died. 14The Egyptians gathered up all the dead frogs and made great piles of them, and the land took on a rotten stench. 15But when Pharaoh saw *that the infestation of frogs had ended,* he was relieved; and he hardened his own heart and refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Eternal had said.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 16Give this message to Aaron: "Raise your staff and strike the dust of the earth and the land of Egypt will be overrun with swarms of gnats."

17They did exactly as *God had* instructed. When Aaron reached out and struck the dust of the earth with his staff, swarms of gnats flew up from the dust and covered the people and animals. *It seemed as if* all the dust in the land of Egypt turned into gnats.

18The *most talented* magicians *in Pharaoh's Egypt* tried to perform this same act with their incantations, but none could do it. So the gnats continued to swarm all over the people and their animals.

Magicians *(to Pharaoh)*: 19This must be the finger of God.

If God can do this with a finger, what must His whole hand be able to accomplish?

But Pharaoh's heart was as hard as stone, and he refused to pay any attention to Moses and Aaron, just as the Eternal One had said.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 20Get up early in the morning and get in Pharaoh's way as he is walking out toward the water. *Stand up to him, face-to-face, and* give him My message: The Eternal says to you, "Release My people, so that they may serve Me. 21If you do not release My people, I will release swarms of flies upon you, your servants, and your people, and into all of your houses. The houses of the Egyptians and the ground they walk on will be overrun with these swarms. 22On the day *this plague* begins, I will separate Goshen—where My

people live—*from the rest of the land.* It will be *a safe place,* unharmed by the hordes of insects *that I release against Egypt.* Then you will know that I am the Eternal; and I am here, right in the middle of this land. 23I will make a distinction between My people and your people. This sign will happen tomorrow."

24The Eternal did just as He said. Thick swarms of insects *darkened the skies and* invaded Pharaoh's palace and his servants' houses. The land was wiped out by the swarm of insects that infested all the land of Egypt. 25Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron.

Pharaoh: Go and sacrifice to your God. *But you must stay* here in the land.

Moses: 26It would not be right to do what you ask, for our manner of offering sacrifices to the Eternal our God is deeply offensive to the Egyptians. If we offend them with these sacrifices, will they not stone us? 27*No.* We must travel for three days into the desert and sacrifice to the Eternal our God, just as He has asked us to do.

Pharaoh: 28I will allow you to go *on a short journey* into the desert and sacrifice to the Eternal your God. But you must not travel too far from here—*certainly not three days away*. And *do not forget to* offer prayers for me.

Moses: 29I am leaving you now, and I am going to offer prayers to the Eternal that the swarms of insects will leave Pharaoh, his servants, and his people by tomorrow. But, Pharaoh, do not go back on your promise to allow the people to go and sacrifice to the Eternal.

30Moses left Pharaoh and offered prayers to the Eternal. 31He honored Moses' prayers and removed the swarms of insects that had plagued Pharaoh, his servants, and the people of Egypt. Not a single insect remained. 32But Pharaoh hardened his stubborn heart this time as well and refused to allow the people to go.

9 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** *Once again,* go visit Pharaoh and give him My message: "The Eternal, God of the Hebrew people, says *to you,* 'Release My people, so that they can serve Me. 2If you refuse to release them and strengthen your grip on them, 3then the hand of the Eternal will come down hard on you: a terrible disease will afflict all of your livestock in the fields—horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep. 4But the Eternal will distinguish between Israel's livestock and Egypt's livestock, so that not a single animal that belongs to Israel's people will die.'" 5He has already determined the time *when this plague will begin,* saying: "Tomorrow He will strike the land."

6Then the Eternal *did exactly as He said and* sent this sign on the next day. All of the Egyptians' livestock began to die, but not a single animal from Israel's livestock perished. 7Pharaoh sent *investigators to check Israel's livestock,* and they found that not a single one of their animals had died *or become sick*. But Pharaoh's heart was still as hard as stone, and he refused to release the people.

Eternal One *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** 8Reach into the furnace and grab handfuls of ashes. Moses, throw these ashes up into the air—right in front of Pharaoh. 9It will turn into a fine dust that will cover all the land of Egypt and cause painful abscesses to break out on people and animals throughout the land of Egypt.

10So they removed ash from the furnace and stood directly in front of Pharaoh. Moses threw the ashes up in the air, and it caused abscesses to break out on people and their animals. 11Even the *most talented* magicians *in Pharaoh's Egypt* could not stand before Moses, because the abscesses broke out on their bodies as well as the rest of the Egyptians.

12The Eternal made Pharaoh's hard heart even harder, and Pharaoh was not moved by *the miraculous deeds and* the words of Moses and Aaron, just as the Eternal had told Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 13Get up early tomorrow morning and stand before Pharaoh. Tell him, "The Eternal, the God of the Hebrews, has a message for you: 'Release My people, so that they may serve Me. 14This time, *if you refuse,* I'm going to send a series of plagues upon you *yourself,* your servants, and your people. Then you will see that there is no one else *as great* as I am in all the earth. 15For by now I could have *easily* raised my hand and struck you and your people with a

disease *so lethal* that you would be erased entirely from the earth. 16But I have kept you *in power* for a reason, to show you My *greater* power and to see that My name *and reputation* spread through all the earth.* 17But you still *try to* dominate My people and refuse to release them from the land. 18This time tomorrow, I will unleash an enormous hailstorm *upon you*—a storm like no other that has ever occurred in Egypt since its beginning until now. 19So gather all your livestock and anything left in your fields into a safe place. *Protect it the best you can,* for every man or animal left unprotected in the field when the hailstorm arrives will die.'"

20Some of Pharaoh's servants feared the Eternal's message, so they gathered their servants and livestock into *the safety of* their houses. 21But *there were others* who did not take seriously the Eternal's word, and they left their servants and livestock unprotected in the field.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 22Raise your hand up toward the heavens, and hail will rain *from the sky* across the entire land of Egypt—upon people and animals and all the crops in the field throughout the land of Egypt.

23So Moses raised his staff up toward the heavens, and the Eternal released *loud* thunder and hail *from the sky,* and fire streaked down upon the earth. He caused hail to rain down upon all of Egypt. 24As the hail fell, lightning pierced *the darkness* and lit up *the sky*. The hailstorm was so intense that it was like no other that had ever occurred in Egypt since its beginning. 25The hail pounded everything *to the ground* that remained in the fields, both people and their animals; it crushed every crop, it shattered every tree. 26There was only one place the hail did not fall—Goshen—where the people of Israel lived.

27Pharaoh then sent for Moses and Aaron.

Pharaoh: *I admit that* this time *I've gone too far*. I have sinned. The Eternal is in the right; I and my people have done wrong. 28*Go back* to the Eternal and plead my case. We have had enough of your God's thunder and hail. I will *agree to* release you—you and your people will not stay any longer.

Moses: 29*Watch closely*. The moment I step outside the city gates, I will lift up my hands to the Eternal, and the thunder and hail will stop. Then you will know that the earth belongs to Him. 30But I know *very well* that you and your servants do not yet fear the Eternal God.

31(The flax and barley crops were both destroyed, because the barley heads were nearly ripe and buds had formed on the flax *when the hail fell*. 32But the wheat and the spelt had not yet sprouted, so these crops were spared.)

33Moses left Pharaoh and departed the city. He lifted up his hands to the Eternal *and prayed. When he did,* the thunder and hail and heavy rains stopped. 34But as soon as Pharaoh saw *that the weather had changed,* and he and his servants were certain that the hail and thunder and heavy rains were no longer a threat, they became utterly defiant and Pharaoh hardened his *stubborn* heart once again. 35Because his heart was as hard as stone, he refused to release the Israelites *as he promised*. This happened exactly as the Eternal One predicted through Moses.

10 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: Go pay Pharaoh another visit. I have made his heart and his servants' hearts as hard *as stone,* so that I can perform My *wondrous* signs among them *and reveal My power*. 2*I have done all these things* so that you can tell your children and grandchildren stories of how I treated the *cruel* Egyptians with contempt and performed My signs among them. *I have done all this* so that you may believe I am the Eternal.

3So *once again* Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh.

Moses and Aaron: The Eternal, the God of the Hebrews, has a message for you: "How long do you plan to *resist Me and* refuse to humble yourself before Me? Release My people, so that they can *go and* serve Me *in the desert*. 4If you refuse to release My people, tomorrow I will fill your land with locusts, 5and they will blanket the ground. There will be so many that you will not be able to see the ground! The locusts will devour every crop the hail did not destroy, and their horde will strip every tree that grows in

* 9:16 Romans 9:17

your fields! 6They will fill *every corner of* your houses, your servants' houses, and all the Egyptians' houses. This will be a spectacle that none of your ancestors have ever seen—never from the day that they were born until this present day."

Starvation for the majority of Egyptians is becoming a real possibility. How far they have come from Joseph's day when Egypt fed the world!

Moses then turned and left Pharaoh.

Servants *(to Pharaoh)*: 7How much longer will *you let* this man trap us? Why don't you just release the people and let them go serve the Eternal their God? *Look around you!* Don't you see that Egypt is in ruins?

8Then Pharaoh had Moses and Aaron brought back to him.

Pharaoh: *Some of your people may* go and serve this God of yours, the Eternal! *But not all.* Who will be going with you?

Moses: 9*No.* All of us must go—the young and the old. We will take our sons, daughters, flocks, and herds with us. We are all going *into the desert* to celebrate a *great* festival to the Eternal.

Pharaoh: 10The Eternal *had better* be with you if you really think I am going to let you take your little ones with you! Look, I know you have some evil plan. *I can see it in your face.* 11No! I will allow you to take only the men to go and serve the Eternal One, since that is what you have been asking for *all along.*

Then Pharaoh had Moses and Aaron thrown out.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 12Stretch your hand over the land of Egypt and call forth the locusts, so that they may invade Egypt and devour anything *that grows* from the earth and everything the hail did not destroy.

13Then Moses raised his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Eternal directed the east wind to blow over the land all that day and night. When the morning dawned, the east wind brought with it *a cloud of* locusts. 14They *dropped from the sky and* overran the land of Egypt from one end to the other. Countless numbers of them swarmed *in the air and* crawled over the ground. Never had there been nor would there ever be again such a swarm of locusts in Egypt. 15The locusts blanketed the whole land until the ground was *smothered* in darkness. They devoured every plant growing in the fields and stripped every tree of its fruit, everything the hail had not destroyed. Not one green leaf was left on any tree, not one plant was left growing in the field anywhere in the land of Egypt.

16Pharaoh immediately sent for Moses and Aaron.

Pharaoh: I have sinned against the Eternal your God and against you. 17Now, please forgive me, just this once; and pray to the Eternal your God, and ask Him to take away this *plague of* death from me.

18Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Eternal *for him.*

19He caused the winds to shift, and a strong west wind blew and lifted the *cloud of* locusts *up into the air* and drove them out into the Red Sea.* Not a single locust was left in all the land of Egypt. 20But He hardened Pharaoh's stubborn heart, and he refused to release the Israelites.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 21Raise your hand up toward the heavens, and a great darkness will cover the land of Egypt, a heavy, oppressive darkness.

22So Moses raised his hand up toward the heavens, and a deep darkness settled over all the land of Egypt for three days. 23*It was so dark that* people could not even see each other, and no one dared to venture out from their houses for three *whole* days. But all the people of Israel had light where they lived. 24Once more Pharaoh sent for Moses.

Pharaoh: You may go and serve the Eternal. Everyone can go—even your little ones—but leave your herds and flocks behind.

Moses: 25You must also allow us to take *our herds and flocks as* sacrifices and

* 10:19 Literally, Sea of Reeds

burnt offerings, for we must offer them to the Eternal our God. 26We need to take every single animal—not a hoof can be left behind—because we need some of them to sacrifice to Him. And until we get to where we are going, we will not know what *animals* we need to worship the Eternal.

27But the Eternal hardened Pharaoh's *stubborn* heart *once again,* and he was unwilling to release the Israelites.

Pharaoh *(to Moses)***:** 28Get out of here, and never come back! If you ever *try to* see my face again, I will have you killed!

Moses: 29What you say is true. I will never see your face again!

11 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** I am going to strike Pharaoh and *his* Egypt one more time, and after *this final plague,* Pharaoh will release you from Egypt. When he *finally* releases you, *he will be so glad to see you go that* he will *practically* force you out of this land. 2*Go now and* speak to all the people. Have every man and every woman ask their neighbors to give them items made of silver and gold.

3Now the Eternal caused the Egyptian people to have a favorable attitude toward His people. And Moses was already highly regarded in the land of Egypt by Pharaoh's servants and *most* Egyptians.

Moses *(to Pharaoh)***:** 4This is the message of the Eternal: "About midnight I will move through Egypt, 5and every firstborn son in every family in Egypt will die—from the firstborn of Pharaoh (who rules from his throne) to the firstborn of the slave girl (who grinds at the mill). The firstborn of all your *cattle and* livestock will die as well. 6The air will be heavy with loud wailing throughout the land of Egypt, *a deep and dismal mourning* unlike any that has been or will ever be again in the land. 7But among the people of Israel not even a dog's bark will disturb *the night.* Then you will know that the Eternal makes a *sharp* distinction between Egypt and Israel."

8All those who are servants to you, *Pharaoh,* will come down to me and humbly bow before me and beg, "Please go! You and all those who follow you! *Leave now!*" That is when I will go.

Then Moses, who was boiling with anger, left Pharaoh's presence.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 9Pharaoh will not pay attention to what you say. As a result, My wonders will increase in all the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh's stubbornness never frustrates the divine plan. God turns it and uses it to demonstrate to all that He is the one True God.

10Moses and Aaron performed all of these wonders in the presence of Pharaoh. But the Eternal hardened Pharaoh's *stubborn* heart, and Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites from his land.

► Perhaps the best way to look at the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh is as a contest to see who truly is God. In Egypt Pharaoh is considered a god. He has certain powers and abilities, and the might of Egypt resides with him. When Moses and Aaron appear before him to demand the release of the Hebrew slaves, each refusal becomes an occasion for the True God to demonstrate His superiority over Pharaoh and all the other gods of Egypt. Each successive miracle attacks deeper into the heart of Pharaoh's power and politics. Slowly but surely, Pharaoh's power is subverted until God breaks Pharaoh's grip on the people of Israel completely. With the final miracle everything begins to unravel: the death of the firstborn is personal for Pharaoh.

12 **Eternal One** *(to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt)***:** 1-2Mark this month as the first month of all months for you—the first month of your year. 3Declare this message to the entire community of Israel: "When the tenth day of this month arrives, every family is to select a lamb, one for each household. 4If there aren't enough people in the family *to eat* an entire lamb, then they should share a lamb with their nearest neighbor

according to how many people are in the neighbor's family. Divide the portions of the lamb so that each person has enough to eat. 5Choose a one-year-old male that is intact and free of blemishes; you can take it from the sheep or the goats. 6Keep this chosen lamb safe until the fourteenth day of the month, then the entire community of Israel will slaughter their lambs *together* at twilight. 7They are to take some of its blood and smear it across the top and down the two sides of the doorframe of the houses where they plan to eat. 8That night, have them roast the lamb over a fire and feast on it along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. 9Do not eat any meat raw or boil it in water; only eat the meat after the *entire* animal has been roasted over a fire with its head, legs, and intestines attached. 10*Eat whatever you can,* but don't leave any of it until morning; whatever is left over in the morning burn in the fire. 11Here is how *I want you* to eat this *meal*: Be sure you are dressed and ready to go *at a moment's notice*—with sandals on your feet and a walking stick in your hand. Eat quickly because this is My Passover.

12I am going to pass through the land of Egypt during the night and put to death all their firstborn children and animals. I will also execute *My* judgments against all the gods of the Egyptians, for I am the Eternal One! 13The blood on *the doorframes of* your houses will be a sign of where you are. When I *pass by and* see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague will not afflict you when I strike the land of Egypt *with death.*

14This will be a day for you to always remember. I want you and all generations after you to commemorate this day with a festival to Me. Celebrate this feast as a perpetual ordinance, *a permanent part of your life together.* 15You are to eat bread made without yeast for seven days. On the first day get rid of any yeast *you find* in your house. Anyone who eats bread made with yeast during the seven *festival* days must be cut off from *the rest of* Israel. 16On the first day of the festival and again on the seventh, gather the community together for a time of sacred worship. No one may work on those two days except to prepare what every person needs to eat. 17Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread because it commemorates the day that I led your forces out of Egypt. Honor and celebrate this day throughout all your generations as a perpetual ordinance, *a permanent part of your life together.* 18From the evening of the fourteenth day of that first month to the evening of the twenty-first day of that month, eat bread made without yeast. 19-20No yeast is to be found in any of your houses during the seven *festival* days. Whoever eats anything that has yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel. It doesn't matter whether he is a foreigner or a native; *the same standards apply. During the seven festival days,* do not eat anything made with yeast; wherever you live *and gather together,* be sure you eat only unleavened bread.

21Then Moses called all of Israel's elders together and gave them instructions.

Moses: Go and pick out lambs for each of your families, and then slaughter *your family's* Passover lamb. 22Take a handful of hyssop *branches,* dip them down into the bowl of blood *you drained from the sacrifice,* and mark the top of the doorway and the two doorposts with blood from the bowl. *After you do this,* no one should go out that door until the next morning.

23The Eternal will pass through *the land during the night* and bring death to the Egyptians. But when He sees the blood-markings across the tops of your doorways and down your two doorposts, He will pass over your houses and not allow His messenger of death to enter into your houses and strike you down. 24You and all your descendants are obligated to keep these instructions for all time. 25Even after you arrive in the land the Eternal has promised you—*the land flowing with milk and honey*—you must keep *these instructions and perform* this ritual. 26When your children ask you, "What does this ritual mean to you?" 27you will answer them, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Eternal, for He passed over the houses of the Israelites *when we were slaves* in Egypt. And although He struck the Egyptians, He spared *our lives and* our houses."

The name of this festival, "Passover," comes from the fact that God "passes over" those houses where the Israelites gather and eat the sacrifice.

When Moses finished these instructions, the people bowed down and worshiped.

28The Israelites went and did as they were instructed; they were obedient to what the Eternal had commanded Moses and Aaron.

29Now this is what happened: at midnight, He struck down all the firstborn sons in Egypt—from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, to the firstborn *son* of the prisoners *locked* in the dungeon, and even the firstborn of all the livestock in the land. 30Pharaoh woke up during the night. *He wasn't the only one.* His servants, as well as all of the Egyptians *in the land,* had awoken. A great scream *shattered the night* in Egypt, for there was not a single *Egyptian* house where someone was not dead.

31Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron before the night was over.

Pharaoh *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** Get up and get out. Leave my people *right now*—you and *all the rest of* the Israelites. Go and worship *this god of yours,* the Eternal One, just as you have said. 32Take your flocks and your herds as well with you—just as you said—and go! But bless me *on your way out*!

Pharaoh hates to admit he has been beaten by Moses and his God. After losing his firstborn son—destined to be the next Pharaoh—he has little choice.

33The Egyptians *frantically* urged the people of Israel to hurry and leave their land.

Egyptians *(imploring)***:** *If you do not leave soon,* we will all be dead.

34*So the Israelites hurried.* They took their *bread* dough before any yeast had been added, packed up their kneading bowls, wrapped them in *some of* their clothing, and carried them on their shoulders.

35The people of Israel also did what Moses had told them to do; they asked the Egyptians for items made of silver and gold, and they asked for *extra* clothing as well. 36The Eternal caused the Egyptians to have a favorable attitude toward *His* people, so the Egyptians fulfilled these requests *and gave the people what they asked for.* This is how the Israelites stripped the Egyptians of their valued possessions.

For many years the Egyptians stripped the people of Israel of their lives, labor, and dignity. God's justice demands that Israel be paid for all they lost.

37The Israelites *left and* traveled from Rameses to Succoth. There were about 600,000 men, plus all the *women and* children. 38Another crowd, made up of various and sundry peoples, accompanied them, as well as herds, flocks, and a great number of livestock. 39They baked flat bread *along the way* from the dough without yeast which they carried with them from Egypt. The dough had no yeast because the people had been rushed out of Egypt, and they did not have enough time to gather food supplies for themselves.

40-41The Israelites had lived in the land of Egypt for a total of 430 years. On the last day of their 430th year, all the forces belonging to the Eternal left the land of Egypt. 42This was the night when the Eternal kept watch over His people and brought them *safely* out of the land of Egypt; now this night is to be kept by His people, to be celebrated by all of the people of Israel throughout all generations.

Eternal One *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** 43This is the requirement for Passover: no foreigner *or outsider* should eat this meal. 44But every slave bought with money may participate in this celebration if he has been *initiated into the community by* circumcision. 45No temporary residents or paid servants may share in it. 46The meal must be eaten in only one house. Don't take any of the meat outside. Not one of the lamb's bones shall be broken.* 47The entire community of Israel must celebrate it. 48If you have outsiders living among you and they want to celebrate the Passover to the Eternal with you, then all the men must *agree to* be circumcised. Only after circumcision may they join in and celebrate with you; then you must treat them as if they were native-born. But make sure no uncircumcised male eats *any part* of the *sacred* meal. 49The same instruction applies to *everyone equally—without distinction*—the native as well as the outsider who is living among you.

50Then all of the Israelites did exactly as the Eternal had instructed Moses and

* 12:46 John 19:36

This night is still remembered by Jewish people each year during the festival called Passover. The exodus—God's liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt—is one of the most important events in all Scripture. For over 400 years, God's covenant people lived as outsiders in Egypt. For as long as that last generation could remember, they had been slaves living embittered lives under a cruel regime. But God heard their cries and acted finally and decisively to rescue them. Now it is time to go home, to a land they have never seen, a land of promise and prosperity. They return not as slaves but as free people, a powerful force for God in the world. The exodus leaves a permanent mark on the people of Israel. It is celebrated in song, recorded in Scripture, and commemorated in a festival; the prophets even see a day when a new exodus is coming.

Aaron to do. 51On that same day, He led the Israelites *as they marched* out of the land of Egypt like an army.

13 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** 1-2Set apart all of the firstborn and dedicate them to Me. The first *male* offspring—both human and animal—that opens the womb among the people of Israel belongs to me.

Moses *(to the people)***:** 3Remember this day, the day when you departed from Egypt and left behind lives of slavery. For the strong hand of the Eternal has freed you from *Pharaoh and his* Egypt. *In observing this day, be careful* not to eat any food containing yeast. 4You are leaving today in the month of Abib. 5When He leads you into the land which He promised your ancestors He would give to you—a *wide, open* space flowing with milk and honey, a land currently inhabited by the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Amorites, and Jebusites—*I want you to* observe the following festival during this month: 6For seven days, you are to eat only bread made without yeast. On the seventh day, celebrate a feast in honor of the Eternal. 7*Remember the directive:* only bread made without yeast can be eaten during the seven *festival* days. Don't keep any bread with yeast around; in fact, get rid of all yeast anywhere in your territory during those days. 8You are to explain to your children on that day, "We observe this feast because of what the Eternal did for me when I came out of Egypt." 9This festival will be a sign to you—*like a mark stamped* on *the back of* your hand or a reminder *written* across your forehead—so that the Eternal's instruction will never be far from your lips. For He led you out of Egypt with a strong hand. 10Observe what I have decreed at the designated time every year.

11The Eternal will lead you into the land He promised you and your ancestors—the land where the Canaanites are now living. 12You are to dedicate to Him every offspring that opens the womb—your firstborn sons and the firstborn male of all your livestock—for they belong to Him. 13You may redeem every firstborn of a donkey by sacrificing a lamb in its place. If you choose not to redeem it, then you must break its neck. But you must redeem all of your firstborn sons *and not sacrifice them.*

14There will come a time when your children ask you, "What is this *thing we are doing*?" You will say, "With a strong hand the Eternal led us out of Egypt and *freed us* from lives of slavery. 15When Pharaoh's heart was as hard as stone, and he refused to release us, the Eternal killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt (both humans and animals). That is why I sacrifice the firstborn male *of all our livestock* to Him, but then I redeem every firstborn son *by sacrificing a substitute.*"

16These practices will be like a mark *stamped* on *the back of* your hand and a reminder *written* across your forehead, a *constant* reminder that the Eternal led us out of Egypt with a strong hand.

17After Pharaoh sent the people out, God did not take them by the *coastal* road that runs through the land of the Philistines, even though that was the nearest *and easiest* route. Instead, God said, "For if they see battle *with those contentious Philistines,* they might regret their decision and then return to Egypt." 18So God *chose a different, longer path that* led the community of His people through the desert toward the Red

Sea. The Israelites marched out of the land of Egypt like an army ready for battle.

19Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath, "God will certainly come and rescue you. Carry my bones with you when you leave this place."*

20The people of Israel departed from Succoth and set up camp in Etham at the edge of the desert. 21The Eternal went on ahead to guide them during the day in a cloud shaped like a pillar; at night *He appeared to them* in a fire shaped like a pillar to light their way. So they were able to travel by day and by night. 22The Eternal did not remove the cloud pillar or the fire pillar; by day and by night it continued to go ahead of the people.

Often clouds and fire signify the presence of God in Scripture; that is especially true here in the Book of Exodus.

14 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: 1-2Speak to the Israelites and tell them to go back and set up camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal-zephon. Camp there next to the sea. 3Pharaoh will talk about the Israelites, saying, "They are wandering around in circles. The desert has closed them in *on all sides*." 4Then I will harden Pharaoh's stubborn heart *even more,* and he will pursue the Israelites. Honor will come to Me through *the actions of* Pharaoh and his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Eternal One.

And so they did exactly as the Eternal instructed.

5When Egypt's king received the news that the Israelites had run away, the attitude of Pharaoh and his servants changed. They began talking among themselves.

Pharaoh's Servants: What have we done? We have released the Israelites from serving us *and lost our labor force*!

6Pharaoh prepared his chariot and called out his army. 7He took a select group of the 600 best chariots *in the land* plus all the other chariots in Egypt with drivers commanding all of them.

8The Eternal hardened the *stubborn* heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he chased after the Israelites just as they were marching out of the land with *victorious* hands held high.

9The Egyptians pursued the Israelites. All of Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot-drivers and army caught up with the Israelites as they were camping by the sea not far from Pi-hahiroth, opposite Baal-zephon.

10Pharaoh approached *the Israelites' camp,* and the Israelites saw the Egyptian army closing in on them. The Israelites *were trapped and* feared for their lives, so they cried out to the Eternal.

Israelites *(to Moses)*: 11Were there not enough graves in Egypt? Is that why you brought us out here to die in the desert? Why have you done this to us? Why have you made us leave Egypt? 12Didn't we tell you in Egypt, "Stop pestering us so that we can *get on with our lives and* serve the Egyptians"? It would have been better for us to live as slaves to the Egyptians than to die out here in the desert.

Moses *(to the people)*: 13Don't be afraid! Stand *your ground* and witness how the Eternal will rescue you today. Take a good look at the Egyptians, for after today you will never see them again. 14The Eternal will fight on your behalf while you watch in silence.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 15Why do you call for Me? Instruct the Israelites to *break camp and* keep moving. 16Raise your staff and reach out over the sea to divide it. The Israelites will be able to walk straight through the sea on dry ground. 17-18I am going to harden the *stubborn* hearts of the Egyptians, and *in their arrogance* they will continue to chase the Israelites. My honor will be on display *when I defeat* Pharaoh, his army, his chariots, and his chariot-drivers. The Egyptians will know that I am the Eternal when I display my glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot-drivers.

19God's messenger, who had been out front leading the people of Israel, moved to *protect* the rear of the company; the cloud pillar moved *with him* from the front to the back of them. 20The cloud pillar

* 13:19 Genesis 50:25

took its position between Egypt's and Israel's camps. The cloud cast darkness *by day* yet it lit up the sky by night. As a result, the Egyptians never got close to the Israelites the entire night. 21Moses then *took his staff and* reached out over the sea. The Eternal parted the sea with a strong east wind, which blew all night and turned the floor of the sea into dry ground between the divided waters. 22The Israelites *broke camp and* traveled on dry ground through the parted waters, and the sea stood like a *solid* wall on their right and on their left.

23The Egyptians *were undaunted. They* continued their pursuit; all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot-drivers followed the Israelites into the middle of the sea.

24Before daybreak the Eternal peered down upon the Egyptian army through the fire pillar and the cloud pillar and threw them all into confusion. 25He caused the wheels of their chariots to break down so that it was nearly impossible for the drivers to control them. *The Egyptians knew something was wrong.*

Egyptians: Let's go and get away from these Israelites. *Their God,* the Eternal One, is fighting for them against us.

26*After all the Israelites had reached the other side of the sea,* the Eternal spoke to Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** *Now take your staff and* reach out over the sea. The waters *which I parted* will crash upon the Egyptians and cover their chariots and chariot-drivers.

27So Moses raised his hand and reached out over the sea, *and the walls of water collapsed.* As dawn gave way to morning, the sea returned to normal and the Eternal swept the retreating Egyptian army into the sea. 28The waters rushed and covered all the chariots and their drivers, swallowing up all of Pharaoh's army that had pursued Israel into the sea. Not one Egyptian survived.

29But the Israelites had walked *safely* through the parted waters on dry ground, and the sea stood like a *solid* wall on their right and on their left. 30That day the Eternal rescued Israel from the *powerful* grip of the Egyptians, and Israel watched the corpses of the Egyptians *wash up* on the shore. 31When Israel witnessed the incredible power that the Eternal used to defeat the Egyptians, the people were struck with fear of Him, and they trusted in Him and also in Moses, His servant.

► Throughout this redemption story, it is clear that the Lord has protected Israel while He has judged and frustrated Egypt. After the many wonders before the Passover and the miraculous guidance by the cloud and the pillar of fire, God destroyed the Egyptian army in the midst of the sea. For centuries people have sought to explain this great miracle and make sense of it. Was it a volcanic eruption and a tsunami that parted the waters? Was it a shallow lake that drowned Pharaoh's army? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Only God knows. But reason cannot grasp all that took place that day. When God's covenant people were on the verge of extinction, God stepped in to fight for them. No one survived that day except by the miraculous grace of God.

15 Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Eternal One.

Moses and the Israelites: I will sing to the Eternal, for He has won a great victory;
He has thrown the chariot into the sea: horse and rider.
2The Eternal is my strength and my song,
and He has come to save me;
He is my God, and I will praise Him.
He is the God of my father, and I will exalt Him.
3The Eternal is a warrior;
the Eternal is His name.
4Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has thrown into the sea.
And his high-ranking officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
5The deep waters covered them;
they sank to the *muddy* depths like a stone.
6Your right hand, Eternal One, is magnificent in power.
Your right hand, Eternal, vanquishes the enemy.

7In Your majestic greatness You conquer
those who rise against You;
You unleash Your burning anger,
and it consumes them like
straw.
8With a blast of Your anger the waters
piled high,
the waves stood up like a wall;
in the heart of the sea, deep waters
turned solid.
9The enemy said, "I will go after them,
chase them down, and divide
the spoils;
my desire will be spent on them.
I will draw my sword; my powerful
hand will take possession of
them *once again*."
10But You blew Your breath-wind, and
the sea covered them;
they sank like lead down into the
mighty waters.
11Who compares to You among the gods,
O Eternal?
Who compares to You—great in
holiness,
awesome in praises, performing
marvels and wonders?
12You raised Your right hand,
and the earth swallowed Your
enemies.
13With Your loyal love, You have led the
people You have redeemed;
with Your great strength, You have
guided them to Your sacred
dwelling.
14*Already* people have heard and they
tremble;
those who inhabit Philistia are
gripped by fear.
15*Even* now the chiefs of Edom are deeply
disturbed;
Moab's leaders cannot stop
trembling;
all who live in Canaan are *deeply
distressed and* wasting away.
16Horror and fear overwhelm them.
Faced with the greatness of Your
power,
people are afraid to move; *they fall
as silent* as stone,
Until Your people pass by, Eternal One,
until the people whom You
purchased pass by.
17You will bring them and plant them
on the mountain of Your
inheritance—
the place, Eternal, that You have
designated to be Your dwelling,
the sanctuary, Lord, that Your
hands founded *and made ready*.
18The Eternal will reign *as King* forever
and always.

19When Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot-drivers drove into the sea, the Eternal caused the waters to collapse upon them. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

20The prophetess, Miriam (Aaron's sister), picked up a tambourine, and all *the rest of* the women followed her with tambourines and *joyful* dancing.

Miriam: 21Sing to the Eternal One, for He
has won a great victory;
He has thrown the horse and its
chariot into the sea.

22Then Moses led Israel away from the Red Sea, and they entered the desert of Shur. They traveled for three days in the desert before they found water.

23When they came to the place where they did find water, they could not drink it because it was so bitter. So they called the place Marah, *or bitter*. 24*Because they were very thirsty,* the people complained to Moses.

Israelites: What are we supposed to drink?

25Moses then asked the Eternal for help, and the Eternal showed him a log. Moses threw the log into the *bitter* water, and the water became sweet. At Marah the Eternal established an *important* principle and set a standard for His people so that He could test them.

Eternal One: 26If you will listen closely to My voice—*the voice of* your God—and do what is right in My eyes, pay attention to My instructions, and keep all of My laws; then I will not bring on you any of the plagues that I did on the Egyptians, for I am the Eternal, your Healer.

27Then they traveled on to *an oasis called* Elim, where there were 12 freshwater springs and 70 palm trees with dates. They set up camp there next to the waters.

16 Then the entire community of Israel departed from Elim and entered the desert of Sin, which is located between Elim and Sinai. *They arrived there* on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from Egypt.

The covenant people leave the pleasant, coastal area around Elim to begin the long journey through the wilderness. It will take longer than anyone expects.

2*As soon as* they got to the desert *of Sin,* the entire community of Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron.

Israelites: 3It would have been better if we had died by the hand of the Eternal in Egypt. At least *we had plenty to eat and drink, for* our pots were stuffed with meat and we had as much bread as we wanted. But now you have brought the entire community out to the desert to starve us to death.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 4Look! I will cause bread to rain down from heaven for you,* and the people will go out and gather a helping of it each day. I will test them to see if they are willing to live by My instructions. 5On the sixth day, they will gather the usual amount; but when they go to prepare it, it will end up being twice what they usually gather.

Moses and Aaron *(to the Israelites)***:** 6When evening falls, you will know that the Eternal has led you out of the land of Egypt. 7In the morning your eyes will see His glory because He takes your complaints *against us as complaints* against Him. Who are we, that you direct your complaints to us?

Moses *(continuing)***:** 8This will take place when the Eternal One provides you with meat in the evening and plenty of bread in the morning because He hears all your grumbling and complaining against Him. Why do you complain to us? Your complaints are not against us, but against Him.

9*(to Aaron)* Tell the entire community of Israelites, "Draw near to the Eternal. He has heard your complaints."

10While Aaron was speaking to the entire community of the Israelites, they all looked out toward the desert, and the *radiant* glory of the Eternal could be seen in the cloud. 11The Eternal spoke to Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 12*Rest assured,* I have heard the *constant* complaining of the Israelites. Tell them, "In the evening, you will have meat to eat; and in the morning, you will have enough bread to satisfy your *gnawing* hunger. Then you will know that I am the Eternal your God."

13That evening, quail flew in and covered the camp; and when morning arrived, *what seemed to be ordinary* dew was all around the camp.

14But when the dew evaporated, it left behind a thin, *mysterious,* flaky substance that looked like frost on top of the *dry desert* ground. 15The people of Israel went out to examine it. *They had never seen anything quite like it.*

Israelites *(to one another)***:** What is it?

The people didn't have a clue what this *strange substance* was.

Moses: It is the bread which the Eternal has given you to eat. 16Here are His instructions: "Gather only as much of it as you should eat by yourself. Pick up two quarts* *of bread* for each person who lives in your tent."

17The Israelites did as they were told. Some people gathered a lot, others gathered less. 18When they used a two-quart jar to measure it, the one who had gathered a lot didn't have more than he needed; and the one who gathered less had just what he needed.* *Miraculously,* each person *and each family*—regardless of how much they gathered—had exactly what they needed.

Moses *(continuing God's instructions)***:** 19Don't try to keep any of it until the morning. *Either eat it all, or throw it away*.

20But some people ignored Moses and tried to keep some of it until the next morning. *Overnight* it became wormy and started to have a dreadful smell. Moses became furious with them *because they had disobeyed God's instructions.*

21Every morning the people went out and gathered it—each family took only what it needed. By the time the sun became hot, it had melted away. 22On the sixth day the people *went out and* gathered, but they came back with twice as

* 16:4 John 6:31 * 16:16 Hebrew measurement is omer. * 16:18 2 Corinthians 8:15

much as usual—four quarts per person. All the leaders of the community *thought they needed to* tell Moses *what had happened.*

Moses *(to the leaders)***:** 23Listen to what the Eternal commanded: Tomorrow, *the seventh day,* is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath dedicated to Him. Bake or boil whatever you need for today's meals. Whatever is left over, keep it to eat tomorrow. *It won't spoil.*

God wants His people to keep the Sabbath as a special day and to depend on Him—not their own efforts—to supply all they need.

24So the people stored *some of* it until the next morning, just as Moses had instructed. None of it spoiled, nor did it have any worms.

Moses: 25Eat what is left over today, because today is a Sabbath to the Eternal, *a day of rest.* You will not find any of it in the field today. 26You are to gather it for six days, but on the seventh day (the Sabbath), none of it will be *on the ground.*

27When the seventh day arrived, some of the people *ignored Moses and* went out to gather it *anyway*; but there was none *to gather.*

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 28How much longer are you going to disobey My commands and instructions? 29Look! I have given you the Sabbath *as a day of rest.* That is why I give you an extra portion of food on the sixth day. Everyone should stay where they are and not go out *to work* on the seventh day.

30So the people *did as God directed and* rested on the seventh day.

31The community of Israel decided to name this *mysterious substance* "manna" (*which means, "What is it?"*). It was white like a coriander seed, and it tasted *sweet* like honey wafers.

Moses: 32This is the instruction of the Eternal: "Preserve two quarts of the manna so that future generations can see the bread I provided for you in the desert when I led you out of the land of Egypt."

33(to Aaron) *Go,* find a jar and fill it with two quarts of manna. Put it *in a special place* before the Eternal to preserve it for future generations to see.

► "The Eternal Provides." That could well be the theme for the entire exodus adventure. When there is no water, He provides. When there is no bread, He provides. When there is no meat, He provides. These provisions are clearly God's gift to His people. They do not depend upon the cleverness, skill, or hard work of the Israelites. It must be difficult for these former slaves—whose lives have been all about work—to stop, to rest, and to truly believe their lives and futures depend upon God and not upon themselves.

34Aaron did as the Eternal commanded. He stored the jar before the covenant to keep it safe.

► This is an interesting statement. Aaron is directed to place the jar with the special breadlike substance that God provides "before the covenant," which is either a reference to the directives God will provide (chapter 20) or to the special container—the covenant chest—God directs Aaron to build (chapter 25) to preserve some of Israel's most precious treasures from the exodus and their time in the wilderness. Neither of these items exists at this point in time.

35For 40 years, the Israelites were sustained by the manna *God supplied. They ate it* until they arrived at the borderlands of Canaan, *the edge* of the land they would *one day* inhabit. (36And their omer was a two-quart measurement and in turn was one-tenth of an ephah.)*

* 16:36 An ephah was about 21 quarts or seven-tenths of a bushel.

17 The entire community of Israel traveled in stages out of the desert of Sin, just as the Eternal instructed. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there to quench their thirst. 2*Once again* the people complained to Moses.

Israelites: Give us water to drink! *We're thirsty.*

Moses: Why do you aim your complaints at me? Why are you testing the Eternal One?

3But the people were so thirsty for water, they complained to Moses *and leveled accusations against him.*

Israelites: Why did you lead us out of Egypt? Was it to kill *all of* us—our children and livestock included—with this thirst?

4Moses *had had enough of their complaints, so he* cried out to the Eternal One.

Moses: What am I supposed to do with these people *and their relentless complaining*? They are on the verge of stoning me.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 5*Here's what I want you to do:* go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. *Also,* be sure to bring your *shepherd's* staff—the one with which you struck the Nile. 6I will be there when you arrive standing at the rock of Horeb. I want you to strike the rock *with your staff*; and *when you do,* water will flow out of it so that everyone will have *enough* to drink.

The elders of Israel *accompanied Moses and* watched as he did what the Eternal directed.

7Moses named the place Massah* and Meribah,* because the Israelites complained and tested the Eternal, saying, "Is He standing with us or not?"

8While the Israelites were camped at Rephidim, soldiers of Amalek came and attacked them. 9Moses called for *a young leader named* Joshua.

Moses *(to Joshua)*: Select some *of our best* men, and go fight against the soldiers of Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand at the crest of that hill *overlooking the battlefield* with God's staff in my hand.

10Joshua did exactly as Moses had instructed him to do. *He gathered the strongest men he could find* and fought against the soldiers of Amalek. Meanwhile, Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of the hill.

11It happened that whenever Moses raised his hand, the battle went well for Israel; but whenever he lowered his hand *to rest,* Amalek began to win. 12When Moses became too tired to hold his hands up any longer, Aaron and Hur took a stone and sat him down on it. Then both men stood beside Moses, one on each side, holding his hands up and keeping them steady until sunset. 13*In the end,* Joshua *and the men of Israel* defeated Amalek and his soldiers with the sword.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 14Write down what I say on a scroll as a memorial record *of these events,* and read it aloud so Joshua can hear: "I will erase *all traces of* the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

15Then Moses constructed an altar and called it, "The Eternal Is My *Battle* Flag."

Moses: 16*Because Amalek raised a defiant hand against the throne of the Eternal,* He has promised to wage war against Amalek through future generations.

18 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, the priest of Midian, heard about all that God had done for Moses and His people Israel, and how the Eternal had rescued Israel out of Egypt. 2-3Now Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and her two sons back to Jethro *from Egypt,* and Jethro had cared for them *in his long absence. Moses had* named one son Gershom, because as he said, "I have lived as an outsider in an unfamiliar land."* 4*Moses had* named the other son Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper, and He rescued me from Pharaoh's sword." 5Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) brought Zipporah and her two sons into the desert to meet Moses when he *and the people of Israel* were camped near God's mountain.

* 17:7 Literally, "testing" * 17:7 Literally, "complaining" * 18:2-3 Exodus 2:22

This place is special for Moses, for it was here that he first met God in the burning bush.

6Jethro sent *a servant with* a message for Moses.

Jethro *(to Moses)*: I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming out to see you and I'm bringing your wife and two sons with me.

7So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. When he saw him, he bowed down *before Jethro* and kissed him. They each asked how the other was doing, and then they went into Moses' tent.

8Moses told Jethro *the whole story*. *He told him* everything that the Eternal had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians on behalf of Israel. *He told him* about all the *misery and* tribulations they had run into during their long journey. And *then he told* how the Eternal had rescued them. 9Jethro was thrilled to hear of all the kindness the Eternal had shown Israel, especially how He rescued them from the *powerful* hand of the Egyptians.

Jethro: 10Praise to the Eternal, for He rescued you from the powerful hand of the Egyptians, from the cruel grip of Pharaoh. He has liberated His people from beneath the *harsh* hand of their Egyptian *masters*. 11Now I know *with all my heart* that the Eternal is greater than all gods because of the way He delivered His people when Egyptians in their arrogance abused them.*

12Jethro then took a burnt offering and sacrifices and presented them to God. Aaron and the rest of the Israelite elders gathered to dedicate a meal to God with Moses' father-in-law.

13On the next day, Moses sat *and served as judge,* settling disputes among the people. Those *with grievances* surrounded him from sunrise to sundown *waiting to present their case*. 14Jethro noticed all Moses was doing for the people.

Jethro: What do you think you are doing? Why are you the only one who is able to judge the disputes of all these people who surround you from sunrise to sundown?

Moses: 15These people come to me seeking direction from God. 16When two people are arguing *and can't resolve their differences,* they come to me; and I settle the matter between them. *This is one way* I help God's people understand His requirements and instructions.

Jethro: 17What you are doing is not good *for you*. 18The responsibility is just too much. You are going to wear yourself out. Not only that, you're going to wear out the people too. You can't do it all by yourself. 19I am going to give you *a piece of* advice, so listen up and God will be with you. You should represent the people before God, and carry their concerns to Him. 20Teach them God's requirements and *pass on His* laws. Show them the right way to live and the kind of work they should be doing. 21*As for all these other duties you have taken on,* choose competent leaders who fear God, love truth, despise dishonesty, and won't take bribes. After you divide *and subdivide* all the people into various groups of a thousand, hundred, fifty, and ten, put the men *of integrity* you selected in charge over the various groups. 22Let these *righteous leaders* be ready to judge the people whenever it is necessary. If there is some major problem, they can bring that to you. Otherwise, these select leaders ought to be able to handle the minor problems. This will be much easier for you, and they will help you carry this burden. 23If you do what I advise and God directs you, then you will be able to handle the pressure. Not only that, but all these people *standing around needing help, they* will be able to return to their tents at peace.

24Moses accepted Jethro's advice and did all that he said. 25He chose competent leaders and put them in charge of the community of Israel. He divided *and subdivided* the nation into groups of a thousand, hundred, fifty, and ten, and he appointed a leader over each group. 26The *righteous* leaders judged the people whenever disputes or problems arose. Any major quarrel, they brought to Moses *for his judgment*; but every minor argument, they judged themselves.

27When it was time for Jethro to return to his own land, Moses sent his father-in-law on his way.

* 18:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is unclear.

Jethro is more than Moses' father-in-law; he is also an insightful leader and a skilled counselor. He sees that what Moses is trying to do is counterproductive. Moses is wearing himself down in continual service to the people, and the people are frustrated with the many hours they must wait to have their cases heard by a single arbitrator. Jethro's counsel advances the best possible solution for all concerned. Moses remains the sole spiritual leader of the emerging nation, the people's representative to God, and the conduit of God's wisdom to the people. But now he is to delegate his governing authority to a set of judges.

The legal and administrative system Jethro proposes is much like a military command with the masses of people divided and then subdivided. Those who are honest and capable hear the normal disputes that arise on a daily basis, much as they have observed Moses handling them in the past. The more difficult and unique issues are still dealt with by Moses. In this system, there is no difference between civil disputes and religious inquiries. This is an administration designed to handle all problems, secular or spiritual. Life, after all, doesn't fall into nice, neat categories.

19 The Israelites entered the desert of Sinai on the day the third new moon appeared after the Israelites left Egypt. 2After departing from Rephidim, they entered into the desert of Sinai and set up camp out in the desert. The entire community of Israel camped right in front of the mountain *of God*.

3Moses climbed *the mountain* to meet with God, and the Eternal spoke to him from the mountain.

Eternal One: This is what I want you to say to the house of Jacob—to all the people of Israel: 4"You are eyewitnesses of all that I did to the Egyptians. You saw how I *snatched you from the bonds of slavery and* carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5Now if you will *hear My voice,* obey what I say, and keep My covenant, then you—out of all the nations of the world—will be My treasured people. After all, the earth belongs to Me. 6You will be My kingdom of priests, a nation holy *and set apart.*" Tell the Israelites exactly what I have told to you.

As a kingdom of priests, Israel exists to serve as agents of God's blessing. The people are to bear witness to God's character and carry to Him the world's concerns.

7Moses descended *from the mountain* and assembled the elders of Israel and told them everything the Eternal commanded him to say.

Israelites: 8We will do everything the Eternal has told us to do!

Moses took what the people said back to the Eternal.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 9I will come to you in a thick cloud so that the people will be able to hear *My voice* when I speak to you. That way they will trust you forever.

Then Moses told the Eternal all that the people had said.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 10-11Go down to the people and get them ready *to meet Me* today and tomorrow by purifying themselves and washing their garments. By the third day, they need to be ready, for on that day I will descend from Mount Sinai so that everyone can see. 12You are to set up boundaries all around the mountain and tell the people, "Be careful that you do not *cross the boundaries and* go up on the mountain or even touch the edge of it. If anyone so much as touches the mountain, he should be put to death. 13No one is to touch the person *or animal* who crosses the boundary; stone them or shoot them with arrows *but do not touch them.* It doesn't matter whether it is a human or an animal, it must be put to death." But when they hear the long blast of the ram's horn, then they are permitted to make their way up on the mountain.

14Moses went down the mountain and purified all the people. They washed their clothes. 15He gave instructions to everyone.

Moses: Be ready for the third day. Do not have sexual relations with your spouse *between now and then.*

16When the morning of the third day arrived, thunder cracked and lightning lit up *the sky*. A thick cloud veiled the mountain, and there was a *long,* loud blast of a ram's horn. Every person in the camp trembled. 17Moses led the *anxious* people away from camp to encounter God. Everyone waited at the base of the mountain. 18Now Mount Sinai was covered in *thick* smoke because the Eternal descended on the mountain in fire; and the smoke of that fire rose *up to the sky* as if it were *billowing* out of a furnace, and the entire mountain shuddered *and quaked* intensely. 19The blast of the ram's horn grew louder and louder. Moses spoke, and God answered with a voice *that rumbled like thunder*.

20The Eternal descended to the summit of Mount Sinai. He called for Moses to come and meet Him, so Moses began the *long, hard* climb up the mountain.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 21Go down, and warn the people not to cross *the boundaries* in order to try to see Me, or else many of them will die. 22Any of the priests who draw near to Me must first rid themselves of any impurity so that I do not break loose and kill them.

Moses *(to the Eternal)***:** 23No one can approach Mount Sinai because You warned them when You said, "Set up boundaries around the mountain and keep the area holy and separate."

Eternal One: 24Go back down and bring Aaron with you next time. But do not let any of the people (including priests) cross *those boundaries* to come up and meet Me, unless they want Me to break loose and kill them.

25Moses went back down *the mountain* and told the people *all the Eternal had said.*

20

Then God began to speak *directly to all the people.*

► Until now God has dealt only with Moses on behalf of His people; at Mount Sinai, He turns to address them directly in order to express the core of His covenant obligations. He begins by reminding them of all He has done for them. His miraculous deeds in liberating the Hebrew slaves and providing for them in the desert become the basis of this new relationship. He then proceeds to lay out the Ten Directives that will define and shape their lives together. The first four Directives concern their duties to know and worship the one True God. The last six pertain to how Israel is to live with one another in a covenant-based society. Properly understood, all the other teachings, prescriptions, and directives that come in later chapters derive from these Ten Directives.

Eternal One: 2I am the Eternal your God. I led you out of Egypt and liberated you from lives of slavery *and oppression.*

3You are not to serve any other gods before Me.

4You are not to make any idol *or image of other gods. In fact,* you are not to make an image of anything in the heavens above, on the earth below, or in the waters beneath. 5You are not to bow down and serve any image, for I, the Eternal your God, am a jealous God. As for those who are not loyal to Me, their children will endure the consequences of their sins for three or four generations. 6But for those who love Me and keep My directives, their children will experience My loyal love for a thousand generations.

7You are not to use My name for *your own* idle purposes, for the Eternal will punish anyone who treats His name as anything less than sacred.

8*You and your family are to* remember the Sabbath Day; *set it apart,* and keep it holy. 9You have six days to do all your work, 10but the seventh day is *to be different; it is* the Sabbath of the Eternal your God. *Keep it holy* by not doing any work—not you, your sons, your daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, or any outsiders living among you. 11For the Eternal made the heavens *above,* the earth *below,* the seas, and all the creatures in them in six days. Then, on the seventh day, He rested.

That is why He blessed the Sabbath Day and made it sacred.

12 *You are to* honor your father and mother. If you do, you *and your children* will live long *and well* in the land the Eternal your God *has promised to* give you.

13 You are not to murder.

14 You are not to commit adultery.

15 You are not to take what is not yours.

16 You are not to give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 You are not to covet what your neighbor has or set your heart on getting his house, his wife, his male or female servants, his ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

18 As all the people witnessed *the signs of God's presence*—the blast of the ram's horn, the *roaring* thunder, the flashing lightning, and the smoke-covered mountain—they shook *with fear and astonishment* and *wisely* kept their distance.

Israelites *(to Moses)*: 19 We are afraid to have God speak directly to us; we are certain that we will die. You speak to us instead; we promise to listen.

Moses: 20 Don't be afraid. These *powerful manifestations* are God's way of instilling *awe and* fear in you so that you will not sin; He is testing you *for your own good.*

21 But everyone remained far away *from the mountain* as Moses began moving toward the thick, dark cloud where God was.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 22 This is what I want you to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves witnessed that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 *It is essential that you* not make any idols to rival Me. Do not make any idols out of silver or gold for yourselves! 24 Take earth and build an altar to Me and sacrifice all of your burnt offerings and peace offerings there. Offer Me *the best of* your sheep and oxen. Wherever I choose for My name to be remembered, I will come to you and shower blessings upon you. 25 But if you *decide to* build an altar out of stones for Me, use *only natural stones,* not hand-cut stones, because any attempt to shape them with your tools will desecrate the altar. 26 *Also,* do not approach My altar by walking up steps, for *you might profane the altar by* exposing your nakedness."

► After God gives Israel the Ten Directives, He gives them other instructions that derive from the first ten. They do not cover every situation but provide guidance for how God's people should live.

21 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: These are other rules *and guiding principles* that you must present to the Israelites:

2 If you purchase a male Hebrew slave, he will be your servant for six years *only.* When the seventh year arrives, he will go free without having to pay a price *for his freedom.*

In Moses' day, slavery exists everywhere in the world, and slaves are the first to be given protection under these guiding principles or judgments.

3 If *you acquire* a slave who is not married, then he will depart as a single man. But if *you acquire* a man who is married, then his wife will also leave when he goes free.

4 If his master provides a wife for him, and the wife gives him sons and daughters, then both the wife and the children belong to the master, and only the slave will leave the master's service *when the seventh year arrives.*

5 But if *the seventh year arrives and* the slave freely *renounces his right to freedom,* saying, "My heart is full of love for my master, my wife, and my children. I will not leave *my master's service* as a free man," 6 then his master will present him to the True God.* Next his master will escort him to the doorway and pierce his *ear against the doorpost* with an awl. Then everyone will know this slave will serve his master for life.

7 *Women are to be treated differently.* If a man decides to sell his daughter as a slave, she will not be freed as male slaves are *when the seventh year arrives.*

* 21:6 Greek manuscripts read, "to the lawcourt of God."

8If *for any reason* she does not please her master who handpicked her *for a wife,* then he is to allow her to be bought *by another*. He has no right to sell her to a foreign people because he has broken the agreement with her.

9If the master chooses her *as a wife* for his son, then the master must treat her just as he would his own daughter.

10If the master decides he wants to marry an additional wife, then he must not reduce his slave-wife's food or clothing or any other marital rights. 11If he does not provide these three things for her, then she is free to leave without owing him any money *for her freedom.*

12If a man attacks another and the victim dies from the attack, then the attacker must be put to death. 13But if God allows a person to die at the hands of another who never intended to kill him in the first place, then I will appoint a place where he can run *and take refuge from those who would exact revenge.* 14But if a man plans an attack and cunningly kills his victim, then *he will find no refuge* at my altar. Take him from there and put him to death.

15Also, anyone who strikes one of his parents must be put to death.

16Anyone who kidnaps another—whether he has already sold his victim or still has him when he is caught—must be put to death.

17And anyone who curses either of his parents must be put to death.*

18If people are engaged in an argument and one hits the other with a rock or his fist, and the victim does not die but is bedridden *for a time and unable to work,* 19then the one who struck him will not be punished as long as the injured party recovers enough to be able to get out of bed and walk around with the help of his staff; however, he must pay his victim for lost time *and wages,* and make sure he has the care he needs until he recovers. 20If a person hits his male or female slave with a rod, and the slave dies because of the blow, then that person must be punished. 21But if the slave survives a couple of days, then there will be no penalty because the slave belongs to the master.

22If *two* men are fighting with each other and *happen to* hit a pregnant woman *during the quarrel* causing her to give birth prematurely (but no other harm is done), then the one who hit her must pay whatever fine the judges determine based upon the amount demanded by the woman's husband.

23But if any further harm comes, then the standard for the punishment is *reciprocal justice*: a life for a life, 24an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,* a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, 25a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise.

26If anyone hits one of his slaves (male or female) in the eye and blinds him in that eye, then the master is to free the slave to compensate for the loss of the eye. 27If anyone hits one of his slaves (male or female) and knocks out a tooth, then the master is to free the slave to compensate for the loss of the tooth.

28If a bull gores a man or woman *and the injury leads* to the victim's death, then the bull must be *put to death by* stoning. No one is allowed to eat the bull meat, and the owner of the bull has no further liability. 29But if a bull has gored *people* before and its owner is aware of the problem but has not confined it, and if that bull kills a man or woman, then the bull must be stoned and the owner must also be put to death.

30*There is an exception.* If the relatives of the dead demand money *instead of his life,* then the owner of the bull may redeem his life in exchange for whatever is required of him. 31The same rule applies whether the bull gores someone's son or daughter. 32If the bull gores a slave (male or female), then the owner *of the bull* is to give the dead slave's master 12 ounces of silver, and the bull must be stoned.

33If someone uncovers an *old* pit or digs a *new* pit and leaves it uncovered, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34then the person who owns the pit *will be held responsible and* must compensate the owner for the *full* cost of the animal; but the dead animal *at the bottom of the pit* belongs to the man who owns it.

35If a person's bull injures another's bull and it dies, then *together* they must sell the living bull and split the money equally; they must also divide the dead bull *equally*. 36Now if the bull already has a reputation for goring and the owner has not confined it, then the owner *of*

* 21:17 Mark 7:10 * 21:24 Matthew 5:38

the living bull must pay a *healthy* bull for the dead one, but he may keep the dead bull for himself.

22 **Eternal One:** If someone steals an ox or a sheep and either kills or sells it *for profit,* then he must pay five oxen for the one ox *he stole* or four sheep for the one sheep *he stole*. [4]But if the stolen animal—the ox or donkey or sheep—is still alive and in his possession when he is caught, then the thief must pay *the owner* double. [3b]A thief must make restitution *for what he has taken*. If he has no means of doing so, he must be sold to pay for his theft.

[2]If a person attacks a thief in the act of breaking into *his house* and the thief is killed *during the attack,* then the homeowner is innocent of blood guilt. [3a]It is different if the sun has already risen; so any homeowner *who kills a thief during the day* must be considered guilty of bloodshed.*

► The difference between these two situations is the difference between daylight and dark. If a homeowner is protecting his property at night and injures a thief, it is to be treated as a case of self-defense. But if the crime takes place during the light of day, it is not necessary to incapacitate or capture the thief; it is necessary only to recognize the thief and bear truthful witness against him in court. The right to personal property does not eclipse the right to life.

Eternal One: [5]If someone allows *his animals* to graze a field or vineyard until it is bare and then lets his animals wander over onto a neighbor's field, then he must compensate *his neighbor* from the very best of his field and vineyard.

[6]If *someone* starts a fire and the fire spreads and sets the thorn bushes ablaze, and eventually that fire burns up stacks of harvested grain and everything growing in the fields, then the person who started the fire *is responsible and* must pay reparations *for what was lost*.

[7]If someone gives his neighbor money or items to keep for him and it is stolen from his neighbor's house, then if the thief is captured, he must pay double *for what he stole*. [8]If the thief is not found, then the person who owned the house *that was burglarized* must go stand before God's presence so that He can decide whether he is the one who stole the property.

[9]Whenever there is a breach of trust—regarding an ox, a donkey, a lamb, a piece of clothing, or any lost item—and the contested item is *discovered in the possession of a neighbor and* claimed by two different parties, then both sides must appear before God. If God finds the neighbor guilty, he must pay double *for what he stole*.

[10]If someone leaves a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any other kind of livestock in his friend's keeping, and the animal dies or is injured or disappears while no one is watching, [11]then the two are to make an oath in the presence of the Eternal. The neighbor must swear he had nothing to do with the loss of the animal, and the owner of the animal must accept his statement and not demand any compensation *for the loss*.

[12]But if the animal was stolen while in his neighbor's care, then the neighbor must compensate the owner. [13]If it was torn to pieces *by another animal,* then the neighbor may use the remains as evidence, and not have to pay any compensation for the torn animal.

[14]If someone borrows an animal from a neighbor and it is harmed or dies while not in the possession of the owner, then the borrower must compensate the owner in full. [15]But if the owner was there *when the animal dies or is harmed,* then no compensation is required. If the animal has been rented *and not borrowed,* then the rental fee paid shall cover the loss *of the animal*.

The owner who rents the animal must calculate the risk of losing the animal when he assesses the rental fee.

[16]If a man entices a virgin who is not promised to another man to have sex with him, then he must pay *her father* the bride-price and marry her. [17]If the young woman's father refuses the

* 22:2-4 Verses 2-4 have been rearranged to assist in the comprehension of the passage.

marriage offer *because he disapproves of the man,* then the man still must pay the amount of money that is customary for the bride-price for virgins.

18You are not to allow a sorceress to live.

19Anyone who has sex with an animal must be put to death.

20Anyone who *dares to* sacrifice to any god other than the Eternal must be *declared under the ban and* destroyed.

21Do not wrong or oppress any outsiders *living among you,* for there *was a time when* you lived as outsiders in the land of Egypt.

22You must not take advantage of any widow or orphan. 23If you do oppress them and they cry out to Me, I will certainly hear them, 24and My wrath will be kindled. I will make sure you are slaughtered by *your enemy's* sword, and your own wives and children will become widows and orphans.

25If you loan money to any of the poor among My people, do not *treat them as borrowers and* act as their creditors by charging interest. 26If your neighbor gives his coat to you as collateral, then be sure to give it back before night falls—*even if he has not repaid you in full.* 27You see that coat covers his body and may be his only protection *against the cold.* What do you think he would sleep in? When he calls out for Me, I will hear his cry. I am *kind and* compassionate *as you should be when a fellow Israelite is in need.*

28Do not curse *the one True* God or any rulers of your people.*

God demands respect from His people and expects His people to honor those He puts in charge.

29You must not *hold back or* delay your offering from *the bounty of* your harvest or the juice of your vineyard.* Dedicate every one of your firstborn sons to Me. 30But dedicate your livestock—your ox and sheep—to Me *in sacrifice.* The firstborn of your livestock may stay with its mother for the first seven days. When the eighth day arrives, give the firstborn to Me. 31You must be holy before Me. Do not eat any animal that has been torn to pieces *by wild beasts* in the field. Toss its remains to the dogs.

23 **Eternal One:** Do not pass along a false report. Do not plot with evil people to give a false witness.

2Even if the majority of people are doing evil, do not follow them. Also when you are called to give testimony in a dispute, do not let the crowd pressure you into perverting justice. 3*In the same way,* do not side with the poor in a complaint just because he is poor.

4If you *are walking along and* come across your enemy's ox or donkey that has wandered away, then you must return it to its owner. 5If you see the donkey of someone *you know* who hates you and it has fallen beneath its load, you must not leave it there. You must stop and help the donkey *recover the load.*

6Do not deny justice to the poor among you in their disputes. 7Stay far away from false accusations, and do not condemn the innocent or righteous to death. *Understand this:* I will not acquit those who commit such miscarriages of justice.

8Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe can blind those who see and twist the words of those who are in the right. 9Do not oppress an outsider. You know well what it is like to be an outsider *living in a foreign land,* for you were strangers once in the land of Egypt.

10You have six years to plant your fields and harvest your crops. 11When the seventh year arrives, let your land rest and lie fallow. Let the poor and hungry among you come and harvest *the volunteer crops that spring up in your fields.* Whatever is left over, the beasts may eat. Do the same thing with your vineyards and your olive groves. 12You have six days to work. When the seventh day arrives, stop all work so that your ox and donkey can rest. *When you observe the Sabbath Day,* your female slave's son and any outsider serving you have a chance to catch their breath *and relax.*

13Be careful to do all that I have instructed you. Do not even acknowledge the names of other gods or let their names spill from your lips.

14I want you to celebrate a feast in My honor three times a year. 15*First,* celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I instructed you before, you are to eat only bread made without yeast for the seven *feast* days beginning at the appointed

* 22:28 Acts 23:5 * 22:29 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

The Hebrews follow a lunar calendar that has 11 fewer days than the solar calendar. Since it has only 354 days in the year, an extra month (a "leap" month) is added periodically to bring the dates into alignment with the seasons. Within this annual cycle, God sets aside several great feasts for the people to celebrate. The people are to honor their God by having days of pure rejoicing as they recall their rescue from Egypt and God's ongoing provision. In keeping with the needs of an agricultural people, these feasts are situated around the harvests: first, the collection of the winter grains; second, the harvest of the other grains 50 days later; third, the gathering of the main crops of the field.

Month	Length	Date of Celebration	Modern Months
Nisan	30	14 Passover 15-21 Unleavened Bread 16 Firstfruits	March/April
Iyyar	29		April/May
Sivan	30	6 Pentecost (Weeks)	May/June
Tammuz	29		June/July
Ab	30		July/August
Elul	29		August/September
Tishri	30	1-2 Rosh Hashanah (New Year) 10 Day of Atonement 15 Ingathering (7 days)	September/October
Heshvan	29 or 30		October/November
Chislev	29 or 30	25 (8 days) Hanukkah	November/December
Tebeth	29		December/January
Shebat	30		January/February
Adar	29 or 30	14-15 Purim	February/March
Veadar*	29		February/March

* (added 7 of every 19 years)

time in the month of Abib, for that is when you fled out of Egypt. *During this time,* no one is to come before Me without some offering. 16*Second,* celebrate the Feast of Harvest *in the spring* when you bring *to Me* the first *and best* of the *wheat* crop you planted in the field. *Third,* celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the harvest season when you gather your crops from the fields, *orchards, and groves.* 17All of your men must come before the Eternal your Lord, *these* three times a year.

18*When you make offerings* before Me, do not present any bread made with yeast along with an animal sacrifice. Do not let the fat of the sacrifice remain until the next morning. 19Bring only the best crops from your first harvest into the house of the Eternal your God. You must not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk.

20Look! I am going to send a *heavenly* messenger before you to protect you during your journey and lead you *safely* to the place I have prepared *for you.* 21Pay attention to all he shows you and obey whatever he tells you. Do not cause him any trouble. He will not forgive you if you rebel against him for he carries My name in him.

22If you are obedient to his voice and follow all of My instructions, then I will be an enemy to all of those who are against you, and I will oppose all those who oppose you. 23When My messenger moves ahead of you and leads you to the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites—I will annihilate them. 24Do not bow down to their gods, *worship,* or serve them *in any way.* Do not engage in any of their *wicked* practices. Instead, you must destroy every idol *you find* and shatter their sacred pillars into *tiny* pieces.

25Worship and serve *only* the Eternal your God, and I will bless you with *an ample supply* of *wholesome* food and

clean water. I will take away *all* sickness from you, [26]prevent miscarriages and barrenness, and give you long, *productive* lives. [27]My fear and My dread will move ahead of you, and wherever you go people will greet you with panic and confusion. I will see to it that all of your enemies turn and run from you. [28]I will unleash hornets ahead of you; and they will drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites *from the land* before you. [29]Now I will not do all this in a single year, because the land would become a wasteland, overpopulated with wild animals *that would roam unchecked*. [30]*Rather,* I will drive them out a little at a time—*a few here, a few there*—until your numbers grow and you are strong enough to take over the land *and its care*. [31]I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the *Mediterranean* Sea *west* of where the Philistines live and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give to you all those who inhabit the land, and you will drive them all out. [32]But do not make a covenant-treaty with them or agree to serve their gods. [33]They must not *be allowed to* live in your land; otherwise they will cause you to sin against Me, *the only True God*. If you serve their gods, you will be trapped *and be drawn into sin*.

24 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)*: Come up *the mountain* to Me, *Moses,* and *this time* bring with you Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel. *These may come,* but you must worship from a distance. [2]Only Moses is permitted to approach Me; but *be careful, for* the others must stay at a distance. The rest of the people *of Israel* must stay below; they are not to come up *the mountain* with you.

[3]Moses then went and told the people exactly what the Eternal had said, and he *carefully* laid out God's instructions. All the people answered as if they had one, *single* voice.

People *(answering together)*: We will do all that the Eternal has asked us to do!

[4]Moses wrote down *in great detail* everything that the Eternal had said. Then early the next morning he woke up and constructed an altar at the foot of the mountain and erected twelve stone pillars.* Each pillar represented one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

[5]Moses directed some of the young men of Israel to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the Eternal. [6]He gathered half of the blood *from the animals* and filled the basins with it. He sprinkled the other half of the blood against the altar. [7]Then Moses took the book of the covenant—*the very instructions spoken to him by God*—and read it aloud so all the people could hear.

People *(responding)*: We will do all that the Eternal has said! We will obey *every word of His command*!

[8]Moses took the blood *of the sacrifices* and sprinkled it on the *gathered* people.

Moses *(to the people)*: Look! Here is the blood signifying the covenant that God has established with you according to all He has said and all we have promised.

[9]Then Moses took Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of Israel's elders and went up *the mountain*. [10]There they saw Israel's God. Beneath His feet, there appeared to be paving stones of sapphire, as *pure and* clear as the sky above. [11]But God did not raise His hand against the leaders of Israel *to strike them down*. They beheld the True God, and they feasted and drank *in His presence*.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: [12]Come up the mountain to Me and stay here *with Me for a while*. I will give you stone tablets inscribed with My law and commandments in order to provide instruction *and guidance* for the people.

[13]So Moses and his assistant, Joshua, got up and began the *long* climb up *toward the summit of* the mountain of God.

Moses *(to the elders)*: [14]Wait here for our return. Aaron and Hur will stay with you. If anyone has a complaint, then they can speak to them.

[15-16]Moses* made his way up the mountain. A *thick* cloud blanketed the mountain because the Eternal's glory had settled upon it. The cloud stayed there for six days; and when the seventh day

* 24:4 Other manuscripts read, "stones." * 24:15-16 Greek manuscripts add, "and Joshua."

arrived, the Eternal spoke to Moses from the cloud.

17For the Israelites below, the Eternal's glory appeared to be a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. 18As Moses walked further toward the top, he was swallowed by the cloud *of God's glory,* and he remained there for *a total of* 40 days and 40 nights.

► From above God's glory appears as a cloud. From below it appears as a fire. As with the burning bush earlier on Mount Sinai, the mountain seems to burn but is not consumed.

25 Then the Eternal spoke to Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2-3Instruct the Israelites to bring Me a *sacred* offering. All those whose hearts move them are to make an offering to the One *who delivered them from bondage.* You should accept *only the finest things*: gold, silver, and bronze metals; 4blue, purple, and scarlet thread *and fabric*; fine linen and goat-hair *garments*; 5ram skins (dyed red) and sea-cow* leathers; acacia wood; 6olive oil for the lamps; spices for anointing oil and incense; and 7onyx and other gems for the *ceremonial* vestment and the breast piece *worn by the high priest.*

8Direct them to build a *holy* sanctuary in My honor so that I can dwell among them. 9Instruct the people to follow the pattern I am about to show you for the congregation tent and its furnishings.

10I want them to build a covenant chest made from acacia wood. *It should be* 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. 11Overlay it inside and out with pure gold, and decorate it with gold trim around the outside. 12Cast four gold rings and attach them to the four corners—two rings on each side. 13Also, make poles out of acacia wood and overlay them with *pure* gold. 14Slide the poles through the rings on the chest in order to carry it. 15The poles must remain in the rings of the chest *at all times*; they are not to be removed. 16Inside the chest you are to store the stone tablets that I will give you as a witness to our agreement. 17Build a cover for the chest out of pure gold. *It will be known as* the seat of mercy—*where sins are atoned*—and it *should be* 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. 18-19Fashion two winged guardians* out of hammered gold, and place them at both ends of the seat of mercy. Put one winged guardian at each end, but *have your artisans* make them *appear as* one solid piece with the cover. 20The guardians must face one another with bowed heads, their wings spread so that they reach up and cover the seat of mercy. 21After you put the stone tablets that I will give you as a witness to our agreement in the chest, place the seat of mercy—*where sins are atoned*—as a lid to cover the chest. 22I will meet with you there. I will speak to you from above the seat of mercy between the two winged creatures that sit atop the covenant chest. *From there, I will speak to you* about all the commands *and instructions* I have for the people of Israel.

23*I want you to* build a table made of acacia wood. *It should be* 36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 27 inches high. 24Overlay it with pure gold, and decorate it with gold trim around the edge. 25Put a three-inch-wide* rim around it, and place gold trim around the rim. 26Then make four gold rings, and attach them to each of the table's four corners at its four legs. 27The rings need to be near the rim, so that they can hold the poles that carry the table. 28Make the poles out of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. You will use them to carry the table.

29*Have your artisans* make different kinds of dishes for the table—*platters,* pans, pitchers, and bowls—out of pure gold. 30Place the bread of the Presence on the table and keep it before Me at all times.

► This table is to be placed in a special room of the congregation tent with the elements symbolic of God's place among His people. One of the major elements is the bread of the Presence; it is arranged in two rows of six flat loaves representing the twelve sons of Israel. There is also a pan for holding incense and pitchers for fine wine; all

* 25:5 The exact type of animal skin is uncertain. * 25:18-19 Hebrew, *cherubim* * 25:25 Hebrew handbreadth is about 3 inches.

these elements remind God's people of His loving grace. The golden lampstand stands nearby, bathing the room and its contents in warm light. This special room and all it contains stimulate the senses—sight, smell, touch, and taste—and serve to remind those who enter of God's tangible blessings.

Eternal One: 31Fashion a lampstand out of pure, hammered gold. Make it and all its parts—its base, trunk, branches, decorative buds and blossoms, and lamp cups—out of one solid piece. 32Six branches will extend from the trunk's sides—three on one side and three on the other. 33Each of the six branches will have three decorative cups shaped like almond blossoms whose buds have just flowered. 34On the *trunk of the* lampstand, there are to be four cups shaped like almond blossoms whose buds have just flowered. 35A *single almond* bud will sit beneath each pair of branches extending out from the trunk of the lampstand. 36All the buds and branches are to be crafted out of pure, hammered gold and made *to look* as one solid piece. 37Make seven lamps for the lampstand, and position them so that they illuminate the area in front of it. 38The tools and accessories for trimming the wicks and caring for the lamps are to be made of pure gold as well. 39The lampstand and all its accessories will require 75 pounds* of your finest gold. 40Be sure that you make *the covenant chest, table, lampstand and all their accessories* according to the pattern I have shown you on the mountain.*

The valuable materials used to make the congregation tent and its furnishings are provided by the Egyptians when the Israelites make their exodus.

26 **Eternal One:** Make the *interior of the* congregation tent out of 10 curtains made of the finest woven linens. *Decorate it* with blue, purple, and scarlet threads, beautifully embroidered by skilled workers with images of winged guardians. 2Make each curtain 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. 3Attach five of the curtains together *to form one larger curtain.* Then take the other five, and attach them to form a second curtain. 4Make loops out of material *dyed* blue and attach them on the outer edge of both sets of curtains. 5Attach 50 more loops to the *long* edge on both sets of curtains so that the loops match up with one another. 6Make 50 gold clasps to connect the curtains together so that *all the curtains for the interior of* the congregation tent form one continuous piece.

7*Next* make 11 panels of tent fabric out of goat hair to cover the congregation tent *and protect the beautiful embroidered curtains inside.* 8Each of the 11 panels is to be 45 feet long and 6 feet wide. 9Attach five panels together to form a single wide panel. Then attach the remaining six to form a second panel. Fold the larger panel over at the front of the tent. 10Make 50 loops on the long edge of each of these panels and 1150 bronze clasps to connect the panels together, so that *this covering for* the congregation tent may function as one continuous piece. 12The extra length of the *leather* tent panels—the remaining half panel—will hang over the back of the congregation tent. 13The extra length in the sides of the tent panels should be left to overlap so that the tent is covered completely. 14You must add *two more* layers to protect the congregation tent: an *inner* layer made of red-dyed rams' skins and an *outer* layer made of sea-cow hides.

15Construct the supporting frame panels for the congregation tent out of the acacia wood. 16Each panel should be 15 feet high and 27 inches wide. 17For every panel, carve two tenons so that one panel fits *perfectly* into the next. 18You will need 20 frame panels for the south wall of the congregation tent. 19Make 40 silver bases to support the 20 frame panels, two bases beneath each panel so that each fits securely into the bases *for support.*

20Make 20 frame panels for the north* wall of the tent as well, 21sitting on 40 silver bases—two bases beneath each of the 20 panels.

22For the back wall of the congregation tent (the side that faces west), make six frame panels. 23Make two special panels for each corner on the back side of the tent. 24They are to come together

* 25:39 Or one talent of gold * 25:40 Hebrews 8:5 * 26:20 Greek manuscripts read "south."

At the very center of Israel's camp is the congregation tent. It is the heart of the nation, a place of unique revelation, and a constant reminder of God's presence and actions which create and form His people. Everything must be portable because this is not a settled population but a people on the move. God describes exactly how this large tent and its furnishings are to be constructed. Each layer covering the tent and the detailed work on the covenant chest, the seat of mercy, the table of presence, the lampstand, and all the utensils are physical reminders of deep, spiritual realities. The building, assembling, disassembling, and reassembling of the tent are labor-intensive; yet it is a work of obedience and devotion calling Israel to remember their special relationship with God. These are signs—located right in the center of the camp—that point to the fact that His graciousness is ever before them.

with the side panels at the bottom to make a *strong* corner and attach at the top to the first ring. This is how both corner panels should be made. 25So there are to be eight frame panels *on the back wall* that fit into 16 silver bases—two bases beneath each panel.

26-27Make five crossbars of acacia wood to connect the frame panels on each of three sides of the tent: *north, south, and* west. 28Run one bar from corner to corner in the middle, *halfway up the panels*. 29Overlay the frame panels with gold and make gold rings to hold the crossbars. Overlay the crossbars with gold as well. 30Set up the congregation tent according to the pattern you were shown on the mountain.

31*As for the interior of the congregation tent,* have your skilled workers take the blue, purple, and scarlet threads, as well as the finest woven linens, and make a veil that is *richly* decorated with *images of* winged guardians. 32Erect four posts made of acacia wood overlaid with gold onto four silver bases. *When the veil is complete,* hang it on the four posts using gold hooks 33suspended beneath the clasps *that hold together the curtains;* and place the covenant chest, *which holds the sacred tablets,* behind the veil. The veil will separate the two rooms and serve to divide the holy place from the most holy place.

34Place the seat of mercy—*where sins are atoned*—on top of the covenant chest in the most holy place. 35Put the table outside the veil on the north side of the tent, and set the lampstand facing it on the south side.

36As for the entrance to the *congregation* tent, *have your skilled workers* take the blue, purple, and scarlet threads, as well as the finest woven linens, and make another richly embroidered curtain. 37Erect five posts made of acacia overlaid with gold onto five bases cast in bronze. Hang the *richly embroidered* curtain on the five posts using gold hooks.

27 **Eternal One:** Make the altar *of burnt offering* from acacia wood. It should be square *and measure* seven and a half feet by seven and a half feet. Make it four and a half feet high. 2Construct it with horns on each of the four corners so that the top forms one whole piece, and overlay it with bronze. 3Fashion buckets and shovels for the ashes, basins, forks, and fire pans out of bronze. 4Make a grate out of bronze, and attach four bronze rings at each of its four corners. 5Place the grate beneath the ledge of the altar, halfway up *from the base*. 6Make poles out of acacia wood for the altar, and overlay them with bronze. 7Slide the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar so that it can be moved. 8Make the altar out of *wooden* planks, and make it hollow—*exactly* like *the pattern* you were shown on the mountain.

9-10Then enclose the courtyard in front of the congregation tent with large fabric panels made of finely woven linen on the south side that run 150 feet on silver hooks and rings supported by 20 *bronze* posts set *securely* into 20 bronze bases. 11The north side is to be made the same way: hang *a series of* panels for 150 feet on silver hooks and rings supported by 20 *bronze* posts set *securely* into 20 bronze bases. 12The fabric panels on the west end of the court are to run 75 feet (10 posts set into 10 bases). 13The east end of the court facing the sunrise is to

be 75 feet wide. 14-15*Fabric* panels, measuring 22½ feet wide, are to be hung on each end of the *east* entrance, held up by three posts set into three bases. 16The entrance to the court is to be a 30-foot fabric screen, made out of finely woven linen richly embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. It is to be held up by four posts set into four bases.

17All the posts that define the courtyard are to have silver bands and silver hooks, and be set into bronze bases. 18The courtyard itself is to be 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. The finely woven linen panels should be seven and a half feet high *including the height of the* bronze bases. 19As for the items used in the ceremonies held in the congregation tent and the tent pegs used both inside and outside the tent, they are to be made of bronze.

20Direct the Israelites to bring you oil from olives whipped until it is clear in order to keep the lamps burning continually *and producing the best light possible*. 21From dusk till dawn—inside the tent but outside the veil shrouding the most holy place—Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning in My presence. This directive stands forever and must be carried out by the *priests and* people of Israel throughout all generations.

28 **Eternal One:** Have your brother, Aaron, and his sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) brought to you *and appoint them* to serve Me as priests for the people of Israel. 2In order to reflect the glory and beauty *of their office,* create sacred garments for your brother, Aaron. 3Talk with all the skilled workers—those whom I have gifted with *talent and* the spirit of wisdom—and instruct them to create *distinct* garments that set Aaron apart *from others* whenever he is serving Me as priest. 4Here are the *ceremonial* garments they need to make: a breast piece, a special vest, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash. The craftsmen are to make these sacred items for Aaron your brother and his sons to wear when they come before Me in priestly service. 5They are to make *the garments* out of *similar materials used for the congregation tent:* gold, finely *woven* linen, and blue, purple, and scarlet thread.

6Skilled workers are to make the special vest *worn by the high priest* out of finely woven linen embroidered with gold and with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. 7It is to be made of two pieces joined together at the shoulders so that front and back form one piece. 8The waistband should also be made by skilled workers *from the finest quality materials*: from gold; from blue, purple, and scarlet thread; and from finely woven linen. 9Then take two onyx stones and engrave the names of Israel's *twelve* sons upon them. 10*Carve* six names onto each stone in the order of their birth. 11Engrave the *twelve* names upon the two stones, just as a jeweler would engrave a seal. Mount each stone into ornamental gold settings, and 12fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the vest to represent Israel's sons. Aaron must wear the names on both shoulders as a memorial before Me. 13Create ornamental gold settings *at the shoulders of the vest* 14and attach to them two chains made of pure gold braided together like cords.

15*Have your skilled workers* make a breast piece of judgment out of the same quality materials and in the same style as the vest. Use finely woven linen; blue, purple, and scarlet thread; and gold. 16Make it square and fold it over to double *the material,* and create *a pouch* nine inches by nine inches. 17Attach four rows of stones to the breast piece. The first row is to be a ruby, topaz, and emerald; 18the second row is turquoise, sapphire, and diamond; 19the third row is jacinth, agate, and amethyst; 20the fourth row is beryl, onyx, and jasper. Attach all the stones *to the breast piece* with ornamental gold settings. 21These stones stand for the twelve tribes of Israel. Each will be engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. 22Also braid strands of gold into chains and attach them to the breast piece. 23Fashion two gold rings for the breast piece as well and attach them to the two ends. 24Fasten the two gold chains to the two *gold* rings at the ends of the breast piece. 25Fasten the loose ends of the chains on the two ornamental gold settings to the shoulders of the special vest. 26Fashion two *more* gold rings and attach them to the breast piece at the inside edge next to the vest. 27Make two *additional* gold rings and attach them to the front of the vest below the shoulders near the seam just above the waistband. 28Connect the rings on the breast piece to the rings on the vest using a blue cord.

This way, it will be attached above the waistband and not come loose from the vest. 29Aaron must keep the names of the tribes of Israel in the breast piece of judgment over his heart whenever he enters the holy place; and this will serve as a memorial before the Eternal One, a constant reminder *of the covenant*.

► Whenever Aaron and his sons enter into God's presence, they wear these heavy ceremonial garments covered with the names of the tribes of Israel to remind them of their holy calling; they come before God to represent His people, not their own interests. But these stones, carved with the names of the twelve tribes, are there to remind God as well. It is not that God forgets, but as our story shows there are times—sometimes long seasons—when the heavens seem silent while God's people are suffering. The Scriptures tell us that when God's covenant people call on Him, He remembers His promises and comes to save them. These stones sit prominently on the shoulders of Aaron and later high priests as a memorial, as unspoken prayers calling out and calling upon God to act on behalf of His people.

Eternal One: 30Keep the Urim and Thummim in *a special pouch on the front of* the breast piece of judgment. Aaron must wear these two objects over his heart whenever he enters My presence. This way he will always have with him a way to know My will and make *sound* decisions for the people of Israel.

31Make the robe worn under the vest blue. 32Make a hole for the head in the center of it. Form *a collar* around the hole by lining it with an extra layer of woven material so it will not tear. 33Embroider pomegranates out of the blue, purple, and scarlet *thread* and attach them to the hem of the robe. *Fashion* bells out of gold, and place them all around the hem between the pomegranates. 34Use an alternating pattern: bell, pomegranate, bell, pomegranate, *and so on*. 35Whenever he serves as priest, Aaron must wear the robe so that he will not die, because the tinkling of the bells will announce that he intends to enter or leave My presence in the holy place.

36Make a medallion out of pure gold, and engrave it like you were engraving a seal *with the inscription*: "Holy to the Eternal." 37Fasten it with a blue cord to the front of Aaron's turban. 38Aaron must wear it on his forehead in order to take on any guilt from the sacred gifts—regardless of what they are—which the Israelites dedicate *to Me*. Aaron must always wear it on his forehead, so that the gifts they offer may be acceptable to Me.

► The richly detailed description of the high priest's attire reflects key aspects of God's relationship with His people. The engraved onyx stones on the vest remind the priest that he stands before God representing the people of Israel. The Urim and Thummim offer assurance that God will direct and guide His people through difficult times and decisions in the future. The beautifully embroidered robe worn under the breast piece represents the riches and beauty of God's provision. The medallion on the front of the turban announces that Israel must be holy in order to serve the Lord.

Eternal One: 39The tunic is to be made of finely woven checkered linen. Make the turban out of fine linen as well, and have skilled workers embroider the sash. 40As for *the rest of* Aaron's sons, make tunics, sashes, and *special* caps to reflect the glory and beauty *of their office*. 41When they serve as priests, dress Aaron, your brother, and his sons in these *ceremonial* garments; anoint them, ordain them, and consecrate them. 42Furnish them with linen undergarments, so that they are covered from their waists to their thighs. 43Aaron and his sons are to put them on whenever they go into the congregation tent or go near the altar to minister in the holy place. They must do this so that they don't incur guilt and die. This directive stands forever for Aaron and all those who come after him.

29 **Eternal One:** Here is how to conduct the ceremony that consecrates Aaron and his sons as priests: select one *flawless* young bull and two flawless rams. 2Using a good quality wheat flour, make bread without yeast, cakes without yeast with oil, and wafers without yeast spread with oil. 3Place all these baked goods in a basket, and offer them *to God* along with the young bull and two rams.

4Then escort Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the congregation tent, and wash them *carefully* with water. 5Take all the *ceremonial* garments and put them on Aaron: the tunic, the robe worn under the vest, the vest, and the breast piece. Fasten the vest's waistband around him as well. 6Place the turban on his head and attach the sacred medallion to *the front of* it. 7*When he is completely dressed,* pour the anointing oil over his head.

8Then escort Aaron's sons *to the congregation tent,* and dress them in tunics *as well.* 9Fasten sashes around the waists of Aaron and his sons and put *special* caps on their heads. This is how you are to ordain* them.

10Then bring the *young* bull to the entrance of the congregation tent, and Aaron and his sons will lay their hands on its head. 11Slaughter the bull in My presence at the entrance of the congregation tent. 12Take some of the bull's blood and smear it on the horns of the altar with your finger. Pour out any remaining blood at the foot of the altar. 13Remove all the fat from around the internal organs, the *long* lobe of the liver, the two kidneys, and the fat surrounding them and burn them on the altar. 14All the remaining parts of the bull—its hide, meat, and refuse—are to be burned as a sin offering away from the camp.

15Select one of the rams and have Aaron and his sons lay their hands on its head. 16Slaughter the ram and splatter its blood on all sides of the altar. 17Then cut the ram up into pieces. Clean out the intestines and *wash off* the legs *so nothing unclean is mixed with the sacrifice.* Then place them alongside the other pieces, including the head, 18and burn the entire animal as a burnt offering to Me. This offering by fire presented to Me will give off a pleasing aroma.

19Then bring the other ram, and have Aaron and his sons lay their hands on its head. 20Slaughter the ram, and smear some of its blood on the right earlobe of Aaron and his sons. Then smear it on the thumbs of their right hands and the big toes of their right feet. Splatter the remaining blood on all sides of the altar. 21Collect some of the blood from the altar and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. This is how you are to consecrate Aaron, his sons, and their garments. 22Next remove the fat from the ram, the fat tail, the fat from around the internal organs, the *long* lobe of the liver, the two kidneys and the fat surrounding them, and the right thigh (because this is an offering for ordination). 23Take one loaf of bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer from the basket of yeastless bread that was placed before Me. 24Place all of these in the hands of Aaron and his sons to lift up as a wave offering to Me. 25Then take them from their hands and burn them on the altar along with the burnt offering. This offering by fire presented to Me will give off a pleasing aroma.

26Then take the breast from Aaron's ordination ram, and lift it up before Me as a wave offering. This will be your portion *of the sacrifice.* 27Consecrate the breast and the thigh which were lifted up before Me as a wave offering from the ordination ram. They belong to Aaron and his sons. 28From now on when the people of Israel offer a peace offering, Aaron and his descendants must receive a share of what the people offer Me in that sacrifice. It is their due *for their priestly service.*

This ceremony becomes the ritual by which generations of priests and high priests are consecrated for their sacred duties.

29When Aaron dies, his sacred garments must be passed down to his descendants. They will wear them when they are anointed and ordained. 30Aaron's son who succeeds him as *high* priest to minister in the congregation tent and holy place will wear these clothes for seven days.

► One difficult aspect of Old Testament life to appreciate (at least in the

* 29:9 Hebrew idiom is to "fill the hands."

Western world) is the use of animal sacrifices. The Israelites are first a nomadic people; later when they are settled, they become a shepherding people. For them to offer their best and dearest to God means most naturally an animal, one without blemish and young. These animals are the basis of their economy and provide them with food, clothing, shelter, and security. To offer God an animal sacrifice is to offer a piece of their lives. So offerings are very personal and differ based on what families can afford. In some cases, the sacrifices are completely consumed, but in others the priests and the people take some of the meat home to their own tables. This way the whole community shares in the bounty of the sacrifice.

Eternal One: 31Take the meat of the ordination ram and boil it in a sacred place.
32Aaron and his sons are to eat it and the bread from the basket at the entrance to the congregation tent. 33Only they are allowed to eat the bread and meat which was part of their purification rite in the ordination ceremony. An outsider may not eat them because they are holy. 34If any meat or bread is left over from the ordination ceremony the next morning, burn it completely. No one is allowed to eat it, for it is holy.

35The ordination period is to last for seven days. Here is what you must do to ordain Aaron and his sons *to My priestly service.* 36Offer a bull as an offering every day for seven days to purify them from sin. Cleanse the altar and consecrate it by anointing it *with oil.* 37For seven days you must purify the altar and consecrate it. As a result *of these rituals* it will be most holy and anything that touches the altar will become holy.

38Here are the sacrifices you are to offer on the altar: every day offer two one-year-old lambs. 39Offer one lamb in the morning, and the other at twilight. 40With the lamb *offered in the morning* bring two quarts of fine flour mixed together with one quart of beaten olive oil, and one quart of wine for the drink offering. 41With the second lamb offered at twilight, bring the same gifts of grain and drink that you offered with the morning lamb. These offerings by fire presented to Me will give off a pleasing aroma. 42From generation to generation, the ritual of the burnt offering is to begin daily at the entrance of the congregation tent in My presence. I will meet with you and talk with you there. 43I will meet with *My* people Israel there, for My glory will make that place sacred. 44I will sanctify the congregation tent and the altar. I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve as My priests. 45I will live among the Israelites and be their God. 46And they will know that I am the Eternal their God, who led them out of Egypt so that I could live among them. I am the Eternal One their God.

30 **Eternal One:** Make an altar out of acacia wood for burning incense 2in the shape of a square—18 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 36 inches high. Carve the horns and the top of the altar out of one piece of wood. 3Overlay the top, sides, and horns with pure gold, and attach gold trim around its edges. 4Fashion two gold rings, and attach them beneath the trim on the two opposite sides; the rings are to hold the poles so that the altar can be carried. 5Make the poles out of acacia wood *as well* and overlay them with gold. 6Place this altar just outside of the veil that conceals the covenant chest and the seat of mercy that sits on top of the covenant chest. I will meet with you there.

7Aaron is to burn fragrant incense on it every morning when he trims the lamps' *wicks* 8and every evening when he lights the lamps. Incense must be burned in My presence throughout all your generations. 9Do not burn any strange incense, burnt offerings, or grain offerings at this altar. Also, do not pour out any drink offerings on it. 10Since this altar is sacred to Me, Aaron is to cleanse it once each year by smearing blood from the sin offering on its horns. Throughout all your generations, the high priests are to perform this ritual.

11The Eternal One continued giving instructions to Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 12When you take a census of the population of Israel, each person should pay a ransom to Me so that no disease will spread among them when you count them. 13Everyone

who is counted must bring ⅕ ounce *of silver*—a weight based on the sanctuary's measure, where ⅖ ounce equals 20 gerahs*—and it is to be given to Me as an offering. 14Everyone who is 20 years old and older will be counted and must give this offering to Me. 15The rich will not pay more, and the poor will not pay less than ⅕ of an ounce. This money will go to Me in order to ransom your lives. 16Take all the money collected from the people of Israel and use it *to provide* for the service of the congregation tent. This will serve as a constant reminder of *My covenant with* Israel *and provide a way* to atone for your lives.

17The Eternal One instructed Moses *regarding the basin for ceremonial washing.*

Eternal One: 18Make a bronze basin for *ceremonial* washing and set it on a bronze stand. Place it between the congregation tent and the altar. Keep water in it *at all times.* 19-20When Aaron and his sons enter the congregation tent, or when they approach the altar to minister before Me by offering a sacrifice by fire, they must wash their feet and hands so that they will not die. 21It is important that they are to wash their hands and feet, so that they will not die. This directive stands forever for Aaron and his descendants, and they must observe it throughout all generations.

22The Eternal One instructed Moses *regarding the anointing oil.*

Eternal One: 23Collect the best spices: twelve and a half pounds of liquid myrrh, six pounds of fragrant cinnamon, six pounds of fragrant cane, 24and twelve and a half pounds of cassia—in accordance with the sanctuary weights—and one gallon of olive oil. 25Blend all these spices together like a skillful perfumer to make a holy anointing oil; this *fragrant mixture* will be used as a holy anointing oil. 26Use it to anoint the congregation tent and the covenant chest, 27the table and all its accessories, the lampstand and its tools, the altar of incense, 28the altar for the burnt offering and all its tools, and the basin and its stand. 29Consecrate all these *furnishings and their utensils* so that they are most holy. Anything that touches them will become holy.

30Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them, so that they are able to serve as My priests. 31Address the Israelites and say, "This is My sacred anointing oil that you will use for all generations. 32It must not be poured on anyone else. Do not *attempt to* make an anointing oil *for your own purposes* with the same ingredients in the same proportions. It is sacred, and it is to be sacred to you. 33Whoever makes a similar blend or anoints anyone who is not ordained as a priest will be cut off from the community."

34The Eternal One instructed Moses *regarding the fragrant incense.*

Eternal One: Gather *three aromatic* spices—stacte, onycha, galbanum—and mix them with pure frankincense in equal measure. 35Have a perfumer take this mixture and blend it carefully with salt in order to create a pure and sacred incense. 36Grind it into a fine powder, and place some of it in front of the covenant chest in the congregation tent where I will meet with you. It will be most holy to you. 37Do not attempt to make incense for yourselves with the same ingredients in the same proportion. You must regard this as perfectly sacred to Me. 38Whoever makes an incense like it and uses it for themselves will be cut off from the community.

31 The Eternal One instructed Moses.

Eternal One: 2Look, I have a special calling upon one of the sons of Judah. His name is Bezalel (the son of Uri, son of Hur). 3I have filled him with God's Spirit, *gifted him* with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skills with a variety of crafts. 4He is an expert designer and works *well* with gold, silver, and bronze. 5He is able to cut and set gems, work with wood, and *skillfully* perform any craft *needed to help construct the congregation tent and its furnishings.* 6I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan *to assist Bezalel.* I have gifted all *of Israel's* artisans with the skills needed to build everything I have instructed you: 7the congregation tent, the covenant chest, the seat of mercy that covers it, all the furnishings for the

* 30:13 A gerah is about 1/50 of an ounce or 0.6 grams.

tent, [8]the table and its accessories, the pure gold lampstand with all its tools, the altar of incense, [9]the altar for burnt offering with all its utensils, the *washing* basin and its stand, [10]the woven garments, Aaron's sacred priestly garments, the clothes worn by Aaron's sons when they serve as My priests, [11]the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense to be used in the holy place. The craftsmen are to design and build all of these exactly as I have instructed you.

[12]The Eternal One instructed Moses *regarding the Sabbath.*

Eternal One: [13]Speak to the Israelites and tell them, "You must be careful to observe My Sabbaths. For the Sabbath Day serves as a sign between Me and you for all generations, so that you will know I am the Eternal One who has set you apart *from all the other nations.* [14]Keep the Sabbath because it is a sacred day for you, *different from all other days.* Anyone who violates the Sabbath *or defiles it* must be executed; anyone who works on the Sabbath will be cut off from the community. [15]You have six days *out of every week* to do whatever work is needed, but the seventh day is the Sabbath, *a day set aside* for rest and only rest. It is sacred to Me. Anyone who works on the Sabbath must be executed. [16]Therefore, the Israelites are to keep the Sabbath and celebrate it throughout all their generations as an everlasting covenant. [17]The Sabbath exists as a sign forever *of the covenant* between Me and the people of Israel for I made heaven and earth in six days, but then on the seventh day I stopped My work and was refreshed."

[18]When God had finished giving these instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two stone tablets as a witness to their agreement inscribed by the *very* finger of God.

32 When the people realized Moses was taking a long time to return from his trek up the mountain, they got together and approached Aaron.

People: We have no idea what happened to this fellow Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt.* *He left you in charge,* so get up and make us gods who will lead us *from here.*

Aaron: [2]*I want you to* bring me the gold earrings your wives, sons, and daughters are wearing.

[3]So everyone took out their gold earrings and handed them over to Aaron. [4]He collected the gold they brought and used a tool to fashion an idol in the shape of a calf. *When the people saw the calf Aaron made, they were elated.*

People *(seeing the calf)***:** Israel, these are your gods—the ones who led you out of the land of Egypt.

[5]When Aaron saw how the people responded, he built an altar in front of the golden calf.

Aaron: We are going to have a feast to the Eternal tomorrow.

[6]Everyone woke up before dawn the next day and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings *on the altar. When the food was ready,* they sat down to eat and drink and then rose up to *dance and* play.*

[7]Meanwhile, *on the mountain,* the Eternal One spoke to Moses.

► This is truly a dark moment for Israel. Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge 40 days ago, and both men are beginning to feel the strain. The people are stuck in the desert, and they are growing increasingly impatient without Moses and direction from God. So the people begin to question, and eventually they demand a physical representation of God like the ones their neighbors have. Aaron complies. With Moses and God occupied, the people begin breaking the Ten Directives, one after another: worshiping other gods, making idols, invoking God's name for their own selfish purposes, and committing other indecent acts. The people of God fall quickly, and they fall hard. For a brief period, their very survival is in doubt.

* 32:1 Acts 7:40 * 32:6 1 Corinthians 10:7

Eternal One: Go back down *the mountain* immediately, because your people whom you led out of Egypt have corrupted themselves. [8]They have quickly abandoned the way *of life* I require of them. They have fashioned a calf out of gold, bowed down to it, and offered it sacrifices. They are even *crediting My work to that detestable idol,* saying, "Israel, these are your gods—the ones who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

[9]I know these people, and they are unbelievably stubborn. [10]Leave Me alone so that My anger can flare up and destroy them. Then I will *start over and continue My plans without them and* make a great nation out of you.

Moses *(begging)***:** [11]Eternal One, *why are You so angry?* Why does Your anger flare up against the people You led out of Egypt with so much power and a strong hand? [12]Do You really want the Egyptians to say: "You deceived them and led them into the mountains in order to kill them and to wipe their memory from the earth"? *I beg you to* curb Your anger, and change your mind. Don't harm Your people. [13]Remember the *sacred* promise You made to Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. You swore, "I will make your descendants as *many as* the stars in the sky, and I will give them all of this land as I promised. It will be their everlasting inheritance."

[14]So the Eternal relented and decided not to destroy the people as He had threatened to do.

[15]Moses left *God's presence* and went back down the mountain. In his hands, he carried the two *stone* tablets of witness, inscribed on both sides, front and back. [16]The tablets were God's handiwork, and the writing on the tablets was written by God Himself.

[17]*As they neared the camp,* Joshua heard all the commotion and the people shouting.

Joshua *(to Moses)***:** It sounds like a battle going on down at the camp.

Moses: [18]It is not the sound of victory, and it's not the sound of defeat, but I do hear singing *and celebration.*

[19]As soon as Moses arrived at the camp, he saw the calf and the revelry *around it.* His anger flared, and he hurled down the *stone* tablets and they shattered at the foot of the mountain. [20]He took *down* the calf they had made and burned it. He ground it down to a powder, scattered it over the water, and then he forced the Israelites to drink it.

Moses *(to Aaron)***:** [21]How could you lead these people into such a heinous sin? What did they do to you?

Aaron: [22]Control your anger, my master. You know these people. You know how evil they can be. [23]They told me, "We have no idea what happened to this fellow Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt. *He left you in charge,* so *get up and* make us some gods to lead us *from here.*" [24]So I told them, "If you are wearing any gold, take it off." So they gave me all their gold and I just tossed it into the fire, and out came this calf!

[25]When Moses saw that the people had lost all control because Aaron had let them get that way, and *he realized* their wild behavior had become a mockery in the sight of their enemies, [26]he stood at the camp's entrance and shouted to them.

Moses: If you are on the side of the Eternal One, stand over here with me!

All of the Levites gathered around him.

Moses *(to the Levites)***:** [27]This is the message of the Eternal One, Israel's True God: "Every one of you strap on your sword and move throughout the entire camp. Kill your brother, friend, and neighbor."

[28]The Levites did exactly as Moses told them to do, and about 3,000 men were killed that day.

Moses *(to the Levites)***:** [29]Dedicate your lives to the Eternal today—for every one of you has moved against sons and brothers. *Because of your devotion to God,* you have earned His blessing today.

[30]On the very next day, Moses addressed the people.

Moses: You are guilty of a great sin. Now I am going *back* to the Eternal One, and I hope to make atonement for your wickedness.

31Moses then went back *up the mountain* to the Eternal.

Moses: These people are guilty of a great sin *against You.* They fashioned gods out of gold for themselves. 32If You will only forgive their sin, but if You do not, then erase me from the book You have written.

Eternal One: 33I will erase from My book *the name of* everyone who has sinned against Me. 34It's time to go *and leave this mountain.* Lead the people to the place I told you. Look, My messenger will guide you *there.* When the time comes, I will punish them for what they have done.

35Then the Eternal One sent a plague on all the people because they had bowed down and sacrificed to the calf Aaron had made.

33 **Eternal One** *(instructing Moses)***:** *The time has now arrived.* Leave, and take *all* the people you have led out of Egypt with you. Go to the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom I said, "I will give this land to your future generations." 2I will send a messenger to guide you, and I will force out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3Travel to the land that flows with milk and honey, *the land of your inheritance. However,* because you are such an incredibly stubborn people, I will not be going with you. Otherwise, I would completely destroy you during the journey.

4When everyone heard the dreadful news, they began to grieve and stopped wearing their jewelry *to remind them of the calf made from their gold earrings.* 5You see the Eternal One had instructed Moses, "Give the Israelites *this message*: 'You are such an incredibly stubborn people, *therefore I am not going to travel with you.* If I allowed Myself to travel with you for only a moment, I would completely destroy you. Stop wearing your jewelry so I can figure out what to do with you.'" 6So the Israelites took off all of their jewelry from the time they left Mount Horeb.

7Moses used to take a tent* and put it up far away from the camp. He referred to it as the meeting tent. Everyone who sought the Eternal One would go out to the meeting tent, which was located well outside the camp. 8When *the people heard that* Moses was going out to the tent, they would get up and stand at the entrance of their own tents and watch him until he had gone inside. 9When Moses entered the tent, the cloud pillar descended to the tent's entrance, and the Eternal would talk with Moses. 10When people witnessed the cloud pillar standing at the meeting tent's entrance, they would stand and bow *in worship* at the entrance of their own tents. 11The Eternal spoke with Moses face-to-face, just as a friend speaks to another friend. After they were done, Moses would come back to camp but his young assistant Joshua (Nun's son) would remain behind.

► The golden-calf incident creates a deep rift between God and His people. For their safety, God refuses to travel with them to the land of promise; instead, He sends His messenger to guide them. The people's response to God's threatened absence is to mourn and refuse to wear their jewelry and fine clothes. The meeting tent and the congregation tent reflect this rift too. The congregation tent is to be God's unique dwelling with His people, so it is located right in the middle of the camp. But now there is another tent, the meeting tent set up a long way from camp, far from the contagion of evil spreading there. From time to time, God and Moses meet there to talk; and Joshua stands watch over this intimate encounter, for only Joshua and Moses are not imperiled when the rest of Israel violates God's directive and worships the golden calf. Moses speaks with God and does his best to get God back on good terms with His covenant people.

Moses *(to the Lord)***:** 12Look, You tell me, "Lead these people!" but You haven't yet told me whom You will send to accompany me. Yet You tell me, "I know you by

* 33:7 Greek manuscripts read "his tent."

name, and you have gained My trust and blessing." 13If I have gained Your trust and blessing, reveal Your way to me so that I can truly know You, and so that I may gain Your favor. Remember that this nation is Your *covenant* people.

Eternal One: 14My presence will travel with you, and I will give you rest.

Moses: 15If Your presence doesn't travel with me, then don't lead us away from here. 16How will the people know that I have gained Your trust and blessing *if You do not travel with us*? Isn't it the very fact that Your presence travels with us that distinguishes us from every other people on earth?

Eternal One: 17I will do what you have said because you have gained My trust and blessing, and I know you by name.

Moses: 18*If Your presence will go with us,* then let me see Your glory!

Eternal One: 19I will cause all My goodness to pass before you, and I will declare My name, the Eternal One, before you. I will show mercy to whomever I choose to show mercy, and I will demonstrate compassion on whomever I choose to have compassion.* 20You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live. 21Look, there is a place next to Me on the rock where you may stand. 22While My glory is passing by you, I will place you in a *large* crevice of the rock and hide you beneath My hand until I have completely passed by. 23Then I will remove My hand, and you will see only My back. But you won't be able to see My face.

34 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** *I want you to* cut two stone tablets exactly like the first ones *I gave you.* I will write the same words on these tablets that were on the tablets you shattered. 2Make sure you are ready when morning arrives. Climb up to the summit of Mount Sinai and present yourself to Me. 3No one is allowed to accompany you *this time.* No one is allowed to be anywhere on the mountain. This goes for your flocks and herds as well; take them to graze away from the mountain.

4So Moses cut two stone tablets *that were exactly* like the first set. He woke up early the next morning and climbed up Mount Sinai carrying the two stone tablets, just as the Eternal One had instructed him to do.

5The Eternal One descended in the cloud and stood with Moses as He proclaimed His name, the Eternal One. 6Then the Eternal One passed before him.

Eternal One: The Eternal God, full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger, and abundant in loyal love and truth, 7who maintains loyal love to thousands *of people,* who forgives wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin; yet does not allow sin to go unpunished, extending the consequences of a father's sin to his children, his grandchildren, and even to the third and fourth generations.

8Moses quickly bowed down on the ground and worshiped.

Moses: 9If I have gained Your trust and blessing, Lord, please go with us, despite the incredible stubbornness of this people. I also ask that You forgive our wrongdoing and our sins, and receive us as Your very own people, Your inheritance.

Eternal One: 10Look, I am about to make an *extraordinary* covenant with you. Before *the eyes of* all your people, I will do miraculous things that have never been done among any nation on earth. All of the nations living around you will witness the work that I do, for everything I do among you will inspire *fear and* awe. 11You must be careful to obey the instructions I give you today. I am about to force the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites out *of the land you will inherit.* 12Be careful. Do not make a covenant with the people who now live in the land where you are going. Any promises you make to these people could entrap you. 13Destroy their altars and pillars, and cut down their sacred poles 14because you must not worship any god except for Me. My name is Jealous, and I am a jealous God. 15Do not make a covenant with the people who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves with their *so-called* gods and

* 33:19 Romans 9:15

sacrifice to them, they will coax you and you will feast upon their sacrifices. 16And when you take some of their daughters *as wives* for your sons—the daughters who prostitute themselves with other gods—they will seduce your sons into joining them in chasing after other gods.

Here is a brief summary of some essentials found in the laws and ordinances handed down from the Eternal One to Moses.

17You are not to cast metal images for yourselves of any gods.

18You are to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread *every year* as I have instructed you. Eat bread made without yeast for seven days at the designated time in the month of Abib, the month that you departed from Egypt. 19All the firstborn belong to Me. Every male animal from your livestock, both cattle and sheep, that opens the womb is Mine. 20You may redeem the firstborn of a donkey with a lamb. If you choose not to redeem it, then you are to break its neck. Redeem all of your firstborn sons *as well*. No one may appear before Me empty-handed.

21You are to work for six days; but when the seventh day arrives, you are to *observe the Sabbath and* rest. Even when it is the time to plow and harvest, you must still rest *on the seventh day*. 22Also, you are to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, when the firstfruits from the wheat harvest are gathered. And when one year ends and another begins, celebrate the Ingathering Feast. 23All your men are to appear before Me, the Lord and *one True* God of Israel, three times a year at these feasts. 24For I will force the people out of the land before you and expand your borders. No one will try to take your land while you are going up those three times a year to appear before Me, your God.

25You are not to offer blood from a sacrifice with bread made with yeast. Do not leave any of the meat from the Passover sacrifice until morning. 26Offer only the best of your harvest when you bring a gift to the house of the Eternal One your God. Also you are not to boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

27(to Moses) *Be sure to* write down all that I have said to you. By these words of Mine, I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.

28In all Moses was with the Eternal One for 40 days and 40 nights. He fasted the entire time—no food or water. He wrote down the Ten Directives, the *essential* words of the covenant, on the two stone tablets.

29When Moses went back down Mount Sinai, he carried the two *stone* tablets in his hands as a witness to their agreement. But he did not realize that the skin on his face was glowing *and radiant* because he had been speaking with God.

30When Aaron and the Israelites saw that Moses' face was shining, they were afraid to get too close to him. 31But when Moses summoned them, Aaron and all the leaders of the community *were reassured* and approached him. Moses talked to them. 32After this, all *the rest of* the people of Israel approached Moses, and he instructed them to do everything that the Eternal had told him on Mount Sinai. 33When Moses finished sharing *the words of God* with them, he covered his face with a veil. 34From this time on whenever Moses went into the meeting tent to talk with the Eternal, he took off the veil until he left to share with the Israelites the Eternal's instructions. 35*As Moses was speaking,* the Israelites could see that the skin on his face was all aglow. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until the next time he went to speak with God.

35

Moses had the entire community of Israel gather together *so he could address them.*

Moses: These are the instructions the Eternal One has commanded you to do: 2"You are to work for six days; but when the seventh day arrives, you are to observe a day of solemn rest on the Sabbath. *You are to regard* this day as holy to the Eternal. Anyone who works on this *sacred* day must be executed. 3Do not even start a fire in any of your houses on the Sabbath."

4These are the instructions The Eternal One has commanded you to do: 5"Take up an offering to the Eternal One. Let those with willing hearts bring the following as an offering to the Eternal One: gold, silver, bronze; 6blue, purple, and scarlet thread; fine linens; goat hair; 7rams' skins dyed red; sea-cow skins; acacia wood; 8olive oil for lamps; spices for anointing oil and fragrant incense; 9and onyx stones and other stones for the *high priest's* vest and breast piece.

10"Let all who are gifted with *wisdom and* skill come and make these things
the Eternal One has instructed: 11the
congregation tent, including the tent
itself, its covering, all its hooks, panels,
crossbars, posts, bases, and sockets;
12the covenant chest and its poles *for carrying it,* including the seat of mercy
that covers the chest and the veil shrouding *the most holy place*; 13the table and
its poles *for carrying it,* all the utensils,
and the bread of the Presence; 14the
lampstand that illuminates *the tent,*
its tools, its lamps, and the oil for the
light; 15the altar of incense and its poles
for carrying it; the anointing oil and
the fragrant incense; the curtain at the
entrance to the congregation tent; 16the
altar of burnt offering, including the
bronze grate, its *carrying* poles, and various tools; the basin *for washing* and its
stand; 17the panels that hang around the
perimeter of the courtyard, its posts and
bases; and the curtain for the entrance
to the courtyard; 18the tent pegs and
ropes for the congregation tent and its
courtyard; 19the *finely* woven clothing
for *priests* serving in the holy place, the
sacred garments for Aaron the priest,
and the clothes for his sons to wear
when they serve as priests."

20*After Moses completed these instructions,*
the entire community of Israel filed out
of his presence. 21Then all those whose
hearts and minds moved them came back,
bringing *their valuables as* a contribution
to the Eternal One for the congregation
tent, all its service, and the sacred garments. 22Everyone with a willing heart,
both men and women, came back with
brooches, earrings, signet rings, bracelets,
and all sorts of other gold items, and
presented them as an offering of gold to
the Eternal One. 23Those who possessed
blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linens, goats' hair, rams' skins dyed red, and
sea-cow skins brought them as well. 24And
those who were able to give items of silver
and bronze brought their offering to the
Eternal One. Those who had acacia wood
brought it to be used in the project.

25-26All the skilled *and creative*
women who were able to spin made the
blue, purple, and scarlet thread. All the
women who were willing came forward to
use their skills in spinning the goat hair.
27The leaders brought the onyx stones and
the stones for setting in the *high priest's*
vest and the breast piece. 28They also
brought the spices and oils for the light,
the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense.

29All the Israelites, both men and
women, who felt moved to provide the
material needed to do this work, brought
these offerings willingly and set them
before the Eternal One exactly as He had
instructed Moses.

Moses *(to the Israelites)***:** 30Look, the Eternal One has called Bezalel (the son of
Uri, son of Hur the Judahite) by name.
31He has filled him with God's Spirit,
gifted him with wisdom, understanding,
knowledge, and skills with a variety of
crafts. 32He is an expert designer and
works *well* with gold, silver, and bronze.
33He is able to cut and set gems, work
with wood, and skillfully perform any
work *needed to help construct the congregation tent and its furnishings.* 34Also,
God has placed within both Bezalel and
Oholiab (son of Ahisamach the Danite)
the ability to teach. 35He has gifted
them and made them expert engravers,
designers, and embroiderers using blue,
purple, and scarlet thread on fine linen.
They are master weavers, skilled craftsmen, and expert designers.

► Two skilled craftsmen are given special mention in this work of the people. They are called to transform the abundant gifts the people freely provide into the congregation tent and its furnishings. It is God who gifts the hearts and hands of these two individuals and further inspires them to teach others. Of all the women and men who lend their expertise to this project, only Bezalel and Oholiab are recorded. Until Solomon's temple is built in Jerusalem, their handiwork will be admired by all of Israel as the house of the Eternal One.

36 **Moses:** Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person whom the Eternal One has gifted with expertise and wisdom in order to build the sanctuary shall use these gifts as the Eternal One has directed.

2Moses called together Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person whom the

Eternal had gifted with *special* skills—everyone whose heart moved them to work—to help out and contribute to the construction work.

► This project is nothing like the forced labor the people endured back in Egypt. All the creativity and work put into the building and furnishing of the congregation tent comes from the heart. People with various skills—skills honed in slavery—step forward as free men and women to create a home on earth for God. Ultimately all talent and skill comes from God. Used properly they all point back to God.

3Moses handed over to the workers all the materials the Israelites donated to build the congregation tent. Every morning new contributions continued to come in. 4Eventually the craftsmen who were working on every aspect of the sanctuary project interrupted their particular jobs 5and reported to Moses.

Workers: The people are bringing far more than we need to complete the work which the Eternal One has instructed us to do.

6So Moses issued a *new* directive, and it spread *quickly* throughout the camp.

Moses: We do not need any more contributions to complete the congregation tent. *We have more than enough.*

With that the people stopped bringing contributions, 7for the material already on hand was more than enough to construct, furnish, and decorate the sanctuary.

8All the craftsmen made 10 curtains out of finely woven linen for the congregation tent. Using blue, purple, and scarlet thread, Bezalel had skilled workers embroider images of the winged guardians *on the curtains.** 9Each curtain was 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. All 10 curtains were identical in size and shape. 10Bezalel *had his craftsmen* connect five curtains together *to make one large panel*; then they connected the other five curtains *to make a second.* 11-12He had 50 blue loops made *and attached* along the edge of the outer curtain of the first panel, and then did the same thing on the edge of the outer curtain of the second. He made sure the loops matched up with each other. 13He also had 50 clasps fashioned from gold and used them to join the curtains together, so that *the interior of* the congregation tent formed one continuous piece.

14He then had 11 panels of tent fabric made out of goat hair to use as a covering for *the interior of* the congregation tent. 15Each panel was 45 feet long and 6 feet wide. All 11 of the panels were identical in size and shape. 16He joined five panels together to form one large panel and then did the same with the remaining six to form a second large panel. 17He had 50 loops made *and attached* along the edge of the outer panel of each set. 18Then he had 50 clasps fashioned from bronze and used them to connect the panels together, so that they formed one continuous piece. 19He then covered the *goat hair panels* with a layer of red-dyed rams' skins and covered that with a layer made from sea-cow hides.

20Bezalel then had his workers construct the supporting frame panels for the congregation tent out of acacia wood. 21Each panel was 15 feet high and 27 inches wide. 22He had them carve two tenons on each panel to fit into the next. They made all the panels this way. 23*This is how* they made all the panels for the congregation tent: he made 20 panels for the southern end 24and set them into 40 bases made of silver—two bases beneath each panel. 25He made 20 panels for the northern end as well 26and *set them into* 40 silver bases beneath the 20 panels—two bases beneath each framing panel.

27At the back *wall* of the congregation tent (the side that faces west), he made six panels. 28He also made two *special* panels to support each corner on the back of the tent. 29They came together *with the side panels* at the bottom to make a *strong* corner and attached at the top of the first ring. He did the same thing at both corners. 30*On the back wall,* there were eight frame panels with silver bases—16 bases in all—two beneath each panel.

31He then made crossbars of acacia wood, five to connect the frame panels on one side of the congregation tent, 32five more to connect the panels on the other

* 36:8 The Hebrew switches from plural to singular, and with other references it is clear that Bezalel is supervising the craftsmen who are executing the design.

side, and five more to connect the panels at the back, the side that faces west. 33He ran one bar in the center from corner to corner, *halfway up the panels.* 34He overlaid the panels with gold and fashioned gold rings to hold the crossbars, and he overlaid the crossbars with gold as well.

35Bezalel *had his skilled workers* make the veil by embroidering finely woven linen with images of winged guardians in blue, purple, and scarlet thread. 36*To hold up the veil,* he erected four acacia wood posts that were overlaid with gold onto four silver bases. He fashioned gold hooks for them. 37For the entrance to the tent, he made a fabric screen out of finely woven linen richly embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. 38He hung it on five posts using hooks overlaid with gold. The posts were set into four bases made of bronze.

37 After this Bezalel built the covenant chest out of acacia wood. It was 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. 2He overlaid the entire thing, inside and out, with pure gold, and decorated it with gold trim all the way around it. 3He cast four gold rings and attached them to its four corners—two rings on each side of the chest. 4He made poles out of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 5He slid the poles through the rings on the sides of the chest in order to carry it *without touching it. The poles were never to be removed.*

6He built *a cover* for the chest out of pure gold. *It is known as* the seat of mercy—*where sins are atoned*—and it was 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. 7He also fashioned two winged guardians out of hammered gold and placed them at both ends of the seat of mercy. 8*He placed* one winged creature at each end *of the seat of mercy*. He had it made so that the winged guardians appeared as one solid piece with the cover. 9The guardians faced one another with bowed heads, their wings spread so that they were reaching up and covering the seat of mercy.

10Bezalel then built the table out of acacia wood—36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 27 inches high. 11He overlaid it with pure gold, and decorated it with gold trim around the edge. 12He put a three-inch-wide rim around it and placed gold trim around the rim. 13Then he cast four gold rings and attached them to each of the table's four corners at its four legs. 14The rings were placed just beneath the rim so they could hold the poles in order to carry the table. 15He made the poles out of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 16He *had his artisans* make different kinds of vessels for use at the table—platters, pans, pitchers, and bowls—out of pure gold for use with the offerings of incense and drink.

17Then Bezalel fashioned a lampstand out of pure, hammered gold. He made its base, trunk, *branches,* decorative buds and blossoms, and lamp cups out of one solid piece. 18Six branches extended from the trunk's sides—three on one side and three on the other. 19Each of the six branches had three *decorative* cups shaped like almond blossoms whose buds have just flowered. 20On the *trunk of the* lampstand, there were four cups, shaped like almond blossoms whose buds have just flowered. 21A single *almond* bud sat beneath each pair of six branches extending out from *the trunk of* the lampstand. 22All the buds and branches were crafted out of pure, hammered gold of one solid piece. 23Bezalel had his artisans make seven lamps, trays, and tongs out of pure gold. 24He made the lampstand and all its accessories out of 75 pounds of pure gold.

25Bezalel then built the altar of incense out of *more* acacia wood. He made it in the shape of a square—18 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 36 inches high. He carved the horns *and the top of the altar* out of one piece of wood. 26He overlaid the whole thing, the top, the sides, and the horns with pure gold and attached a gold trim around its edges. 27He fashioned two gold rings and attached them beneath the trim on the two opposite sides to hold the poles used to carry the altar. 28He made the poles out of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold.

29With the skill of a *master* perfumer, he *blended the ingredients to* make the sacred anointing oil and fragrant incense.

38 Bezalel made the altar for burnt offerings out of acacia wood. He made it square—seven and a half feet long by seven and a half feet wide—and four and a half feet high. 2He constructed it with horns on each of the four corners so that the top formed one piece and overlaid it with bronze. 3He fashioned all the tools and accessories needed for the altar out of bronze—the buckets and shovels *for the ashes,* basins, forks, and fire pans. 4He made a grate out of bronze and attached it

beneath the ledge of the altar, halfway up *from the base*. 5He cast four *bronze* rings and attached them at the four corners of the bronze grating in order to hold the poles. 6He made poles out of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. 7He then slid the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar so that it could be carried. He made the altar out of wooden planks and made it hollow *so that it would be easier to move*.

8Bezalel made the bronze basin and its stand from the mirrors donated by the women who served at the entrance of the congregation tent.

► In Moses' day mirrors are a luxury. They are made from good-quality bronze that is polished to a shine. These mirrors were likely gifts from the Egyptians.

9Bezalel then made fabric panels out of finely woven linen to enclose the courtyard *in front of the congregation tent*. On the south side, he hung *a series of* panels for 150 feet 10on 20 bronze posts set *securely* into 20 bronze bases. The hooks and bands *used to attach the panels* to the posts were made out of silver. 11On the north side, he hung *a series of* panels for 150 feet on 20 bronze posts set *securely* into 20 bronze bases. The hooks and bands *used to attach them* to the posts were made out of silver. 12On the west end, he hung panels for 75 feet on 10 *bronze* posts set *securely* into 10 *bronze* bases. The hooks and bands *used to attach them* to the posts were made out of silver. 13For the front, which faced the east, *he hung panels for* 75 feet. 14-15On both sides of the entrance, he hung panels that were 22½ feet wide on three posts set into three bases. 16All the fabric panels enclosing the courtyard were made of finely woven linen.

17The bases for the posts were all crafted out of bronze. The hooks and bands on the posts were all made out of silver, and the tops of each post were overlaid with silver. All the rings *which attached the panels* to the posts were made of silver.

18The *fabric* screen that served as the entrance to the courtyard was made of finely woven linen *richly* embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. It was 30 feet long and seven and a half feet high, the same height as the rest of the panels around the court. 19It was held up by four bronze posts set into four bronze bases. The hooks and the rings *which attached the panels* to the posts were crafted out of silver, and the tops of each post were overlaid with silver. 20Every peg which anchored the congregation tent and the courtyard enclosure *to the ground* was made out of bronze.

21Here is an account of everything used to construct the congregation tent—the tent of witness—recorded *exactly* as Moses instructed. The Levites, under the supervision of Aaron's son Ithamar, were in charge *of keeping track of the materials*. 22Bezalel (son of Uri the son of Hur, a Judahite) built everything according to the instructions the Eternal One had given Moses. 23Oholiab (son of Ahisamach the Danite) assisted Bezalel. He was an *expert* engraver, designer, and embroiderer with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and fine linen.

24The total *weight of* gold donated *by the Israelites* and used in the construction of the congregation tent was about 2,200 pounds* (according to the *official* standards used in the sanctuary). 25The *total weight of* silver collected from the people *to be used for the congregation tent* was about 7,600 pounds* (according to the *official* standards used in the sanctuary). 26For every person counted in the census—603,550 men age 20 and older—this amounts to two-tenths of an ounce* per person (according to the *official* standards used in the sanctuary). 27The 100 bases used for the sanctuary and for the veil were cast out of 7,500 pounds of silver, that is 75 pounds per base. 28He used *the remaining silver,* about 45 pounds, to make the hooks and bands for the posts and to overlay the tops of each post. 29The Israelites had also donated about 5,300 pounds of bronze.* 30From it he crafted the bases at the entrance to the tent of meeting, the bronze altar, the bronze grating, all the tools for the altar, 31the bases around the courtyard and the entrance, and all the tent pegs for the congregation tent and courtyard.

* 38:24 Or 29 talents and 730 shekels * 38:25 Or 100 talents and 1,775 shekels * 38:26 A Hebrew beka is 1/5 of an ounce or 5.5 grams. * 38:29 Or 70 talents and 2,400 shekels

39 For the priests who served in the holy place, they decorated finely woven garments with blue, purple, and scarlet thread *donated by the people.* They also made the sacred garments Aaron was to wear, exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

2Bezalel had Aaron's vest of gold made out of finely woven linen embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. 3Craftsmen hammered gold into gold leaf, sliced it into individual threads, and interlaced them with the blue, purple, and scarlet thread as they embroidered *intricate* designs into the fine linens. 4They also made two pieces for the shoulders of the vest that attached so that the front and back *form one piece.* 5The vest's waistband was skillfully made of the same materials—blue, purple, and scarlet thread on finely woven linen—and with a similar design made by skilled artisans exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses. 6They prepared onyx stones, engraved them the same way signet rings are engraved, and set them in ornamental gold settings. 7As the Eternal instructed Moses, he positioned the onyx stones on the shoulder pieces of *Aaron's* vest as a memorial for the people of Israel *before the Eternal One.*

8He then had skilled workers make the breast piece in the same style as the vest out of finely woven linen embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and with gold. 9They made it square by folding over *the material* to double it and created a pouch in it nine inches by nine inches. 10They placed four rows of stones in it. The first row was ruby, topaz, and emerald; 11the second row was turquoise, sapphire, and diamond; 12the third row was jacinth, agate, and amethyst; 13the fourth row was beryl, onyx, and jasper. They were all attached *to the breast piece* with ornamental gold settings. 14The twelve stones stood for the *twelve* tribes of Israel. Each was engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. 15They braided strands of pure gold into chains and attached them to the breast piece. 16They fashioned two ornamental gold settings and two gold rings, and they placed the two rings on opposite ends of the breast piece. 17Then they fastened the two gold chains to the two *gold* rings at the two ends of the breast piece. 18They fastened the loose ends of the chains to the two ornamental gold settings at the front of Aaron's vest on the shoulders. 19Then they fashioned two *more* gold rings and attached them to the breast piece at the inside edge next to the vest. 20They made two *additional* gold rings and attached them to the front of the vest below the shoulders near the seam just above the waistband. 21They connected the rings on the breast piece to the rings on the vest using blue cord, so that it would be attached above the vest's waistband and not come loose from the vest. *They did all this* exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

22He then made the robe worn under the vest blue. 23They made a hole *for the head* and formed *a collar* around the hole by lining it with extra material so that it might not tear. 24All around the hem they stitched pomegranates out of the blue, purple, and scarlet thread. 25They also fashioned bells out of pure gold and attached them all around the hem between the pomegranates. 26They used an alternating pattern: bell, pomegranate, bell, pomegranate, *and so on. They did this* exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

27They made tunics out of finely woven linen for Aaron and his sons. 28They made the turban, caps, and undergarments out of fine linen as well. 29They also made the sash out of finely woven linen and *embroidered it with* the blue, purple, and scarlet thread. *They did all this* exactly as the Eternal One instructed Moses.

30They made the medallion, the sacred emblem that set *the high priest* apart, out of pure gold and engraved it like a seal with the inscription, "Holy to the Eternal." 31They fastened it with a blue cord to *the front of* Aaron's turban, exactly as the Eternal One instructed Moses.

32All the work that went into the sanctuary of the congregation tent was *finally* finished. The Israelites did everything *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

33Then the Israelites brought all they made to Moses. They brought the tent and all its furnishings, including its hooks, frame panels, crossbars, posts, and bases; 34the layers of red-dyed rams' skins and the sea-cow skin that covered *the sanctuary*; the veil shrouding *the most holy place*; 35the covenant chest with its poles and the seat of mercy; 36the table, its tools, the bread of the Presence; 37the *gold* lampstand, its lamps and all its tools, the lamp oil; 38the golden altar *of incense,* the

anointing oil and the scented incense; the *fabric* screen for the tent's entrance; [39]the bronze altar *for burnt offerings,* the bronze grating, its poles and tools, the basin and its stand; [40]the panels that enclose the courtyard, the posts and bases, the screen that covers the court's entrance, the cords and pegs; and all the tools used in the sanctuary of the congregation tent, [41]the finely woven clothing for *priests* serving in the holy place, the sacred garments worn by Aaron the *high* priest, and the clothes his sons are to wear when they serve as priests as well. [42]The Israelites completed each part *of the project exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

[43]Moses inspected every piece of work *they had completed,* and he saw that they had done it all *with excellence* according to the specifications given to Him by the Eternal One. So Moses blessed them.

40

Then the Eternal One instructed Moses.

► The last half of the Book of Exodus offers a picture of the relationship between God and humanity through powerful symbols. The amazing truth of all Scripture is reflected here: God resides in the midst of His people. In every detail of God's directives—the ethical rules, the people's offerings, the design of the congregation tent and its furnishings, God's redemptive acts—God is announcing the central truth: He is present with His covenant people. So the physical elements of this covenant bear witness to deep, spiritual realities. God is in the process of repairing the world from the damage caused by sin and death; but to do so, He needs a people. This is why He chooses Israel and makes them different from everyone else. He needs agents on the ground devoted to liberating a world held hostage to lesser powers and feebler gods. But where will those people be formed and trained to be God's effective agents? They will be shaped in the crucible of worship and obedience.

Eternal One: [2]When the first day of the first month arrives, erect the sanctuary of the congregation tent. [3]Place the covenant chest in there—as a witness to our agreement—and screen it *from sight* with the veil. [4]Move the table into place and arrange the utensils on it. Then move the lampstand into place and set up all its lamps. [5]Place the golden altar for incense in front of the covenant chest *outside the veil,* and install the curtain at the entrance to the congregation tent. [6]Set up the altar for burnt offerings in front of the entrance to the congregation tent. [7]Place the basin between the sanctuary of the congregation tent and the altar, and fill it with water. [8]Erect *the posts and fabric panels around* the courtyard, and hang the panel at the court's entrance. [9]Anoint the tent and everything in it with the anointing oil. Consecrate it and all its furnishings, so that it will all be holy. [10]Anoint the altar for burnt offerings and all its tools, and consecrate the altar so that it will be most holy. [11]Anoint the basin and its stand, and consecrate it as well. [12]Escort Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the sanctuary of the congregation tent and cleanse them with water. [13]Dress Aaron in the sacred garments, then anoint and sanctify him so that he may serve Me as *high* priest. [14]Next bring his sons *forward* and dress them in tunics. [15]Anoint them in the same way that you anointed their father, *Aaron,* so that they may serve Me as priests. With their anointing, they will enter the priesthood and remain priests forever for all their generations.

[16]Moses did exactly as the Eternal One instructed him.

[17]The congregation tent was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year *after the exodus from Egypt.* [18]Moses raised it. He began by laying down the bases, installing the frame panels, attaching the crossbars, and erecting the posts. [19]He covered the *frame of the* tent with the tent fabric and then covered that with other layers they made. He did this *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him.

[20]He then placed the stone tablets—as a witness to their agreement—inside the covenant chest. He slid the poles *through the rings* on the chest and covered the chest with the seat of mercy, *where sins are atoned.* [21]He carried the covenant chest into the congregation tent and hung the

veil to screen *it from sight exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him. 22He then placed the table on the northern end of the sanctuary of the congregation tent outside of the veil. 23He arranged the bread *on the table* before the Eternal *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him. 24He took the lampstand into the sanctuary of the congregation tent and set it up on the southern end, directly opposite the table. 25He lit the lamps before the Eternal One, *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him. 26He put the golden altar in front of the veil within the sanctuary 27and burned fragrant incense on it, *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him. 28He hung the screen at the entrance of the congregation tent. 29He put the altar for burnt offering in front of the entrance to the sanctuary of the congregation tent, inside the courtyard. He offered burnt offerings and grain offerings on it *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed him. 30-31He put the basin between the sanctuary and the altar *for burnt offerings* and filled it with water so Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons could wash their hands and feet *and cleanse themselves.* 32When they went into the congregation tent and when they came near the altar, they washed themselves *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed Moses. 33Moses then raised *the posts and panels that enclosed* the courtyard around the congregation tent and altar. He put up the screen at the court entrance. Moses completed the work.

The congregation tent faces the rising sun in the east. Its orientation along with the bronze and gold objects all around create a brilliant sight every morning.

34*At that moment,* a cloud blanketed the congregation tent, and the glory of the Eternal filled the sanctuary. 35Moses could not even go into the congregation tent because the cloud had enveloped it, and the glory of the Eternal filled the sanctuary. 36Through all their wanderings *in the desert,* whenever the cloud lifted up from the congregation tent, the Israelites would *break camp and* set out. 37But when the cloud covered *the tent,* they *remained where they were and* did not set out until once again the cloud lifted. 38Through all their wanderings, the cloud of the Eternal stood over the congregation tent during the day and at night fire was lit for all the community of Israel to see.

LEVITICUS

The shape of worship

By Moses, the shepherd of God's people

There is a story behind every book of the Bible, and Leviticus is no exception. Only a few months before, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, breaking their backs every day to serve a paranoid and despotic Pharaoh. God had heard their cries and remembered the covenant He made with Abraham and his family, so He sent Moses to rescue them. After many miracles, the liberated slaves lumbered en masse out of Egypt and headed east toward Abraham's ancestral lands. But on the way, they had a stop to make. God commanded Moses to return to Mount Sinai, the place where the Eternal revealed Himself and commissioned Moses to be His emissary to the beleaguered slaves. Moses met with God frequently on the mountain and at the congregation tent, a specially designed tent, a meeting place between God and His people. Leviticus is part of a larger dialogue where God lays down certain stipulations for the new covenant with His people, a covenant that builds upon and extends God's relationship with Abraham's people. These traditions begin in Exodus 25–31; 35–40, continue through Leviticus, and end in Numbers 1–10.

Essentially Leviticus is a manual for the priests, those individuals set apart by God in order to care for and maintain the covenant with the Eternal One. Priests are mediators between God and the average person. They communicate God's grace to those who desperately need it and carry the concerns of people who live with great burdens to a loving God through offerings, feasts, and other services.

At the heart of the book is worship, how an unholy people approach an absolutely holy God. The former slaves are fully convinced that God is in their midst and is calling them to be a different sort of people, a people chosen to bear witness to the one True God and make Him known to all the nations. But His nearness means an acute sense of sin, guilt, and impurity. So Leviticus provides the spiritual leaders with the spiritual means by which hopelessly flawed people can discover grace and find their broken lives repaired.

1 The Eternal One called Moses and addressed him from the congregation tent.

Eternal One: 2*Moses, I want you to go* talk with the Israelites and tell them *how to perform ritual offerings*: Any time one of you brings an offering to Me, you must bring the offering from the animals of either the herd or the flock. 3If you are bringing a burnt offering from your herd, then you are to pick an unblemished bull. *No diseased, weak, or injured animals are allowed.* Offer it at the entrance to the congregation tent so that I can accept it. 4The person *offering the sacrifice* shall place his hand on the head of the *living* animal, and the offering will be accepted to atone for the person's sins. 5You shall slaughter the young bull in My presence. Aaron's sons, the priests, will offer the blood and splatter it around the altar at the entrance of the congregation tent. 6You shall then skin the burnt offering and cut the animal up into pieces. 7The sons of Aaron the priest will place fire on the altar and arrange the *pieces of* wood. 8Aaron's sons, the priests, will place the head, the fat, and individual pieces *of the sacrifice* on the altar as the wood burns. 9Wash the animal's organs and legs with water *so that unclean elements are not included in the offering*. The priest will offer up the whole burnt offering on the altar, and the smoke of the offering will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me.

10If you give a burnt offering from the flock, either of sheep or goats, you are only to offer an unblemished male. *No diseased, weak, or injured animals are allowed.* 11Slaughter it on the north side of the altar before Me. Aaron's sons, the priests, will splatter the blood all around the altar. 12Cut the sacrifice up into pieces. The priests will take the head, fat, and rest of the pieces and place them all on the altar as the fire burns. 13Wash the animal's organs and legs with water. The priest will offer up the whole burnt offering on the altar, and the smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me.

14But if you *have no flock or herd of your own, then you may* offer Me birds; your offering is to be turtledoves or young pigeons. 15The priest will take it to the altar, pull off its head, and offer up the sacrifice as smoke on the altar. Its blood will be drained onto the side of the altar. 16The priest will remove the crop and feathers and toss them on the eastern side of the altar in the ash pile. 17Then the priest will tear the bird open by its wings without separating them completely from its body. The priest will offer up the burnt offering as smoke on the wood-fire of the altar, and the smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me.

2 **Eternal One:** Any time one of you brings a grain offering to Me, it should be the finest flour mixed with *olive* oil and frankincense. 2Give it to Aaron's sons, the priests. One of the priests will take a handful of the fine flour mixed with *olive* oil and frankincense and offer up a memorial portion on the altar, and the smoke of the offering will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me. 3The rest of the grain offering is for Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the fire-offerings dedicated to Me. *No one other than the priests may eat it.*

► The sacrifices and offerings not only please God but they provide for the physical and spiritual needs of the people. All the priests are from the tribe of Levi and participate in the spiritual heritage of Aaron, Moses' brother. With some of the offerings, God prescribes that the priests must share in the food brought by the people. By eating from their sacrifices, the priests participate in the lives of those who wish to approach God. Some sacrifices are described as "memorial" offerings to God. These are offerings that ask God to remember His people and keep them in His good favor.

Eternal One: 4Any time one of you brings a grain offering that was prepared in an oven, it should be bread made without yeast from the finest flour mixed with oil or a wafer made without yeast spread with oil. 5Any time one of you brings a grain offering that was prepared on a griddle, it should be made without yeast from the finest flour mixed with oil. 6Separate it into pieces, pour oil on it, and present it as a grain offering. 7Any time one of you brings a grain offering that was prepared in a pan, it should be

made from the finest flour and mixed with oil. 8Whenever you bring any of these grain offerings to Me, it should be given to the priest who will then take it to the altar. 9The priest will offer up the memorial portion on the altar, and the smoke of the offering will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me. 10The rest of the grain offering is for Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the fire-offerings dedicated to Me. *No one other than the priests may eat it.*

11Every grain offering that is presented before Me must be made without yeast because it is forbidden to offer up any yeast or honey to Me by means of the fire-offering. 12When you bring an offering of the first *and finest* part of the harvest to Me, you may bring yeast and honey but they must not be offered up in smoke as a pleasant aroma. 13You must salt every grain offering you bring so that the salt of your covenant with God* will not be missing. You will season all of the offerings you present with salt.

► In the ancient world, salt was a valuable substance. It was used for a variety of purposes: to preserve meats, promote healing, and seal friendships. When covenants were made, people celebrated with fine meals seasoned with salt and other spices. The permanence of salt symbolized the permanence of God's covenant with His people (Numbers 18:19). Jesus echoes this covenant practice when He instructs His followers to be salt in the world (Matthew 5:13).

Eternal One: 14If you present a grain offering from the first ripe grain of your harvest to Me, bring fresh new grain, crushed and roasted in the fire. 15Also mix it with oil and frankincense because it is *presented as* a grain offering. 16The priests will then offer up a memorial portion of the grain mixed with oil and all of the frankincense as a fire-offering to Me.

3 **Eternal One:** Any time one of you presents a sacrifice from the herd as a peace offering, you must offer only an unblemished cow or bull before Me.

* 2:13 Numbers 18:19

► In Leviticus there are many kinds of sacrifices. Some celebrate God's covenant with His people. Some atone for sin. The peace offering is a meal in which the worshiper, his family, and the priests all participate. Some parts of the animal become part of the fire-offering. The rest is eaten by the priests and people. In a sense, God, the priests, and the worshipers all share a common meal.

Eternal One: 2You will put your hand on the animal's head and slaughter it at the entrance of the congregation tent. Aaron's sons, the priests, will splatter its blood against the sides of the altar. 3From the sacrifice of the peace offerings, you must bring to Me as a fire-offering the fat covering and surrounding the animal's organs, 4the two kidneys and also the fat on them from the loins, and the lobe of the liver (which will be removed along with the kidneys). 5Aaron's sons will offer this *peace* offering on top of the burnt offering on the altar, and the smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me.

6If the *animal* sacrifice for the peace offering to Me is of the flock, then you must offer an unblemished male or female. 7If you bring a lamb as your offering before Me, 8you must place your hand on the head of the offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the congregation tent. Aaron's sons will then splatter the blood of the lamb against the sides of the altar. 9From the peace offering, you must bring to Me as a fire-offering its fat, the tail (which is to be cut off near the backbone), the fat covering and surrounding the organs, 10the two kidneys and the fat on them from the loins, and the lobe of the liver (which must be removed along with the kidneys). 11The priest will then offer all these on the altar as a fire-offering to Me.

12If you bring a goat as your offering before Me, 13you must place your hand on its head and slaughter it at the entrance of the congregation tent. Aaron's sons will then splatter its blood against the sides of the altar. 14From this

offering, you must bring to Me as a fire-offering the fat covering and surrounding the organs, [15]the two kidneys and the fat on them near the loins, and the lobe of the liver (which must be removed along with the kidneys). [16]The priest will then offer all these on the altar, and the smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma. All the fat belongs to Me.

[17]Do not eat any fat or blood. This directive stands throughout all generations regardless of where you live.

4 The Eternal One then spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: [2]*Moses,* go, talk with the Israelites, and tell them that if someone unwittingly commits a sin that violates any of the directives I have given, *this is what you should do.*

► Sin is serious business; it destroys one's relationship with God and can even endanger entire communities. So sin must be dealt with seriously. God provides a process whereby sin may be forgiven and guilt may be set aside. It begins with admitting you are wrong and then following the requisite sacrifices. But note: these sacrifices only atone for sins committed unwittingly. There is no sacrifice offered for sins committed deliberately.

Eternal One: [3]If the person anointed as priest commits a sin, he brings guilt on the people *and they suffer the consequences.* So the priest must offer *the most valuable animal*—an unblemished, young bull—to Me as a purification offering for sin. [4]He must bring the bull to the entrance of the congregation tent, place his hand on the bull's head, and slaughter it in My presence. [5]The anointed priest must then carry some of the bull's blood inside the congregation tent. [6]*While in the tent,* he is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times before Me in front of the veil of the sanctuary. [7]He must then approach the altar of fragrant incense and place some of the blood on its horns before Me. He must then pour the rest of the bull's blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering located near the entrance of the congregation tent. [8]The priest must remove all of the fat from the bull being offered as a purification offering for sin, the fat covering and surrounding the organs, [9]the two kidneys and the fat on them near the loins, and the lobe of the liver (which must be removed with the kidneys). [10]*He should remove these portions* in the same manner that they are removed from the ox sacrificed as a peace offering. The priest should then offer them on the altar of burnt offering. [11]As for the bull's skin and the rest of its meat, head, legs, intestines, and excrement—[12]basically, the rest of the bull's body—the priest must move it to a ritually clean space where ashes are dumped outside the community, and he must burn it there on the wood-fire. It must be burned in the place where the ashes are dumped.

This procedure makes sure that the priest does not benefit from his own sins. Nothing is left over from the sacrifice for him to consume and enjoy.

[13]If the entire community of Israel unintentionally commits a sin and, *for a time at least,* the sin goes unnoticed by the community, and they have violated any one of the directives I gave them, and they are guilty, [14]then *later* when the sin is realized, the community must offer a young bull as a purification offering for sin. They must bring the bull to the entrance of the congregation tent. [15]The community elders are to place their hands on the bull's head and then slaughter the bull in My presence. [16]The one anointed as *high* priest must then carry some of the bull's blood into the congregation tent, [17]where he is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times in My presence in front of the veil *of the sanctuary*. [18]The priest must also approach the altar, which is before Me in the congregation tent, and place some of the blood on its horns. He is to pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering located at the entrance to the congregation tent. [19]The priest must remove all the bull's fat and offer it up in smoke on the altar. [20]He is to do the same thing with this bull that he did with the bull of the purification offering for sin. This

is how the priest will cover the sin of the community *of Israel,* and the entire community will be forgiven. 21Then the priest must carry the rest of the bull's body outside the camp and burn it in the same manner that he burned the first *purification-offering* bull. This is the purification offering for sin when the entire community is involved.

22-23*The following are instructions for what to do* when a leader unwittingly commits a sin by violating any of My directives: When he realizes his guilt or the sin he committed is brought to his attention, then he must bring an unblemished male goat as his offering.

24He is to place his hand on the head of the goat and slaughter it in the same spot where the burnt offerings are slaughtered in My presence. The goat is *to be presented as* a purification offering for sin. 25The *officiating* priest must dip his finger into the blood of the sin offering, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and then pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 26The priest is to offer up all of its fat as smoke in the same way that the fat of the peace offering is offered up. This is how the priest will cover the leader's sin, and the leader will be forgiven.

27-28If a common person among you unwittingly commits a sin by violating any of My directives, once he realizes his guilt or the sin he committed is brought to his attention, then he should offer an unblemished female goat for his wrong. 29He must place his hand on the head of the purification offering for sin and slaughter it in the same spot where the burnt offerings are slaughtered. 30The priest will then dip his finger in some of its blood, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and then pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 31The priest is then to remove its fat in the same manner that the fat is removed from the peace offerings. The priest must offer up the fat on the altar, and the smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me. This is how the priest will cover the sins of common people and how they will be forgiven.

32If a person presents a lamb for the purification offering for sin, then he must bring an unblemished female. 33He is to place his hand on the lamb's head and slaughter it as a purification offering for sin in the same spot where the burnt offerings are slaughtered. 34The priest must then dip his finger into the blood of the purification offering for sin, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and then pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 35The priest is to remove all of its fat in the same manner that the fat is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest will offer it up on the altar on top of the fire-offering to Me. This is how the priest will make atonement for the sin this person committed, and *this is how* he will be forgiven.

5 **Eternal One:** When anyone sins by hearing a public call to testify about a matter he has seen or knows something about, yet he does not speak up, then he is considered guilty *and must be punished.* 2If anyone has physical contact with some impure thing such as the carcass of a ritually unclean wild animal, domestic animal, or even an insect—even if he is unaware of the incident—he has become ritually unclean and must accept the consequences. 3If anyone has physical contact with some kind of human impurity, regardless of the form of impurity it is—even if he was unaware of it at the time—once he realizes it, he must accept the consequences. 4If anyone speaks a careless vow to do something bad or something good or any careless vow for that matter—even if he was unaware of it at the time—once he realizes what he has done, he must accept the consequences. 5Regarding any of these situations, when the guilty party realizes the offense, he must confess it. 6He must present to Me an offering for his guilt as a remedy for the sin he has committed. This purification offering for sin must be a female lamb or goat from the flock. The priest will make atonement for the guilty person's sin.

► These are some cases where a purification offering for sin is required. It is important to note that sacrifice is not some magical cure for sin or its consequences. Before you come to God through the sacrifice, you must realize the error of your ways and confess it. Confession has always been act one of restoration.

Eternal One: 7But if the guilty person *is poor and* cannot afford to offer a lamb, then he must bring to Me two turtledoves or two pigeons as a purification offering for sin. One of these will act as the purification offering and the other will be a burnt offering. 8The guilty person must take them to the priest, and the priest will offer the purification offering for sin first. He will wring the bird's neck but not separate its head from its body. 9He will sprinkle some of its blood on the side of the altar and drain the remaining blood out at the base of the altar. This will be *the ritual for* the purification offering for sin. 10Then the priest will conduct the ritual for the second sacrifice, the burnt offering, in accordance with the regulations. The priest is to make atonement to cover the sin of the guilty, and the guilty will be forgiven.

11If a person cannot afford to offer two turtledoves or two young pigeons, he must offer four pints of his finest flour as the purification offering for sin. He should not mix it with oil or frankincense because it is an offering for the purification of sin. 12He will give it to the priest, and the priest will take a handful of the flour as a memorial portion and offer it up as smoke along with the other fire-offerings presented to Me. The flour is a purification offering for sin. 13This is how the priest will make atonement to cover the sin of anyone guilty of these things, and the guilty will be forgiven. The leftover flour belongs to the priest as in the grain offering.

14The Eternal One then told Moses *about the guilt offering*.

Eternal One: 15If anyone violates his *covenant* duties and unwittingly commits a sin against any of My sacred objects, then that person must bring Me an unblemished ram from the flock or its value in silver (according to the sanctuary standards) for a guilt offering.

A guilt offering provides a remedy for offenses when there is some type of financial restitution with 20 percent interest.

16The guilty person must offer restitution for the wrong he has committed against the sacred thing, add ⅕ of its value, and then give it to the priest. The priest will then make atonement for him by offering the ram to cover his guilt; and the guilty will be forgiven.

17If anyone commits a sin by violating the directives I have given you—even if he was unaware of it—*once he realizes it,* he bears the guilt and must still accept the consequences. 18He must bring to the priest an unblemished ram from the flock or its equivalent value as a guilt offering. The priest will then make atonement to cover the guilty person's wrong, which he unwittingly committed, and the guilty will be forgiven. 19This is a guilt offering because the person was guilty in My eyes.

6 Then the Eternal One told Moses:

Eternal One: 2*The following are instructions regarding liars and cheaters:* Anytime someone commits a sin and violates his *covenant* duties to Me by deceiving his neighbor in financial or security matters, by stealing or by extortion, 3or if a person finds something that is lost and lies about it and makes a false claim, or in anything that someone does, 4and if he has sinned and comes to realize it, he will give back what he has stolen or extorted, or the deposit entrusted to him, or the lost object he found, 5or any other object he lied about. He will repay it entirely plus ⅕ of its value. He must give it to its rightful owner the very day he gives his guilt offering. 6He is to bring to the priest an unblemished ram or its equivalent value as his guilt offering to Me. 7The priest will make atonement and cover the guilty person's wrong before Me, and the guilty will be forgiven for anything that he did wrong.

8The Eternal One spoke again to Moses.

Eternal One: 9Give Aaron and his sons these instructions regarding the ritual of the burnt offering: The burnt offering must stay on the wood-fire all night until morning arrives. The fire on the altar is to be *tended and* kept burning during the night. 10The priest must dress in his *ritual* linen clothes and undergarments, and he must take the ashes from the burnt offering on top of the altar and place them next to the altar. 11Then the priest must remove his ritual clothes and dress in other clothes to transport the ashes to a ritually clean space outside the camp. 12The fire on the altar must burn continually; it must not be allowed

to go out. The priests are to feed wood to the fire every morning, arrange the burnt offering on the fire, and offer up the fat portions of the peace offerings. 13The fire on the altar must burn continually; it must not be allowed to go out.

14Here are the instructions for *the ritual of* the grain offering: Aaron's sons must offer it to Me in front of the altar. 15A priest is to take a handful of the finest flour from the grain offering, together with the oil and frankincense that are part of the grain offering, and offer it as a memorial portion on the altar. The smoke of the sacrifice will rise and be a pleasant aroma to Me. 16Aaron and his sons get to eat whatever is left over. They must eat it without yeast in the holy place or in the courtyard around the sanctuary. 17It must not be baked with yeast. I am assigning this as their portion of the fire-offerings. Their portion is most sacred in the same way that the purification offering and guilt offering are sacred. 18All of Aaron's male descendants are allowed to eat of it. It will be their portion of the fire-offerings presented to Me. This directive stands throughout all generations. Anything that touches them will become holy.

► Holiness is contagious. We're accustomed to thinking about it in the negative. "A bad apple spoils the barrel," our Western wisdom instructs us. But the Scriptures are clear that holiness, too, spreads from contact. Essentially, holiness refers to whatever is set apart for God's purpose and use. The act of setting apart creates a reality that can transform anything it touches. Holy bread consumed in the holy place by holy priests created a holiness that could spread throughout the community.

19The Eternal One continued to Moses.

Eternal One: 20Here are instructions for the *ritual* sacrifice which Aaron and his sons are to offer Me on the day Aaron is anointed *high priest*: bring four pints of the finest flour as a grain offering. *Offer* half of it in the morning and the other half in the evening. 21Prepare it with oil *and bake it* on a griddle. After it has been mixed *with the oil* and thoroughly cooked,* offer it as a pleasant aroma to Me. 22This directive stands for all time. The priest from Aaron's line who is selected to be his successor must bring this same offering when he is anointed, and all of it must be burned. 23The grain offering from the priest is not to be eaten; all of it must be consumed on the altar.

24The Eternal One continued to Moses.

Eternal One: 25*Go,* talk with Aaron and his sons, and give them these commands for *the ritual of* the purification offering for sin: The purification offering is to be slaughtered in My presence in the same place where the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most sacred. 26The priest who presents the purification offering is to eat his portion of it in a sacred place inside the courtyard around the sanctuary. 27Anything that comes in contact with the flesh of the sacrifice will be made holy. When the blood of the sacrifice gets on any clothing, you must wash the bloodstain out in a sacred place. 28If a clay pot is used to boil the sacrifice, it must be shattered *and discarded.* If it was boiled in a bronze bowl, however, then it must be scrubbed and rinsed with water. 29Every man who is a priest may eat it; it is most sacred. 30But none of the offerings from which blood is brought inside the congregation tent as a covering for sin may be eaten. All of it must be consumed on the altar.

7 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** Here are the instructions *for the ritual* of the guilt offering; it is most sacred. 2The slaughter of the guilt offering must take place where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and the priest must splatter its blood against the sides of the altar. 3Then the priest is to offer all of its fat, the fat tail, the fat covering and surrounding the organs, 4the two kidneys and the fat on them near the loins, and the lobe of the liver (which he is to remove along with the kidneys). 5The priest must offer it all up on the altar as a fire-offering to Me. It is a guilt offering. 6Every man who is a priest may eat of

* 6:21 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

it, as long as he eats in a holy place; it is most sacred.

7The guilt offering is similar to the purification offering for sin. The instructions are the same for both rituals. The priest who makes the atoning sacrifice is allowed to have some of it. 8Also, the priest who presents anyone's burnt offering gets to keep the skin from what he has offered for himself. 9In the same way, any grain offering that is oven-baked or cooked in a pan or griddle belongs to the priest who offered it. 10Any other grain offering—whether it is dry or mixed with oil—is to be shared equally among Aaron's sons *after the ritual is completed.*

► There are three kinds of peace offerings described: (a) thanksgiving, expressing gratitude for God's favor; (b) votive, fulfilling a promise made to God; (c) freewill, made out of appreciation but not obligation.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 11Here are the instructions for *the various kinds of* the peace offerings that one may offer to Me. 12If someone offers a sacrifice out of thanksgiving, then in addition to the sacrifice he must offer loaves of unleavened bread mixed with oil, unleavened wafers topped with oil, and loaves of the finest flour mixed with oil. 13Along with the peace offerings for thanksgiving, a person must include loaves of leavened bread. 14He must present one of each kind of bread as a gift to Me; it will belong to the priest who *officiates the sacrifice and* splatters the blood of the peace offerings *against the sides of the altar.*

15The meat of the sacrifice for the thanksgiving peace offering must be eaten on the day it is offered. None of it is to be left over for the next day. 16If the sacrifice for a *peace* offering accompanies a vow or comes simply as an act of free will, it is to be eaten on the day it is offered; but if any remains on the next day, it may still be eaten. 17But all the meat from the sacrifice left over on the third day is to be burned *completely so that none is left.* 18If any of the leftover meat from the peace offering is eaten on the third day, then the person who offered it will not be accepted and will receive no benefit from the sacrifice. *By then* it has become foul, and the person who eats from it will bear his guilt *and suffer the consequences.*

19Do not eat meat that comes in contact with any impure thing. Burn it up *completely*. As for any *remaining* meat that is pure, people who are ritually clean may eat it. 20Any person who eats meat from the sacrifice of My peace offering during a time when he is impure must be cut off from his people. 21Also a person who comes into contact with something impure—whether it pertains to human or animal impurity or some totally detestable creatures—and then eats some of the meat from the sacrifice of My peace offerings must be cut off from his people.

► As hard as it may be for us to understand, being "cut off from your people" is another way of saying "death penalty." God is tough on disobedience because sin and impurity is a contagion that can ruin and ultimately destroy His people. To deal with these matters decisively requires decisive action. Like a deadly disease, sin has to be quarantined.

22The Eternal One continued to Moses.

Eternal One: 23*Go,* talk with the Israelites, and tell them not to eat any fat from an ox, sheep, or goat. 24If an animal dies *a natural death* or is killed by another animal, then you are allowed to make use of its fat, but under no condition are you allowed to eat any of it. 25Whoever eats animal fat from a fire-offering to Me must be cut off from his people. 26Be sure not to consume any animal or bird blood regardless of where you live. 27Anyone who consumes *animal or bird* blood must be cut off from his people.

28The Eternal One continued speaking to Moses.

Eternal One: 29*Go,* talk with the Israelites, and tell them that anyone who offers a peace offering to Me must bring it from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. 30He

is to present the fire-offerings to Me with his own hands. Bring the fat along with the breast so that the breast can be lifted up as a wave offering to Me. 31The *officiating* priest is to offer the fat as smoke on the altar, but the breast will belong to Aaron and his sons. 32The right thigh from the sacrifice of your peace offerings is to go to the priest as your contribution *to his service.* 33The right thigh will be the portion set aside for the son of Aaron who officiates *at the sacrifice* and presents the fat and blood of the peace offerings. 34For I, *the Eternal One,* have taken the breast from the wave offering and the thigh as a gift from the sacrifices brought by the people of Israel as peace offerings, and I have handed them over to Aaron the priest and his sons. This is for all time their rightful portion of the offering from the people of Israel. 35From the *first* day they are brought forward as priests in My service, this is the portion set aside for Aaron and his sons taken from the fire-offerings presented to Me. 36From the day when I anointed *and consecrated* them *as priests,* I directed this gift be made to them by the people of Israel. This is their rightful portion for all time and throughout all generations.

The wave offering is a particularly solemn moment in the ceremony when the priest lifts and waves the sacrifice before God. Afterward, the portions waved became property of the priests.

37These are the instructions for the burnt offering, grain offering, purification offering for sin, guilt offering, ordination offering, and peace offering. 38The Eternal gave these instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai the same day He told the Israelites to bring their offerings to Him in the desert.

8 The Eternal One addressed Moses.

Eternal One: 2*Moses,* take Aaron and his sons together with their *sacred* garments, the *specially prepared* anointing oil, the bull *set aside* for the purification offering for sin, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread. 3Then gather the entire community at the entrance of the congregation tent.

4So Moses followed the Eternal's instructions. When the community of Israel was gathered together at the entrance of the congregation tent, 5Moses addressed the assembly: "The Eternal One has commanded that *we gather and ordain Aaron and his sons as priests*."

6So Moses had Aaron and his sons approach, and he washed them with water *and purified them.* 7Moses put a tunic on Aaron, fastened the sash around his waist, and put the robe and vest on him. He wrapped the skillfully made waistband of the vest around him and tied it to him. 8Then Moses placed the breast piece on him and put the Urim and the Thummim inside a *specially designed pouch* on the breast piece.

► There is much we do not know about the Urim and the Thummim. We do know the high priest used them to ascertain God's will on difficult questions (see Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 14:41-42).

9Moses then put the turban on Aaron's head and fastened a golden medallion, a holy crown, to the front of it. Moses did all this *exactly* as the Eternal commanded.

10Then Moses anointed and consecrated the sanctuary of the congregation tent along with everything in it with the anointing oil. 11He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times; he anointed and consecrated the altar, its tools, and the basin and its stand *with the oil.* 12Moses poured some of the oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to set him apart *as head of the priestly order*. 13Then Moses had Aaron's sons step forward and dressed them with the *special* tunics, fastened sashes about their waists, and placed caps on their heads. He did *exactly* as the Eternal commanded.

► This consecration is of Aaron and his sons along with the enclosed part of the congregation tent, the sanctuary, and their objects. They are all set apart for God's special purpose.

14Moses brought the bull for the purification offering for sin and had Aaron and his

sons place their hands on the bull's head.
15After the bull was slaughtered, Moses
dipped his finger in its blood and rubbed
it on the altar horns, purifying the altar.
Moses then poured the remaining blood
at the base of the altar. This is how Moses
consecrated the altar and covered over
any impurity it possessed. 16Moses also
removed the fat from around the organs,
the lobe of the liver, the two kidneys and
the fat around them, and offered it all
up as smoke on the altar. 17As for the
rest of the bull—its skin, its meat, and its
excrement—he *took and* burned it outside
the camp. Moses did *exactly* as the Eternal
commanded.

18Moses then brought out the ram
for the burnt offering and had Aaron and
his sons place their hands on its head.
19After Moses slaughtered it, he splattered
its blood against the sides of the altar.
20Moses cut it up into pieces, and then
he took the head, the cut portions, and
the fat and offered them up *on the altar*
as smoke. 21After rinsing off the organs
and legs with water—*in order to remove
any impurities*—he took everything *that
was left of* the ram and offered it up on
the altar. The smoke of the burnt offering
rose and became a pleasant aroma, a fire-
offering to the Eternal One. Moses did all
this *exactly* as the Eternal commanded.

22Then Moses prepared the second
ram, the ordination ram. He had Aaron
and his sons place their hands on its head.
23After Moses slaughtered it, he put some
of the ram's blood on Aaron's right ear
lobe, on his right thumb, and on his right
big toe. 24Then Moses sent for Aaron's
sons and put some of the ram's blood on
their right ear lobes, on their right thumbs,
and on their right big toes. Moses then
splattered the remaining blood against the
sides of the altar.

25He then removed the fat, the fat
tail, the fat around the organs, the lobe
of the liver, and two kidneys and the fat
from them, as well as the right thigh *of
the ram.* 26Then Moses reached into the
basket of unleavened bread dedicated to
the Eternal One and took out one loaf of
unleavened bread, one loaf made with oil,
and one wafer. He put them on the fat and
on the right thigh. 27Then he placed it all
in the hands of Aaron and his sons, who
raised them to the Eternal One as a wave
offering. 28Moses then took it all back from
Aaron and his sons and offered it on the
altar along with the burnt offering. The
smoke of the ordination offering rose and
became a pleasant aroma, a fire-offering
to the Eternal. 29Moses also lifted up the
breast *of the ram* as a wave offering to the
Eternal. The breast served as Moses' por-
tion of the ordination offering as the Eter-
nal had commanded.

30Moses took some of the anointing
oil and some of the blood from the altar
and sprinkled it on Aaron and his gar-
ments. *He did the same* on Aaron's sons
and their garments. This is how he conse-
crated Aaron and his *priestly* garments, as
well as his sons and their garments.

Moses *(to Aaron and his sons)*: 31Boil the
meat at the entrance to the congregation
tent, and feast on it together with bread
from the basket of the ordination offer-
ing, in accordance with the instructions
I gave: "Aaron and his sons may eat it."
32Burn the rest of the meat and bread
in the fire. 33You are not allowed to go
beyond the entrance of the congregation
tent for seven days when your ordination
period is complete; for it will take seven
days to ordain you. 34Everything we have
done today the Eternal commanded us
to do in order to cover your impurity.
35Stay *here* at the entrance of the con-
gregation tent all day and all night for
the seven days. Do whatever the Eternal
requires, or else you will die, for this is
the command He has given me.

36So Aaron and his sons honored the
Eternal One's instructions, which He com-
manded through Moses.

9 When the eighth day arrived, Moses
called for Aaron, Aaron's sons, and
the elders of the Israelite community.

This ceremony inaugurated the daily sacrifices in the congregation tent.

Moses *(to Aaron)*: 2Take a young unblem-
ished calf for a purification offering and
an unblemished ram for a burnt offering
and offer them to the Eternal One. 3Then
go instruct the Israelites, "Take a male
goat for a purification offering and an
unblemished calf and lamb, both a year
old, for a burnt offering. 4Take also an
ox and a ram for a peace offering and a
grain offering mixed with oil, and offer
them to the Eternal One for He will
reveal Himself to you today.

5So the people gathered *the sacrifices* as
Moses had commanded and brought them

to the front of congregation tent. The entire community gathered around and stood in the presence of the Eternal One.

Moses: [6]The Eternal One has told us to conduct this ceremony so that His glory will be revealed to you.

[7]*(to Aaron)* Approach the altar, and present your purification offering and burnt offering. Do this *first* to cover *the impurity of* your own life so that you will *be fit to* cover the impurity of all the people. Then present the offering of the people so that *the impurity of* their lives may be covered. *Do exactly* as the Eternal has commanded.

[8]Aaron approached the altar and slaughtered the calf as the purification offering for himself. [9]Aaron's sons held the blood out to him, and Aaron dipped his finger in the blood and spread it on the *four* horns of the altar. Then he poured the remaining blood around the base of the altar. [10]After this he removed the fat, the kidneys, and the lobe of the liver of the purification offering and offered them as smoke on the altar, *exactly* as the Eternal had commanded Moses. [11]He took what remained of the meat and skin and burned it up in a fire outside the camp.

[12]Then Aaron slaughtered the burnt offering and his sons brought him the blood, and he splattered it against the sides of the altar. [13]Then Aaron's sons gave him all the pieces of the burnt offering, including the head, and he offered them up as smoke on the altar. [14]He washed the organs and the legs *with water so nothing unacceptable would be added* and offered them with the burnt offering as smoke on the altar.

[15]*Now with his own sins covered,* Aaron was able to offer the sacrifices for the masses. So he took the goat for the purification offering, slaughtered it, and offered it *as reparation* for the people's sin. He did this in the same way he presented the first offering. [16]He brought the burnt offering as well and offered it in accordance with the ordinances *God handed on to Moses*. [17]Then he presented the grain offering, took some of it in his hand, and offered it up as smoke on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

[18]Then he slaughtered the ox and the ram as the peace offerings for the masses. Aaron's sons gave him the blood, and he splattered it against the sides of the altar. [19]The fat of the ox and ram—the fat tail, the fat covering *the intestines,* the kidneys, and the lobe of the liver—[20]they put on top of the breasts and offered them as smoke on the altar. [21]Aaron lifted the breasts and the right thigh as a wave offering before the Eternal as Moses commanded.

[22]Then Aaron raised his hands in the direction of the people and blessed them.* After he had completed the sacrifices for the purification offering, burnt offering, and peace offerings, he descended from the altar. [23]Moses and Aaron entered the congregation tent. When they returned, they blessed the people, and the Eternal One's glory appeared to all the people. [24]Then flames erupted from the presence of the Eternal One and devoured the burnt offering and all the fat on the altar. At the sight of this, everyone cried out and fell on their faces.

► The glory of God is a hard notion for us. The word often translated "glory" means essentially heaviness or weight. The Eternal One uniquely is the most substantial and most significant being in the cosmos. Only God is eternal. Only God has true substance. Creation runs out, wears out, and peters out eventually. In the Scriptures the term "glory" is used often for those unique times and places when God manifests Himself in some visible way. It is His epiphany, or manifestation, one might say. To see God's glory is a fearsome thing. That's why people fall on their faces and call out for mercy. Not many people have seen God's glory, but those who do never forget it.

10 Nadab and Abihu, *two of* Aaron's sons, took censers and filled them with embers; then they put incense on top of the fire and presented it to the Eternal One. This was a strange *and unauthorized* fire that the Eternal did not command them. [2]Flames erupted from before the Eternal and burned up Nadab and Abihu. They both died in the presence of the Eternal One.

* 9:22 See Numbers 6:24-26.

Moses *(to Aaron)*: 3This is what the Eternal One was talking about when He said,

By those authorized to come near,
I will be treated as sacred.
In the eyes of all the people,
I will be honored.

Aaron remained silent.
4Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel.

Moses: Make your way forward. Gather *the dead bodies of* your relatives from the front of the sanctuary, and carry them outside the camp.

5So Mishael and Elzaphan did as Moses instructed; they came forward, picked them up—while they were still wearing their *priestly* tunics—and carried them outside the camp. 6Moses spoke to Aaron and his sons, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Moses: Do not let your hair go unkempt or rip your garments *in customary acts of mourning,* or else you will die. *Follow this instruction* so that the Eternal One does not grow angry toward the entire community. *Everyone else*—our relatives, the entire community of Israel—can lament the great fire the Eternal One has produced *that killed your sons.* 7Do not go beyond the entrance of the congregation tent. If you do, you will meet a *quick* death, for the Eternal's anointing oil covers you.

Aaron and his sons followed Moses' instructions.
8The Eternal One addressed Aaron.

Eternal One: 9You and your sons must not drink wine or any alcoholic drink before entering the congregation tent, lest you die. This directive stands for all time throughout your generations. 10You must know the difference between the sacred and the profane, the ritually pure and the impure, 11and teach the people of Israel the directives, which I have revealed to them through Moses.

God demanded that the priests stay entirely sober while performing their ritual duties to ensure good judgment and orderly worship.

Moses *(to Aaron and his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar)*: 12You may take whatever grain is left from the fire-offerings devoted to the Eternal and eat it unleavened next to the altar; this is most sacred. 13You are to eat it in a sacred space; it is your and your sons' portion of the Eternal One's fire-offerings, according to the commands I have given. 14You, your sons, and your daughters may eat the breast of the wave offering and the thigh presented to God in some ritually pure place. The breast and thigh are your portion and your children's portion from the sacrifices of the peace offerings brought by the people of Israel. 15Have them bring the thigh that is contributed and the breast that is waved, along with the fire-offerings of fat, to present as a wave offering before the Eternal One. This will be your and your children's portion for all time; it is your due as the Eternal has commanded.

16Moses began asking for the goat for the purification offering, but he discovered that it had already been burned up. He was furious with Eleazar and Ithamar (Aaron's surviving sons).

Moses *(to Aaron's sons)*: 17Why did you *disobey my instructions and* not eat the purification offering in the area of the sanctuary? It is most sacred. God has given it to you so that you can take on the guilt of the community and cover their wrongs before the Eternal. 18Look, its blood was never taken inside the sanctuary; therefore the rightful place for you to eat it was in the sanctuary as I commanded.

Aaron *(to Moses)*: 19Look, my sons offered their purification offering and their burnt offering to the Eternal One today. But think of all that has happened to me. *Given the tragedy I have seen,* would the Eternal have approved if I had eaten a purification offering today?

20After Moses listened to what Aaron had to say, he was satisfied.

11 The Eternal One addressed Moses and Aaron again.

► Now that Aaron and his sons have been set aside as priests, it is time to instruct them on one of their major duties, that is, helping God's covenant

people understand the difference between purity and impurity. Impurity is a constant challenge and threat to holiness, and God has called His people to be holy. But many actions and circumstances in life put holiness in jeopardy. God knows that His people need help figuring these things out. That's one of the reasons He sets aside Aaron's family as priests and gives them these instructions.

It is important to note that purity and impurity, as understood here, are much more than what is sanitary or unsanitary. The ritual purity instructions encompass nearly every aspect of social and religious life in Israel.

Eternal One: 2Go talk to the Israelites and explain to them which animals of the earth you may and may not eat. 3You are allowed to eat any animals with split hooves divided into two parts or that chew the cud. 4But from those animals with split hooves or that chew the cud, you are not allowed to eat camels. Because they only chew the cud and do not have split hooves, camels are impure to you. 5In the same way, the rock badger chews the cud but does not have split hooves. Therefore, rock badgers are impure to you. 6Also the hare chews the cud, but it does not have split hooves. Therefore, they are impure to you. 7The pig has split hooves divided into two parts, but it does not chew the cud. Therefore pigs are impure to you. 8Do not eat their meat or touch their dead bodies, for they are impure to you.

9You are *certainly* allowed to eat these creatures of the water: any *fish* with fins and scales that swim in the seas or rivers. 10But any finless or scaleless fish that comes from the abundance of water-life in the seas or rivers, and any other creatures living in the water, are detestable to you. 11*Recognize and* treat them for what they are: detestable. You are not allowed to eat their meat, and their dead bodies are repulsive to you. 12Any finless or scaleless fish or animal or insect in the seas or rivers is detestable to you.

13Also among the creatures of the air, there are some you should detest as well. Do not eat the eagle, the *bearded* vulture, or the black vulture, 14the kite and all kinds of buzzards, 15any sort of crow, 16the ostrich, the owl, the seagull, all kinds of hawks, 17the little owl, the cormorant, the screech owl, 18the white owl, the pelican, the carrion vulture, 19the stork, all kinds of herons, the hoopoe, and the bat.

20Also, any insect that can fly and move around on four legs is detestable. 21But you are allowed to eat any flying, four-legged insect that has joints above its feet for jumping. 22You may eat the following insects: locusts, destructive locusts, desert locusts, and grasshoppers. 23But any other flying, four-legged insects are detestable.

► Have you noticed how often faith and food come together? One of the most authentic expressions of our spiritual lives has to do with the table where we gather with family and friends to bless God for the goodness the earth provides. These regulations recorded here helped Israel to maintain its status as God's chosen and holy people. Kosher laws, as they are called, are unique to Israel's covenant with the Eternal One. They aren't God's laws for everyone; they serve as a cultural boundary-marker indicating what kinds of meat should be eaten.

Eternal One: 24Also you will become impure until dusk if you touch the carcass of any creature. 25A person who picks up any part of its carcass must wash his clothes and remain impure until dusk. 26All animals that do not chew cud or have split hooves that are not in two parts are impure to you. Anyone who has contact with them becomes impure. 27Also, any four-legged animals that walk on paws are impure to you. Anyone who has contact with their carcasses will be impure until dusk. 28And anyone who carries their carcass is to wash his clothes and remain impure until dusk. They are impure to you as well.

29These *small* creatures that scamper about the earth are impure to you:

small rodents, great lizards, [30]geckos, monitor lizards, other lizards, sand reptiles, and chameleons. [31]These *small* creatures of the earth are impure to you. Anyone who touches their remains will be impure until dusk. [32]If one of the carcasses touches an object you intend to use—such as a piece of wood, an article of clothing, an *animal* hide, or a sack—then that item is impure and should soak in water until dusk. After that, it will be pure again. [33]If one of the carcasses falls into any container made of clay, the substance within the container will become impure and you should destroy the container. [34]If any food in the container that is ready to eat is touched by water, then the food becomes impure. Any drink from a contaminated container will become impure as well. [35]If any part of a dead body touches something—say, an oven or stove—then that oven or stove must be destroyed. They are impure and will always be impure to you. [36]However if *a carcass falls into* a spring or a container accumulating water, the water will be ritually pure *because it is continually renewed.* But the person who pulls the carcass *out of the water* will be ritually impure. [37]If any part of the dead body has contact with a seed that is to be planted, then the seed remains ritually pure *because it is dry*. [38]But if the seed becomes wet and any part of a dead body touches it, then the seed is ritually impure.

[39]If a clean animal dies naturally, whoever touches the carcass will be impure until dusk. [40]And if anyone eats some of its meat, then that person is to wash his clothes and remain impure until dusk. Anyone who touches the dead body is to wash his clothes and remain impure until dusk.

[41]Any swarming creature that scurries along the ground is detestable to you and must not be eaten. *Do not consume any of them!* [42]Also do not eat any creature that moves on its belly, walks on four legs, or has multiple pairs of feet, for they are detestable to you. [43]Do not defile yourselves by having contact with any of the swarming creatures. Do not become impure by having contact with any of them. [44]For I am the Eternal One, your God. You are to consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy.*

Do not cause yourselves to become impure by having contact with any swarming creature that crawls along the ground. [45]I am the Eternal One who led you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore, you are to be holy, for I am holy.*

[46]*So* this is *God's* instruction concerning animals, birds, creatures that live in the waters, and small creatures that move along the ground, [47]so that the people will be able to distinguish between what animals are ritually acceptable and ritually unacceptable, and what is to be eaten and what is not to be eaten.

12 The Eternal One addressed Moses.

Eternal One: [2]*Go,* talk with the Israelites, and tell them, "If a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, then she will be ritually unclean for seven days, just like she is unclean when she is menstruating. [3]When the eighth day arrives, the boy will be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. [4]A woman *who gives birth to a boy* must not have contact with any holy thing or go into the sanctuary for 33 days. She must wait until her purification is complete and her bleeding from childbirth ends. [5]But if the woman gives birth to a girl she will be ritually unclean for 14 days—just like she is unclean when she is menstruating. She must wait 66 days for her purification from bleeding to be complete.

[6]After her days of purification are over—regardless of whether she had a boy or a girl—she will bring *several things* to the priest at the entrance of the congregation tent: a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a purification offering. [7]Then the priest will present it to Me and cover the woman's blood impurity, and she will be ritually clean from her flowing of blood. This is My instruction for any woman who gives birth to a child, either a boy or a girl. [8]If the woman cannot afford a lamb, then she may instead present two turtledoves or two young pigeons*—one for a burnt offering and the other for a purification offering. The priest will offer them to cover her *blood impurity,* and she will be ritually clean.

* 11:44 1 Peter 1:16 * 11:45 1 Peter 1:16 * 12:8 Luke 2:24

Humans suffer from many different kinds of skin disorders. Although one of the most dreaded diseases known to antiquity was leprosy, it is most likely that few Israelites in Moses' day suffered from the disease we know as leprosy. The Hebrew word that appears in this chapter covers many disfiguring and debilitating skin diseases that certainly can be infectious. The priests are given the challenge of making critical observations as to what is indeed infectious and what is not. The term applied not only to a variety of skin diseases, but it was also used to describe articles of clothing or buildings marred from leprouslike outbreaks.

By the time of the New Testament, leprosy is present in Israel. It is caused by a bacterium that can begin as a blemish on the skin; but when it runs its course, the skin is left discolored. There are unsightly lumps and scaling, and eventually the nerves are paralyzed so that there is no feeling of pain. Without the pain sensation people eventually wear down their fingers and toes into mere nubs. It is a terrible, contagious disease that socially marginalized people from their families' loving touch and intimate relationships.

13 The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron.

Eternal One: 2Any time a person has an area of swelling or a rash or a white patch of skin, it may be the sign of a serious skin disease; so he must be taken to one of the priests—Aaron or one of Aaron's sons. 3The priest must examine the spot on the skin. If the hair on it has turned white, and the affected area appears to go deep beneath the skin, then it is a serious skin disease. After the examination, he will then pronounce the *diseased* person unclean. 4But if the patch on the skin is white and does not appear to go deep beneath the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest will quarantine the person for seven days. 5When the seventh day arrives, the priest will examine the affected area again; and if the priest thinks it has not grown worse and has not spread to other parts of the skin, then the priest will continue the quarantine for another seven days. 6At the end of *the second* seven days, the priest will examine the person again; and if the affected area has faded and has not spread to any other part *of the body,* then the priest will pronounce that he is clean and suffers only some minor skin problem. The person is to wash his garments and must be considered clean again.

Only if the individual is declared clean by the priest can he or she come back fully into the life of the community.

7But if the rash spreads to other parts of the skin after the priest examines the person and pronounces him clean, then he must go back to the priest *to be examined* again. 8The priest will check the person again; and if the rash has *grown worse and* spread, then the priest must pronounce the person unclean. He does, in fact, have a serious skin disease.

9When a person contracts any serious skin disease, he must be taken to the priest. 10The priest will check the skin; and if the priest finds an area of white swelling on the skin where the hair has turned white, and if there is a raw, open sore, 11then the person has a chronic skin disease and the priest must pronounce him unclean. The priest does not have to quarantine the person because it is evident that he is *already* unclean. 12If the disease gets worse, spreads across his body, and involves all of his skin from head to toe—as far as the priest can tell—13then the priest will check; and if the disease has covered the person's entire body, then the priest will pronounce the infected man clean because the disease has turned his entire body white. 14But if a raw, open sore shows up, then he must be declared unclean. 15The priest will examine the raw skin and pronounce the man unclean because the raw skin is unclean. It is *definitely* a serious skin disease. 16If the raw skin changes again and becomes white, then the infected person must go see the priest 17to be examined. If the affected area has turned white, then the priest will

pronounce the diseased person clean;
for he is *in fact* clean.
18If a boil shows up on someone's
skin, and the boil goes away 19and
is replaced by a swollen white or a
reddish-white spot, then he must point
this out to the priest. 20The priest will
check; and if the affected area appears
to go deep beneath the skin and the
hairs on it have turned white, then
the priest will pronounce the person
unclean. It is a case of serious skin
disease that started out as a boil. 21But
if the priest examines the person and
finds there are no white hairs on it and
the condition does not appear to go
deep beneath the skin, and is, in fact,
improving, then the priest will quaran-
tine the infected person for seven days.
22If the condition spreads to new places
on the skin, the priest will pronounce
him unclean; it is a serious infection.
23However, if the affected area does not
get worse or spread *to new parts of the
skin,* it is simply a scar from the boil,
and the priest will pronounce him clean.
24If a person suffers a burn in a fire,
and the raw skin from the burn turns
shiny white, reddish-white, or white,
25the priest will examine the affected
area. If the hair on it is white and the
sore appears to go deep beneath the
skin, then the person has a serious skin
disease that started out from the burn;
the priest will declare him unclean. 26If
the priest examines the affected area
and finds no white hair on it, and the
condition does not go deep beneath the
skin but instead seems to be improv-
ing, then the priest will quarantine him
for seven days. 27When the seventh day
arrives, the priest will examine him *once
again.* If the condition appears to be
spreading, the priest will declare him
unclean; the person has a serious skin
disease. 28If the affected area does not
get worse and spread to new parts of
the skin, but seems to be improving,
then it is simply swollen from the burn.
The priest will pronounce him clean
because it is simply a scar from the
burn.
29If a man or a woman has a spot
on the head or chin, 30the priest must
examine it, and if it appears to go deep
beneath the skin and has thin, yellow-
ish hairs in it, then the priest must
pronounce the infected person to be
unclean; it is a scaly skin disease on the
head or chin. 31If the priest examines
the scaly area and it does not appear to
go deep beneath the surface of the skin
and there are no dark hairs in it, then
the priest will quarantine the infected
person for seven days. 32When the sev-
enth day arrives, the priest will examine
the area again. If the scaly area has not
gotten worse and there are no yellowish
hairs in it, and the scale does not appear
to go deep beneath the surface of the
skin, 33then the infected person should
shave *the head or beard* except *where
hair is growing* in the affected area. The
priest will then quarantine the infected
person for another seven days. 34When
the seventh days arrives, the priest will
examine the scale again; and if it has
not gotten worse and does not appear
to go deep beneath the skin, the priest
will pronounce the person clean. He
will wash his clothes and be consid-
ered clean again. 35But if the scale *gets
worse and* shows up on new parts of the
skin *anytime* after the priest declares
him clean, 36the priest must examine
the person again. If the condition has
spread to new parts of the skin, the
priest is not required to look for yellow-
ish hair because *it is evident* the person
is unclean. 37However, if he inspects the
person and the scaly skin has not gotten
worse and dark hairs are growing on
it, then the condition is healed and the
person is once again clean. The priest
will declare the person clean.
38If a man or a woman discovers
bright *shiny* spots on the skin, includ-
ing bright white ones, 39the priest must
check them out. And if *he determines
that* the bright spots on the skin are
pale, this is only a minor skin rash; the
person is clean.
40If a man loses his hair and goes
bald, he is clean. 41If he loses it on his
forehead *but not on the sides,* he is *only
partially* bald on the forehead; he is still
clean. 42However, if a reddish-white spot
shows up on his bald head or forehead,
then a serious skin infection is develop-
ing. 43The priest must examine him; and
if the affected area is reddish-white on
his bald head or forehead and looks sim-
ilar to a reddish-white outbreak on the
body, 44then that means the man has a
serious skin disease and is unclean. The
priest has to pronounce him unclean
because of the skin disease on his head.
45Anyone with a serious skin disease
must wear torn clothing, not comb
his hair, and cover his face beneath

the nose. He must call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" 46As long as the disease persists, he will be unclean. He must live alone, outside the camp, *away from the rest of the community.*

47-48Now if it ever looks as if an article of clothing has some outbreak like leprosy—whether it is made of wool, linen, or leather—49and if the affected area in any leather or woven material has turned a greenish or reddish color, it is a sign of a serious problem and should be taken to the priest. 50The priest must examine the article and quarantine it for seven days. 51When the seventh day arrives, the priest must check it again; and if the affected area has spread to other parts of the article—whether in the wool, linen, or leather, regardless of what the leather was used for—the article has a serious outbreak which makes it unclean. 52So the priest has to burn the garment—whether it is made of wool, linen or leather—because it has some serious outbreak like leprosy and must be destroyed by fire.

53But if the priest examines the article, and the affected area has not spread in either the woven or knitted material, or the leather, 54the priest must direct the article be washed, and then quarantined for another seven days. 55After it has been washed, the priest must check it again; and if the affected area looks the same, then the article is still unclean even though the outbreak has not spread. Therefore, you must burn it in the fire; it doesn't matter whether the affected area is on the front or the back.

56But if the priest examines it, and the affected area has faded after it has been washed, the priest must rip the affected material out of the garment, leather, or woven or knitted material. 57If another spot shows up in the article again—either in the woven or knitted material, or the leather—then the outbreak is spreading, and the article must be burned in the fire. 58But if the spot is gone once the article has been washed—whether it is woven or knitted or leather—you must wash it; then it will be considered clean.

59So this is God's instruction for how to deal with linen, woolen, or leather garments that have suspicious-looking spots on them. With these instructions, priests are able to determine whether they are clean or unclean.

14 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 2-3These are the instructions for determining when an infected person has recovered from a skin disease and should be pronounced clean. The priest must go outside the camp and examine the infected person. If the priest determines the skin disease has been healed, 4then he will prescribe that two healthy birds—both ritually pure—some cedar wood, scarlet string, and hyssop be brought for the cleansing ritual. 5The priest will direct that one of the birds be killed in a clay jar over running water. 6He will then take the living bird along with the cedar, the scarlet string, and the hyssop and dip them in the blood of the first bird killed over running water. 7Then the priest will sprinkle the one who is being cleansed from his skin disease seven times *with the blood,* pronounce that he is *once again* clean, and set the living bird free in a wide, open field. 8The person who is presented for cleansing will wash his clothes, shave all the hair from his body, and wash himself with water; then he will be clean. After all this is done, he is permitted to enter the community but he must remain outside of his tent for seven days. 9When the seventh day arrives, he must shave all the hair from his body *again*—his head, beard, and eyebrows—and he has to wash his clothes *again* and bathe in water. This is how he is to be made clean.

10On the eighth day, the person must bring two unblemished male lambs, an unblemished year-old ewe lamb, six quarts of the finest flour mixed with oil to act as a grain offering, and ⅔ pint of oil. 11The priest who pronounces the person clean will bring the man and his offering into My presence at the entrance of the congregation tent. 12The priest is then to take one male lamb as the guilt offering, along with the ⅔ pint of oil, and lift them up as a wave offering in My presence. 13Then he must slaughter the lamb in the same area of the sanctuary where they kill the purification offering for sin and the burnt offering. The guilt offering, like the purification offering, belongs to the priest. They are most sacred. 14The priest will then collect some of the blood of the guilt offering and place it on the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the

person who is being cleansed. 15The priest will take some of the ⅔ pint of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, 16and then he will dip his right finger into the oil in his left hand and sprinkle drops of it with his finger seven times before Me. 17He will then take some of the oil from his *left* hand and place it on the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the person being cleansed and on top of the blood of the guilt offering. 18The priest should take any remaining oil from his *left* hand and put it on the head of the person being cleansed. Then the priest must perform the atoning sacrifice before Me to cover the person's sins. 19The priest is to offer the purification offering to cover the sin of the one being cleansed. After this, the priest must present the sacrifice for the burnt offering 20along with the grain offering on the altar. This is how the priest will cover the sin, guilt, and uncleanness of the person seeking to be cleansed; this person must be considered clean *once again.*

Taken together, these rituals and sacrifices allow the formerly unclean person to reenter the life of the community.

21If the person who comes for cleansing is poor and cannot afford the prescribed offerings, then he may be covered by bringing one male lamb as a guilt offering to be lifted up as a wave offering. He should also present four pints of the finest flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, along with ⅔ pint of oil. 22He should also bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, whichever he can afford. One *of the birds* will be for the purification offering and the other one will be for the burnt offering. 23When the eighth day arrives *(which is the day after he shaves the second time),* the person must present them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance of the congregation tent in My presence. 24The priest will receive the lamb for the guilt offering and the ⅔ pint of oil, and lift them as a wave offering before Me. 25Afterward, he will kill the lamb for the guilt offering, collect some of its blood, and place it on the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the person being cleansed. 26The priest is to pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand 27and sprinkle drops of it with his right finger seven times in My presence. 28The priest will then take some of the oil from his *left* hand and place it on the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the person being cleansed and on top of the blood from the guilt offering. 29The priest should take any remaining oil from his *left* hand and put it on the head of the person being cleansed to cover him before Me. 30-31He will then present one of the turtledoves or young pigeons—whichever he can afford—one for the purification offering and the other for the burnt offering that accompanies the grain offering. The priest will cover the sin, guilt, and uncleanness before Me of the person seeking to be cleansed. 32These instructions explain what to do when someone with a serious skin disease cannot afford all the items for his cleansing.

33The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron.

Eternal One: 34When you go into the land of Canaan—the land which I am giving you as your own—and I contaminate or infect one of the houses in your land, 35the owner of the house must go inform the priest, "I have just noticed a spot in my house." 36The priest must then order the person to remove all the contents from the house before he comes to examine the spot. This saves the person from possibly having everything in the house declared unclean. After this is done, the priest can go inside and inspect the spot. 37If he sees that the spot has greenish or reddish depressions and appears to go deep beneath the surface *of the wall,* 38then the priest will exit the house through the door and quarantine the house for seven days. 39When the seventh day arrives, the priest will go back into the house and inspect it again. If the *discolored* spot has shown up on other places on the walls, 40the priest will direct them to remove all the stones that have any suspicious spots on them and discard them in the impure *refuse* pile outside the camp. 41They are also to scrape off any *suspicious-looking* plaster and discard it in the impure *refuse* pile outside the camp. 42Then they are to *go out and* find other stones to replace the ones they removed and then replaster the walls.

43If there is another outbreak after they have removed *all the*

suspicious-looking stones and plaster and then replastered the walls, 44the priest must enter the house and inspect it *once again.* If he finds that the spots have reappeared, then the house has a chronic outbreak and is unclean. 45The owner must demolish the house and take all its stones, wood, and plaster to the impure *refuse* pile outside the camp. 46Whoever enters the house while the house is quarantined by the priest will become unclean until dusk. 47Also anyone who sleeps or eats inside the house must wash their clothes.

48If the priest enters the house to inspect it and the spot has not reappeared after the walls have been *rebuilt and* replastered, the priest will declare the house clean because the spot has not returned. 49To cleanse the house *from its contamination,* the priest must take two birds, some cedar wood, scarlet string, and hyssop, 50and slaughter one bird in a clay jar over running water. 51He will then dip the cedar wood, hyssop, scarlet string, and the living bird in the blood of the first bird and in running water and sprinkle the house seven times. 52This is how the priest will cleanse the house *from the outbreak* using the blood of the *sacrificed* bird, running water, the living bird, cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet string. 53He will set the living bird free over a *wide,* open field outside the camp. In this way, the priest will cover over the impurity of the house, and the house will be declared clean.

54-57These are God's instructions for how to deal with suspicious-looking spots: for scaly areas, swelling, rashes, and discolored spots on the skin and for discolored spots on clothing or in a house. With these instructions, priests are able to determine whether they are clean or unclean.

15 The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron.

Eternal One: 2*Go,* talk with the Israelites, and tell them that if a man has *any sort of* a discharge from his body, the discharge renders him impure.

► This is the general principle: a bodily discharge produces a state of ritual impurity for both men and women. As we see in this chapter, some of these discharges are abnormal and caused by active infections or diseases. When this is the case, healing is required. But some discharges are actually normal. For example, a woman's period is normal, but there are conditions that cause her to bleed at odd times or too much. Again, in such cases, healing is required.

Eternal One: 3A man's discharge makes him impure regardless of whether his body allows it to flow out of him or blocks its flow *altogether.* 4If the person with the discharge lies down in a bed or sits down *on a couch,* it becomes impure. 5-6Any person who has contact with that bed *or that couch* must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 7Any person who touches the discharging man must wash his or her clothes and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 8If the discharging man spits on a person who is ritually clean, then that person must wash his garments and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 9If the discharging man rides on a saddle, the riding saddle will be impure as well. 10Therefore, if anyone touches any of the items that were under the discharging man, then that person will be impure until dusk. Whoever picks up and carries any of these items must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 11If the discharging man does not wash his hands and touches another person, then that person must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 12If the discharging man touches a clay cup, then it must be shattered; but a wooden cup shall be washed with water.

The impurity of the clay is because it has penetrated the vessel, but the wood is saved because it is less porous.

13Once the discharging man is healed, he must wait seven days *to make sure the ailment doesn't return* before his ritual cleansing. He will wash his clothes and bathe in running water so that he can be ritually pure again. 14On the eighth day, he is to bring two turtledoves

or young pigeons into My presence and hand them to the priest at the entrance of the congregation tent. 15The priest will present the birds—one of them as a purification offering for sin and the other as a burnt offering. The priest will come before Me and cover the impurity of the man with a discharge.

16If a man ejaculates, then he must bathe his whole body with water and remain impure until dusk. 17If an item of clothing or leather is touched by semen, then it must be cleaned *thoroughly* with water and will remain impure until dusk. 18If a man ejaculates while lying with a woman, then both must bathe with water and remain impure until dusk.

► The impurity referred to in these verses has to do with ceremonial and ritual practices such as making sacrifices, going to festivals, or receiving a revelation. Men, like women, have times when they become ritually impure. For men it happens whenever they have an ejaculation. For women it happens whenever they have their period. It's important to note that these bodily functions are normal and natural, not sinful or evil. The ancients knew the power of such events for making them one with their wives and ultimately creating life. Through these bodily fluids men and women become partners with God in creating other humans who are made in the image and likeness of God. Such power cannot and must not be taken lightly.

Eternal One: 19When a woman has her menstrual period and discharges her blood, she must stay in a state of her menstrual impurity for seven days. Any person who touches her will be impure until dusk. 20Anything she lies down upon or sits down on during her menstruation will be impure, 21-23and any person who touches her bed *or her cushion* or anything else she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will remain impure until dusk. 24If a man has sexual relations with a woman *during her menstrual period* and her menstrual blood gets on him, he will be impure for seven days, and any bed he lies down upon will be impure as well.

25If a woman discharges blood for several days beyond her menstrual period or outside of it, then she will treat those days as if she were having her menstrual period and will be impure. 26Treat every bed she lies down upon during her irregular discharge like the bed she lies down upon while she is in her menstrual period. Anything she sits down upon will be considered impure just as it is when she is menstruating. 27By the same token, any person who touches the items *she touches* will be impure and must wash his clothes and bathe in water and remain impure until dusk. 28When the woman's discharge stops, she will wait seven days before she is ritually cleansed. 29On the eighth day, she will bring two turtledoves or young pigeons and present them to the priest at the entrance of the congregation tent. 30The priest will present one as a purification offering for sin and the other as a burnt offering. The priest will come before Me and cover the impurity of the woman with a discharge.

31This is how you are to separate *and deal with* the people of Israel during those times when they are ritually impure, so that they will not die from their impurity by defiling My sanctuary that stands among them.

32These are the instructions for what to do when someone has a discharge of any kind; and for the man who has become impure from his ejaculation, 33for the woman who is not well from her menstrual period, for any man or woman who has a discharge, and for the man who has sexual relations with a ritually impure woman.

16 The Eternal One spoke to Moses after Aaron's two sons died from entering into the Eternal's presence.*

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2*Go,* talk to Aaron, and warn him that he cannot go whenever he wants beyond the veil to the holy place before the seat of mercy that covers the covenant chest. If he does, he will lose his life because I will appear in the cloud above the seat of mercy. 3*Instead,* he may enter into the holy place with

* 16:1 Leviticus 10:1-2

a bull *from the herd* for the purification offering for sin and a ram for the burnt offering. 4Aaron will wash himself with water and then put on his sacred garments: the linen underclothes and the sacred linen tunic. He will tie the linen sash around his waist and put on his linen turban. 5From the community of *My* people Israel, he will take two male goats as a purification offering for sin and a ram as a burnt offering. 6Aaron will present the bull as a purification offering to cover himself and his family. 7Then he will take the two goats and present them to Me at the entrance of the congregation tent. 8There he will cast lots for the goats: one lot for Me and one lot for the scapegoat. 9Whichever goat My lot falls upon, Aaron will offer that goat as a purification offering for sin. 10Whichever goat the scapegoat's lot falls upon, Aaron will keep it alive, bring it before Me as a covering *for the people,* and set it free into the wilderness.

► There are two goats for the annual Day of Atonement. Lots are cast—perhaps the Urim and the Thummim—to see which goat is slaughtered for Israel's purification before God and which goat is released into the desert. The meaning of the Hebrew term *Azazel* is translated "scapegoat" but is uncertain; *Azazel* may refer to the name of a wilderness demon or a place in the desert, or it may simply refer to the goat that takes Israel's sin deep into the desert, that is, "scapegoat."

Eternal One: 11Aaron will offer the bull for the purification offering to cover his and his family's sins; and he will slaughter it himself. 12He will gather embers from My altar in a censer and also two handfuls of the finest, sweetest crushed incense and take it behind the veil.

13He is to place the incense on the embers in My presence so that the cloud of incense engulfs the seat of mercy—*where sins are atoned*—on the covenant chest, so he will not die. 14He must also dip his finger into the bull's blood and sprinkle it on the east side of the seat of mercy; in all he is to sprinkle the blood seven times in front of the seat of mercy.

15He will then slaughter the goat for the purification offering on behalf of the community's sin, take its blood behind the veil, and do the same thing with it that he did with the bull's blood. He will sprinkle it on and in front of the seat of mercy. 16This is how he will cover the impurities of the sanctuary because the impurities, rebellion, and sin of the people of Israel have defiled it. He will perform the same ritual for the congregation tent since it stands in the heart of their uncleanness. 17When the *high* priest enters the sanctuary to cover the impurities in the sacred space, no one else is allowed inside the tent until he comes outside again after atoning for himself, his family, and the entire community of Israel.

18Then the priest will approach the altar that sits in My presence and cover any impurity it has by taking some of the bull's and goat's blood and placing it around the four horns of the altar. 19Then he must sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times in order to purify it from the Israelites' impurities and set it apart *for My holy purposes*.

20When the priest has finished covering the impurities in the sanctuary, the *entire* congregation tent, and the altar, he must then present the living goat, *the scapegoat*. 21-22Aaron will place both his hands on the goat's head and confess aloud over it all the guilt, rebellion, and wrongdoings of the people of Israel. *In this way,* he will transfer the sins of the people onto the goat's head; then another man who has been selected for this *special* task will drive the goat into the wilderness. When the man releases the goat into the desert, it will carry all the offenses of God's people away into the desolate wastelands.

23Afterward, Aaron will enter the congregation tent, remove all of the linen clothing he put on when he entered, and leave them there. 24He will wash himself with water in the sacred space, dress himself in his *normal, priestly* clothes, and present his own burnt offering and the burnt offering for the community to atone for himself and the community. 25Then on the altar, he must offer up the fat of the purification offering as smoke. 26As for the man who let the scapegoat go free, he must wash his clothes and

bathe in water, and then he may reenter the community. 27The remains of the bull and goat whose blood was used to purify the sacred space will be carried outside the camp. Their skins, meat, and dung must be burned up *completely* in a fire. 28Whoever does the burning must wash his clothes and bathe in water, and then he may reenter the community.

29This directive stands for all time: on the tenth day of the seventh month, all of you must humble yourselves and do no work—all native-born *children of Israel* as well as outsiders living among you. 30This must be a day when the *high* priest comes before Me to cover your sins and cleanse you from all your impurities. 31This day will be a Sabbath of sacred rest for you and you are to humble yourselves. This directive stands for all time. 32The priest who is anointed and ordained as *high* priest—succeeding his father *Aaron*—is to make atonement *and thereby cover the sins of the people.* He will clothe himself in the sacred linen garments 33and cover the impurities of the sanctuary, the congregation tent, and the altar. He will cover the priests and the entire community. 34This directive stands for all time: atone for the sins of *My* people Israel once every year.

Moses did exactly what the Eternal commanded him.

► Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holiest day of the year. On this day the high priest enters into the holiest chamber of the congregation tent, the place where the covenant chest resides. Here, in God's immediate earthly presence, he makes reparations for the sins of the people.

Chapters 17–26 are often referred to as the "Holiness Code." The words "holy" and "sacred" are repeated over and over again throughout these chapters. God reminds His people to be different from the rest of the nations for He chose and set them apart for a special purpose. They are to be holy for He is holy.

17 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 2*Go,* say to Aaron, his sons, and all the Israelites: Here is what the Eternal has commanded: 3If an Israelite slaughters an ox, lamb, or goat inside or outside the camp 4and does not present it at the entrance of the congregation tent as an offering to Me in front of My sanctuary, then he is to be considered guilty of murder. He has spilled blood and is to be cut off from the community. 5I want the Israelites to stop sacrificing to Me in the open field and do it only at the entrance of the congregation tent. They must present their sacrifices to the priest and sacrifice them as peace offerings to Me. 6The priest will splatter the blood on My altar at the entrance of the congregation tent and offer the fat *on the altar*; and the smoke *of the sacrifice* will rise and become a pleasant aroma to Me. 7They must not offer any more sacrifices to the goat demons, *the pagan gods* with whom they've been unfaithful *to Me* until now. This directive stands for all time throughout their generations.

8Then warn them that if any Israelite or outsider living among you presents a burnt offering or other sacrifice 9and fails to present it to Me at the entrance of the congregation tent, then he will be cut off from the community.

10If anyone from the community of Israel or an outsider living among you consumes any blood, I will be at odds with him and cut him off from the community of Israel. 11You see, the life of the body is in the blood, and I have directed that you are to take blood and offer it on the altar to atone for your lives *and cover your sins.* It is the life *flowing* in the blood that atones for you *and covers you.* 12This is why I told the people of Israel, "No one of you or any outsider living among you is allowed to eat blood."

13Now if any Israelite or outsider living among you hunts and kills an animal or a bird that *is acceptable and* may be eaten, then that person must drain its blood from it and cover it up with the soil *of the earth.*

14You see, the life of every creature is its blood; *blood represents life. Blood is life.* This is why I told the people of Israel, "Do not eat the blood of any living creature; for the life of any creature is its blood." Anyone who consumes blood will be cut off *from the community.*

15Any time a person eats an animal that has died of natural causes or has been killed by another animal—regardless of whether that person is native-born or an outsider *living among you*—he is to wash his clothes, bathe in water, and be regarded as impure until dusk; afterward, he will be ritually pure again. 16But if the person does not wash his clothes or bathe his body, then he carries his guilt *and will suffer the consequences.*

► God allowed His people to eat meat, but He had concerns about how and where these animals would be killed. The commandments can be summarized this way: every time an animal is used for food, its death must be treated as a sacred event. That's why God tells the people to present it to Him in the sanctuary. Whenever one of God's creatures gives its life for one of our meals, that life is to be respected.

Blood is central to life. It makes life possible. That's why blood is so significant to the sacrifices, and violating any of these laws results in severe penalties.

18 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 2*Go,* talk with the Israelites. Tell them I am the Eternal One, your God. 3You must not act as you saw the Egyptians do when you lived in Egypt, nor should you act as they do in Canaan where I am taking you. Do not follow their practices. 4*From here on out,* you will live by My commands and honor My decrees and live your lives according to them *alone.* I am the Eternal One, your God. 5Stay devoted to My decrees and commands. The person who observes them will live by them.* I am the Eternal One.

6You must not have sexual relations with anyone closely related to you. I am the Eternal One. 7This includes your father and your mother. You are to honor her as your mother and not have sexual relations with her. 8You are not to have sexual relations with your father's wife; you might as well violate your father. 9You are not to have sexual relations with your sister—whether she is your father's daughter or mother's daughter, regardless of where she has lived, with your family or elsewhere. 10Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; *since they are your own flesh and blood,* such an act would bring shame to you. 11You are not to have sexual relations with your stepsister, the daughter of your father and his wife;* for she is *still* your sister. 12Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister, *your aunt;* she is your father's flesh and blood. 13Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister, *your aunt*; she is your mother's flesh and blood. 14You are not to dishonor your father's brother, *your uncle,* by approaching his wife *for sexual relations.* She is your aunt. 15You are not to have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife. 16You are not to have sexual relations with your brother's wife, *your sister-in-law*;* you might as well violate your brother. 17You are not to have sexual relations with a woman and her daughter, her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter; they are blood relations. It would be a disgusting act. 18As long as your wife is living, do not marry her sister or have sexual relations with her. This would make them rivals.

19You are not to have sexual relations with a woman while she is in her menstrual impurity. 20Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife; such an act defiles you both. 21Do not sacrifice your children to Molech. Such *an unholy sacrifice* desecrates your God's name. I am *your God,* the Eternal One. 22You are not to have sexual relations with a man in the same way you do with a woman; such a thing is detestable. 23Do not engage in a sexual act with an animal—this includes men as well as women; such behavior defiles you and perverts the proper order of things.

24Do not defile yourselves by engaging in any of these *perverse* things. I am driving out all these other nations ahead of you because they have corrupted themselves *with disgusting acts like these.* 25The entire land *of Canaan* is so impure that I will punish the land until it vomits out those who dwell upon it. 26I want you to keep My decrees and judgments.

* 18:5 Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12 * 18:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 18:16 Mark 6:18

No Israelite and no outsider living among you should commit any of the detestable acts that [27]the people who were in Canaan before you committed when they desecrated the land. [28]*Do not desecrate the land* or the land will vomit you from it as it has done to those who were there before you. [29]All those who commit these disgusting acts will be cut off from their community. [30]Therefore, observe My laws and do not commit any of these disgusting acts which have been committed *by the people who lived in the land* before you. *If you observe them,* you will not defile yourselves like they did. I am the Eternal One, your God.

► People and their land are connected. When people engage in disgusting practices, it affects the land, pollutes it, and makes it sick. But when people live by God's rules, the land is well.

19 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: [2]*Go,* talk with the community of Israel, and tell them that they are to be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.* [3]I want all of you to honor your mothers and fathers and keep My Sabbaths, for I am the Eternal your God. [4]Do not turn *from Me* to follow *useless* idols or cast metal images of other gods, for I am the Eternal your God.

[5]When you sacrifice a peace offering to Me, present it *correctly* so you are accepted. [6]Your peace offering should be consumed the same day you present it or the day after. But you must burn any *of the offering* that is still left on the third day. [7]If any of it is eaten on the third day, your offering will not be accepted; *by then* it has become foul. [8]Anyone who consumes the peace offering on the third day will bear his guilt *and suffer the consequences,* for he has desecrated what has been set apart for Me. That person must be cut off from his people.

[9]When you harvest the crops of your land, do not gather *the grain* all the way to the edges of your fields or pick up what was overlooked during the *first round of* harvesting. [10]*Likewise* do not strip the vines bare in your vineyard or gather the fallen grapes. Leave the fallen fruit and some grapes on the vine for the poor and strangers *living among you*; for I am the Eternal your God.

► God's care for the poor is clearly reflected and codified in these verses. Those who have are to leave something for those who have not. No one is charged to make them care for the poor; God's covenant people are to do this in obedience to His commands. But the poor have a responsibility as well. They are to go and gather the grain left in the fields and collect the clusters left in the vineyard. In this way, they join with the landowners and farmers in caring for themselves and the earth.

Eternal One: [11]Do not take what is not yours or conduct business dishonestly or lie to each other. [12]Do not swear to a lie in My name. If you do, My name is profaned. I am the Eternal One.

[13]Do not mistreat your neighbor or steal from him. Do not keep the payment of a hired hand overnight, *but compensate him for work at the end of the day.* [14]Do not *mock the disabled by shouting a* curse at a deaf person or putting something in the way to trip up the blind. Instead, *honor and* fear your God; I am the Eternal One.

[15]*In a court of law,* do what is just, not unjust. Do not favor *one side or the other,* the poor or the wealthy; instead, judge your neighbor fairly. [16]Do not go around spreading malicious lies about other people. Do not take a stand that would endanger your neighbor's life. I am the Eternal One.

[17]Do not harbor a deep hatred for any of your relatives. If your neighbor is doing something wrong, correct him or else you could be held responsible for his sin.* [18]Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge against any of your people. Instead, love your neighbor as you love yourself,* for I am the Eternal One.

* 19:2 1 Peter 1:16 * 19:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 19:18 Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; James 2:8

19Honor My decrees. Do not breed
two different species. Do not plant two
different sorts of seed in your fields. Do
not wear clothing made from two differ-
ent kinds of material.
20If a man has sexual relations with a
slave woman who is promised to another
man but has not yet been redeemed
or freed, then they will face an inquiry.
Neither the man nor the woman will be
put to death because she was a slave and
not a free woman *when the offense took
place.* 21The man must present to Me a
ram as his guilt offering at the entrance
of the congregation tent. 22The priest is
to sacrifice the ram of the guilt offering
before Me to cover the man's guilt; then
the guilty man's sin will be forgiven.
23When you go into the land and
plant fruit-bearing trees, you are not
to eat the fruit right away. It's off-limits
for three years.* 24When the fourth year
arrives, all the fruit of those trees must
be regarded as sacred, a praise offering
to Me. 25When the fifth year arrives, you
are *finally* allowed to eat the fruits of
those trees. If you *demonstrate your faith
by* following this procedure, these trees
will be even more productive. I am the
Eternal One, your God.
26Do not consume any meat while
the blood is still in it. Do not practice
divination or fortune-telling. 27Do not
cut the hair at your temples or trim your
beard. 28Do not make cuts in your body
for the dead or mark yourselves with
tattoos. I am the Eternal One.
29Do not defile your daughter by
forcing her into prostitution. If you do,
you not only corrupt her but you also
infect the land with prostitution and
wickedness. 30Keep My Sabbaths and
respect My sanctuary. I am the Eternal
One.
31Do not turn to mediums or consult
with those who communicate with the
spirits of the dead. *Do not go near them,*
or else you will defile yourselves. I am
the Eternal your God.
32You are to stand in respect for the
older people *in your community*. You
must fear your God. I am the Eternal
One.
33Don't take advantage of any
stranger who lives in your land. 34You
must treat the outsider as one of your
native-born people—as a full citizen—
and you are to love him in the same way
you love yourself; for *remember,* you were
once strangers living in Egypt. I am the
Eternal One, your God.
35*In business dealings, be fair and* do
not cheat. Measure accurately length,
weight, and volume. 36Your scales are to
be accurate, your weights true, and your
containers standard. I am the Eternal
your God, who led you out of Egypt.
37You are to keep all My directives
and all of My rules, and do as I have
instructed. I am the Eternal One.

► Genuine faith manifests itself in the way God's people treat others. While some may dishonor aliens or take advantage of outsiders, God's own must live differently. The law of love guides them to treat others as they wish to be treated and to extend hospitality to those who look and sound like they are far from home. God reminds them: you were once strangers and outsiders, too, in Egypt. You of all people should know what it is like to be aliens in a foreign land. Likewise genuine faith shows up in the marketplace. True believers conduct business with integrity. Whether they are buying or selling, they insist on proper weights and measures, hard work, and honesty.

20 The Eternal One spoke to
Moses.
Eternal One: 2Tell the people of Israel
that if any of them or any outsiders liv-
ing among them present their children
as human sacrifices to Molech, they will
be put to death. The entire community
must see to it that he is stoned *to death.*
3I will turn against that man and cut
him off from his community because he
presented one of his children to Molech;
he has desecrated My sanctuary and My
sacred reputation. 4If the people in the
community fail to handle the situation
and do not execute him after he presents
his children to Molech, 5then I will *take
the matter into My own hands and* turn
against the man and his family. I will

* 19:23 The Hebrew idiom is that the trees are "uncircumcised" for three years.

cut him and all those who prostitute themselves with Molech off from their community.

► Since God has pledged Himself to Israel as a husband to his bride, marriage becomes a powerful symbol of the loving, faithful relationship between God and His covenant people. Marital infidelity then—both adultery and prostitution—signify what happens when His people go after other gods.

Eternal One: 6I will turn against any individual who prostitutes himself by turning to mediums and *consulting with those* who communicate with the spirits of the dead. I will cut him off from his community. 7Dedicate yourselves exclusively to the one True God and become holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.* 8Keep My directives and practice My commands, for I am the Eternal who sanctifies you.

9Anyone who utters a curse on his father or mother must be put to death,* for he has dishonored them, and their blood is on him.

10If a man commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, both offenders must be put to death. 11If a man has sexual relations with his father's wife, he might as well have violated his father; both offenders must be put to death, for their blood is on them. 12If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both offenders must be put to death; for they have engaged in a disgusting act and their blood is on them. 13If a man has sexual relations with another man, they have participated in a detestable act. Both men are to be put to death, for their blood is on them. 14Any man who marries a woman and her mother commits a depraved act. He and both women are to be burned to death so that such depravity will not exist in the community. 15Any man who engages in a sexual act with an animal is to be put to death along with the animal. 16Any woman who approaches an animal to engage in some sexual act must be put to death along with the animal, for their blood is on them.

Sexuality is a powerful force for good in humanity. But perversion brings impurity into the world; it defiles the moral and natural order of creation.

17It is a shameful *and dishonorable* act for any man to marry his sister and have sexual relations with her; it doesn't matter whether she is his father's daughter or mother's daughter. Both of them must be cut off from their community. Any man who has sexual relations with his sister will bear his guilt *and suffer the consequences.* 18If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is menstruating, he has uncovered the source of her flow and she has exposed it *to him*; both the man and the woman must be cut off from the community. 19Do not have sexual relations with *your aunt, whether she is* the sister of your mother or father. Any man who does such a thing has disgraced his relative. Both offenders are guilty *and must suffer the consequences.* 20If a man has sexual relations with his uncle's wife, he might as well have violated his uncle. Both offenders will suffer the consequences of their sin; they will die childless. 21If a man has sexual relations with his brother's wife, he has committed a disgraceful, dishonorable act;* He might as well have violated his brother; they will die childless.

22Therefore, keep all My directives and My rules so that the land I am giving you will not vomit you out. 23Do not follow in the footsteps of the people *who lived in the land before you and* whom I will remove from the land when you take possession of it, for they committed wicked acts like the ones described here; this is why I despise them. 24As I have already told you, "You will inherit the land that was theirs. I am giving you this land flowing with milk and honey as your possession."* I am the Eternal One your God who has set you apart from all the other people. 25Consequently you must know the difference between a ritually pure and impure animal and a pure and impure bird. Do not make yourselves detestable by *eating* an animal, a bird, or any small creature that I have designated as ritually impure. 26You must be holy, for I, the Eternal One, am holy, and I have chosen you from all the people of the world to be My people.

* 20:7 1 Peter 1:16 * 20:9 Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10 * 20:21 Mark 6:18 * 20:24 Exodus 13:5

27Any person among you who is a medium or tries to communicate with the spirits of the dead must be put to death. They are to be stoned to death, for their blood will be required of them.

21 The Eternal One addressed Moses.

While it is not a sin to handle a corpse, it makes the person ritually impure.

Eternal One: *Go,* talk to the priests, Aaron's sons, and tell them that I don't want any priest to make himself ritually impure by having contact with a dead person in Israel. 2There is an exception: a priest is allowed to touch *the dead body of* his closest family members—his mother, father, son, daughter, brother, 3and any sister who is still a virgin when she dies. Since she has no husband, the priest is her closest relative, so he is allowed to make himself impure for her. 4A priest must not render himself impure and defile himself by *touching the corpse of* a person related to him only by marriage. 5Priests are not allowed to *mourn like other people by* shaving their heads, trimming their beards, or cutting gashes into their bodies. 6Priests are to be holy to Me and not treat My *sacred* name with contempt. They bring the fire-offerings to Me, the food of their God, and so they must be sacred. 7Priests are not to marry women defiled by prostitution or women who are divorced, for priests are holy to Me.

8You must set the priest apart as special *and treat him as holy,* for he brings the food to your God. The priests must be considered holy to you because I, the Eternal, am holy, and I have set you apart *from all other nations.* 9If a priest's daughter dabbles in prostitution, then she desecrates herself and also her father. She is to be burned to death.

10Of the brotherhood of priests, the high priest is the one whose head has been anointed with oil and who has been ordained to wear the *sacred* garments. He is not to leave his hair uncombed or tear his garments *when he is mourning.* 11He is not to go near any dead bodies—not even his father's or mother's—or else he will make himself impure. 12The high priest is not allowed to go outside the sanctuary *during the time of mourning* and thereby desecrate God's sanctuary, for he has been anointed with the *sacred* oil of his God. I am the Eternal One. 13He is to marry a woman who is a virgin. 14He is not allowed to choose a widow, a divorced woman, or a prostitute as a wife—*any woman who has already had sexual relations.* He is only allowed to marry a virgin from his own community. 15This arrangement will guarantee that his future offspring will not be treated badly among his people, for I am the Eternal who makes him holy.

16The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 17-18*Go,* talk with Aaron, and tell him that throughout future generations those who are physically marred are not allowed to approach *the sanctuary* and offer food to Me. This includes those who are blind, lame, disfigured, or deformed. 19It includes those who have a broken foot or an injured hand, 20hunchbacks, dwarves, anyone with a defective eye or a festering rash or scabs or crushed testicles. 21No one from Aaron's offspring who has a physical defect is allowed to approach *the sanctuary* and present fire-offerings to Me; since he is not perfect, he must not approach to offer his God's food. 22He is allowed to eat a portion of the food offered to God, including the sacred and most sacred, 23but he is not allowed to go behind the veil or approach the altar because of his imperfection. *This is the rule* so that he does not desecrate My holy places. I am the Eternal One who consecrates him.

24So Moses told Aaron, Aaron's sons, and all the Israelites *what God had said to him.*

► In our world, these rules are hard to understand. But remember, it has only been in recent years that Western society has shown concern for people with disabilities. In much of the world today, people who suffer deformities or disabilities are treated differently—as somehow imperfect. Less than a century ago, these people were undervalued and ostracized in the West. So we must be careful not to judge people who lived 3,000 years ago by our

modern standards and sensibilities, as things have changed drastically in recent years. That would not be fair. The logic is clear: just as the sacrifice must be pure and unblemished, so must the priest who offers the sacrifice be whole in body. Disabled priests are mercifully included in God's provision because they are permitted to eat the consecrated bread.

22 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 2Instruct Aaron and his sons to be cautious with the sacred *food* offerings the Israelites bring—the ones they give in My honor so that they do not desecrate My sacred name *and ruin My reputation*. I am the Eternal One. 3Tell them that anyone from your present and future generations who is ritually impure and goes near the sacred gifts the Israelites have presented to Me will be cut off from My presence, for I am the Eternal One. 4None of Aaron's offspring who has a serious skin disease or a discharge is allowed to consume the sacred *food* offerings until he is ritually pure again. If anyone touches something that has become impure by *having contact with* a dead body or if he has a semen emission, 5or if he touches some small creature or anyone impure, whatever the impurity may be—6anyone who has contact with such impurity will be impure until evening; he is not allowed to consume the sacred gifts until he has bathed in water. 7When evening arrives, *it is a new day;* he will be ritually pure. Then he can consume the sacred *food* offerings, which are his food. 8He should not consume any animal that dies a natural death or is torn apart by another animal; if he does, he will become impure, for I am the Eternal One. 9The priests are to *respect and* keep My instructions or they will have to bear *the punishment for* their sin and die for treating my instructions with contempt, for I am the Eternal One who makes them holy.

10No laypeople, guests, or hired workers who enter a priest's house are allowed to consume the sacred *food* offerings. 11But if a priest purchases a slave, then that slave and anyone born into his family can eat his food. 12When a priest's daughter marries a non-priest, she is no longer allowed to eat any of the sacred *food* offerings. 13But if she—after being childless, and divorced or widowed—goes back to live with her father as she did when she was young, then she is allowed to consume her father's food; but no lay person is allowed to consume it. 14If a man consumes a sacred *food* offering accidentally, then *when he becomes aware,* he must present the same amount of food plus ⅕ to the priest. 15When the people of Israel present their sacred offerings to Me, the priests are not to treat them lightly, 16or else they will bear the guilt and punishment for consuming the sacred gifts; for I am the Eternal One who makes them holy.

17The Eternal One spoke to Moses *regarding animals acceptable for sacrifice.*

Eternal One: 18*Go,* talk with Aaron, his sons, and all the Israelites. Tell them that when any Israelite or outsider living among you brings an offering—whether accompanying a vow or out of free will—and offers it to Me as a burnt offering, 19he must offer an unblemished male from the bulls, the sheep, or the goats in order to be accepted. 20You should not offer any animals that *are diseased, weak, or injured or* have any defects. Such a sacrifice is not acceptable for you. 21Also when a man offers a sacrifice as a peace offering to Me from the herd or flock—whether he is fulfilling a vow or out of free will—he must offer a perfect, unblemished offering in order to be accepted. 22Do not offer any animals that are blind, have broken bones, are deformed, have open wounds, a skin disease, or scabs. Do not offer such a sacrifice by fire on the altar to Me. 23You are allowed to offer an ox or a lamb with a limb that is too long or too short as long as it is a freewill offering, but not if it is an offering that accompanies a vow. 24You are not to offer any animal with bruised, crushed, torn, or removed testicles as a sacrifice to Me, and you will not offer these *blemished* animals anywhere in your land. 25You are not allowed to accept such an animal *as a gift* from a foreigner and then offer it as food for your God, because the animal is not whole and carries the foreigner's corruption. Such a sacrifice is not acceptable for you.

26The Eternal One *continued* speaking to Moses.

Eternal One: 27Any time an ox or sheep or goat is born, you are to leave it with its mother for seven days. On the eighth day, the newborn is old enough to be sacrificed to Me as a fire-offering. 28But do not sacrifice both the newborn ox or sheep and its mother on the same day.

That which gives life, whether human or animal mother, and that which is offered on behalf of life, whether human or animal offspring, should not be disrespected, blurred, or confused.

29When you slaughter a thanksgiving sacrifice to Me, do it in such a way that you will be accepted. 30Consume it on the same day *it is slaughtered*; do not leave any for the next day. I am the Eternal One.

31This is how you must keep and follow My commands. I am the Eternal One.

32You must not *do anything that* desecrates My sacred name *and ruins My reputation* so that the people of Israel will acknowledge that I am holy, for I am the Eternal One who consecrates you. 33*I am the One* who led you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Eternal One.

23 The Eternal One spoke to Moses *regarding the holy days.*

Eternal One: 2*Go,* talk to the Israelites. Tell them that I have appointed *certain* feasts to be celebrated. You are to *honor these times and* declare them as sacred assemblies.

3You have six days to do your ordinary work; but when the seventh day arrives, it is a Sabbath and must be a day of complete rest, a time for sacred assembly. No work is allowed. Wherever you live, celebrate the Sabbath in My honor.

4Here are times I have appointed for sacred assemblies; you are to *celebrate these feasts and* declare them *publicly* at their appointed times. 5*In the spring* on the fourteenth day of the first month, My Passover begins at first light. 6When the fifteenth day arrives, you are to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in My honor.

For the next seven days, the only bread you are allowed to eat is unleavened bread. 7On the first day *of the feast,* I want you to gather for a sacred assembly; you are not allowed to do any ordinary work. 8On each of the seven days *of the feast,* present a fire-offering to Me. When the seventh day arrives, hold a sacred assembly; you are not allowed to do any ordinary work.

9The Eternal One addressed Moses.

Eternal One: 10*Go,* talk with the Israelites, and tell them that when you are settled in the land I am going to give you, and when you harvest there, you are to gather a bundle of stalks from the firstfruits of the *barley* harvest and present them to the priest. 11On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will raise up the bundle of stalks and wave them before Me so that you will be accepted. 12Also, on the day that the stalks are waved, you must present an unblemished, year-old male lamb to Me as a burnt offering. 13The grain offering you bring with it is to be four quarts of the finest flour mixed with oil. The *smoke of the* fire-offering will *rise and* be a pleasant aroma to Me. Present it along with a drink offering of 2½ pints of wine. 14Do not consume any bread, roasted grain, or any of the new harvest until this day when you have presented the offering to Me, your God. This directive stands for all time throughout your generations regardless of where you live.

15-16From the day after the Sabbath when you presented the bundled stalks—*the firstfruits of the barley harvest*—as a wave offering *to Me,* count off seven whole weeks. Count to the day after the seventh Sabbath, 50 days; then I want you to bring a fresh grain offering to Me. 17Bring two loaves of bread from wherever you live as a wave offering. The loaves are to be made with yeast from four quarts of the finest flour as the firstfruits to Me. 18With the bread, I want you to offer seven unblemished, year-old male lambs, a bull from the herd, and two rams. These will serve as a burnt offering to Me, along with their grain offering and drink offerings; *the smoke of* this fire-offering will *rise and* be a pleasant aroma to Me. 19You must also present one male goat as a purification offering and two year-old male lambs as a peace offering. 20The priest will then lift them up along with the bread of the firstfruits and the two lambs as a wave

offering before Me. These offerings,
which are sacred to Me, will become
the property of the priest. 21On this day,
you will make a proclamation and hold
a sacred assembly. Refrain from doing
any ordinary work. This directive stands
for all time throughout your generations
regardless of where you live.
22Whenever you harvest the crops in
your land, do not harvest all the way to
the edges of the fields or pick up what
was overlooked during harvest. Leave
them for the poor and the strangers liv-
ing with you. I am the Eternal your God.

23The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 24*Go,* talk with the Israel-
ites, and tell them to observe a day of
Sabbath rest *in the autumn* on the first
day of the seventh month. Commemo-
rate this day and call together a sacred
assembly by sounding the trumpets.
25You must not do any ordinary work
that day, but you are to bring a fire-
offering to Me.

26The Eternal One spoke to Moses *regard-
ing the Day of Atonement.*

Eternal One: 27The tenth day of the sev-
enth month is *set aside as* the Day of
Atonement. On that day, you must call
together the people for a sacred assembly,
humble *and discipline* yourselves *by
fasting,* and bring a fire-offering to Me.
28Refrain from doing any work on the
Day of Atonement, for it is to be a day
when you make offerings before Me, your
God, that cover your sins. 29If anyone
does not humble *and discipline* himself
on this day, he must be cut off from the
community. 30If anyone *from your com-
munity* works on this day, I will destroy
him from the midst of the community.
31You must not do any of the work *you
normally do*. This directive stands for
all time throughout your generations
regardless of where you live. 32This is to
be a Sabbath Day, *a day* of complete rest,
a day when you humble *and discipline*
yourselves. When the ninth day of the
month arrives, you are to honor this Sab-
bath from dusk till dusk.

► Sin causes damage in ways we do not easily recognize. It damages our relationship with God, other people, and the rest of creation. But we should not forget that sin damages us too. We are damaged goods. The Day of Atonement provides the people of Israel with a regular opportunity to recognize how broken and flawed they are, to repent and turn to God, and to seek His healing and forgiveness.

33The Eternal One said to Moses.

Eternal One: 34*Go,* talk with the Israelites
and tell them that when the fifteenth
day of the seventh month arrives, they
must celebrate the Feast of Booths to Me
for seven days.

► The Feast of Booths takes place after the fall harvest is in and the people can take some time off. In this feast, God's people are called to remember how He provided for them, particularly how He provided for them when they wandered in the desert, living in tents or booths, for 40 years.

Eternal One: 35The first day is to be a day
devoted to sacred assembly, so refrain
from doing any ordinary work. 36Then
for seven days, I want you to bring a
fire-offering to Me. When the eighth day
arrives, hold another sacred assembly
and bring another fire-offering to Me.
This is to be a *festive* gathering, and no
one is allowed to do any of their normal
work.
37So these are the feasts that I have
appointed. At these times, you are to call
the people together for a sacred assembly
and bring fire-offerings to Me—burnt
offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices, and
drink offerings—each day will have its
own offering. 38These *feasts and their*
offerings are in addition to My Sabbaths
and other prescribed offerings, offerings
accompanying a vow or a freewill offer-
ing.
39When the fifteenth day of the
seventh month arrives, after you have
harvested the crops from the land,
I want you to celebrate this feast *of*

booths for seven days. Observe a day of complete rest on the first day and the eighth day. 40-41On the first day, gather some branches from the beautiful trees *in the area*: palm fronds, limbs thick with leaves, and branches from the river willow. Celebrate and feast before Me, your God, for seven days. This directive stands for all time throughout your generations; celebrate it every year in the seventh month. 42All native-born Israelites are to live in booths for seven days. 43*I want you to do this* so that all present and future generations of your people remember that I sheltered the Israelites in booths like these after I led them out of Egypt. I am the Eternal One, your God.

Temporary shelters like these were used during harvest to protect their fields from animals and thieves.

44Moses spoke to the Israelites about the Eternal One's appointed feasts.

24 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 2-3Direct the Israelites to bring you clear oil from pressed olives in order to keep the lamps in the sanctuary outside the veil covering the covenant chest continually burning. Aaron is to make sure the lamps continue to burn in My presence from dusk till dawn. This directive stands for all time throughout your generations. 4On a regular basis, Aaron *and the priests* are to tend to the lamps on the pure gold lampstand before Me.

5I want you to take the finest flour and bake 12 loaves of bread. Each loaf is to be made of four quarts *of flour*. 6Then arrange the 12 loaves into two rows on the pure gold table in My presence. Put six loaves in each row. 7Place pure frankincense along each row to serve as a memorial portion for the bread, as a fire-offering to Me. 8Every Sabbath Aaron is to make sure these rows of bread are in order before Me. These loaves, *baked and presented* by the people of Israel, symbolize the perpetual covenant. 9They are reserved for Aaron and his sons, but they must be eaten only in a sacred space. These loaves are most holy gifts to Aaron out of all the fire-offerings presented to Me; they are his due for all time.

10One day there was a man who had an Israelite mother and Egyptian father who got into a fight with an Israelite inside the camp. 11The first man uttered a curse and disparaged the name of the Eternal One. The people brought him to Moses *to decide what must be done*. (His mother was Shelomith, Dibri's daughter. Dibri was from the Dan tribe.) 12They kept him in custody until the Eternal One's decision became clear to them.

13The Eternal One told Moses *what to do*.

Eternal One: 14Take the man who cursed *and disparaged Me* outside the camp and have everyone who was a witness to what he said place their hands on his head. Then have the entire community stone him. 15Tell the Israelites, "Anyone who curses His God *or disparages His name* must bear his sin *and suffer the punishment*. 16Any person who blasphemes My name must be put to death. Then you must have the entire community join in stoning him. Any person—whether native-born or an outsider—who disparages My name must be put to death."

17Anyone who kills another person must be put to death. 18Anyone who kills an animal is to compensate *his owner* for it, life for life. 19Anyone who injures his neighbor must have done to him what he did to the other. 20If he breaks a man's bone, his own bone must be broken. If he puts out a man's eye, his own eye must be put out. If he knocks out a man's tooth, his own tooth must be knocked out.* Whatever a person does to harm another must be done to him in return. 21Any person who takes the life of an animal is to compensate *his owner* for it, but any person who takes the life of another human being must be put to death. 22This law applies to everyone equally, both native-born Israelites and outsiders. I am the Eternal One, your God.

The "law of retaliation," as it is called, is designed to curb cruelty. It limits the kind and extent of retaliation a person can suffer when he deliberately injures another.

* 24:20 Matthew 5:38

23Moses told the Israelites *what God had decided,* so they took the man who had uttered the curse outside the camp and stoned him. The Israelites did *exactly* as the Eternal One had instructed Moses.

25 The Eternal One addressed Moses on Mount Sinai.

Eternal One: 2*Go,* talk with the Israelites and tell them that when you arrive in the land I *have promised to* give to you, *you are to make sure* the land observes a Sabbath rest before Me. 3Plant your fields, take care of your vineyards, and harvest your crops for six years; 4but when the seventh year arrives, I want the entire land to have a Sabbath rest to Me. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards *during this seventh year*. 5Do not harvest whatever grows on its own from earlier plantings, and do not pick grapes from the unpruned vines. The entire year is to be a year of Sabbath rest for the land. 6-7You, your slaves, your hired workers, the outsiders living among you, your domesticated and the wild animals may eat whatever the land produces naturally during the Sabbath year.

8You are to count off seven Sabbath years (that's seven times seven years), which gives you 49 years. 9After *the 49th year is over,* sound a ram's horn across the land *in the 50th year* on the tenth day of the seventh month. Sound the ram's horn throughout the land on the Day of Atonement. 10When the 50th year arrives, sanctify it and declare liberty throughout the land for all who live there—*dramatic, radical liberty* for all. It is to be your jubilee year. Each of you is allowed to go back to the land that belonged to your ancestors; and each of you may return to your own family. 11-12The 50th year is to be your jubilee year. Do not plant. Do not harvest anything that grows on its own or pick grapes from the unpruned vines. You may eat what the land produces naturally. For it is a jubilee, a *special,* sacred time for you.

► The year of jubilee is a far-reaching idea in the ancient world. In the 50th year, land that has been sold to pay debts during the preceding 49 years returns to its original owners. Israelites who had to sell themselves into slavery to pay debts are set free. All debts are declared "paid in full." The jubilee is a regular reminder to God's covenant people that every acre of ground, every soul belongs to God, not to those rich enough to buy them. Actually land cannot be sold; it can only be leased in 50-year increments, from jubilee to jubilee. So God's law protects the welfare of future generations by preventing the permanent transfer of land and wealth outside the control of the family.

Eternal One: 13Everyone will return to his ancestral property during the year of jubilee. 14If you sell something to a friend or buy something from your neighbor, do it honestly. 15When you lease *property* from a friend, you should pay only for the time you get to use it. He will base the price on the number of harvest years remaining until the jubilee returns. 16You will raise the price if the jubilee year is far away. You will lower the price if the year is near, for what you are really buying is the number of harvests you can get in *before the next jubilee.* 17Do not cheat each other. Instead, fear the God who has power over you; for I am the Eternal One, your God.

18So follow My directives and live by My rules; as you do, you *and your people* will *most certainly* be secure in the land *I will give you.* 19The land will produce *an abundance of* food, and you will have all you need to eat and live safely in the land. 20You might ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we don't plant and harvest crops?" 21*Don't worry.* I will direct My blessing *to come* to you during the sixth year so that the land will produce three years' worth of crops *in that one year*: 22Even while you are planting during the eighth year, you will eat your fill of the previous crops *harvested in the sixth year*. You will eat those crops right up until the time when you harvest the new crops in the ninth year.

23You are not allowed to sell the land in perpetuity because *it isn't actually yours.* The land belongs to Me. You will always be strangers and outsiders living in My land. 24So every plot of ground you possess carries a "right of redemption."

25If your fellow citizen becomes so impoverished that he has no choice but to sell off a portion of his land, then his nearest family relation is to buy back the portion sold for him. 26If a man doesn't have any relatives but finds a way to earn the money to redeem his land himself, 27then he will buy it back from the man who bought the land from him, less the profit the buyer would have made in the years since he leased it; then the original owner can go back to live on his land. 28But if a man does not *earn or* find the money he needs to buy back his land, then the man who leased the land will keep it until the year of jubilee. When the year of jubilee arrives, the land will return to the possession of its original owner.

29By the same token, anyone who sells a house that is located within the city walls has one year to buy the house back after it is sold. The right of redemption lasts only one year. 30If the seller does not buy back his house within a year of the date it was sold, then the house located within the city walls belongs to the new owner for all his generations. It will not go back *to the original owner* in the year of jubilee.

The houses located within the city walls are not protected from permanent sale probably because city dwellers do not live off the land.

31The houses in towns that have no walls are classified as fields. They are subject to the rights of redemption and return *to their original owner* in the year of jubilee, *just like any other field.* 32In the Levites' cities, the houses permanently carry the right of redemption: 33The Levites are able to redeem any and all property, and any house that is sold goes back to its original owner when the year of jubilee arrives because all the houses are the Levites' inheritance from *the other tribes of* Israel. 34The open country around the cities *and villages* is not allowed to be sold because this land belongs to them for all time.

Levites do not share the land inheritance with the other tribes, so their homes are their inheritance and will come back to them at the jubilee.

35If your fellow citizen becomes poor and cannot take care of his needs, then you must support him with what you have. *Look after him,* as you would a stranger or outsider, so he may keep living in your community. 36*Let him borrow, but* charge no interest and do not look for ways to profit from his need. Instead, fear God, and allow your fellow citizen to live alongside you. 37Do not ask for interest when you lend him money. Do not try to profit by selling him your food. 38I am the Eternal One, your God, the One who led you out of Egypt so that I could give you the land of Canaan and be your God.

39If your fellow citizen becomes so poor that he must sell himself to you *as a slave,* do not treat him as a slave. 40Have him work for you as a hired hand, as an outsider might, until the year of jubilee. 41Then he and his children will be released from your service, and he will return to his family and to the property that belonged to his ancestors. 42After all, they are My servants; I led them out of Egypt so they must never be sold as slaves. 43You are not allowed to treat them badly. Instead fear your God. 44*On the other hand,* you may acquire slaves, both men and women, from the nations surrounding you 45and from the outsiders who live among you. You can acquire their family members who have been born in the land. You can keep them as property 46and pass them down to your children as part of their inheritance for all time. You may continue to own them, *even after jubilee. Remember* if your slave is a fellow Israelite, then you must not deal with him harshly.

47If a foreigner or outsider living among you becomes rich *enough to buy a slave,* and one of your fellow citizens has become poor enough he has to sell himself *as a slave* to him or to his extended family, 48-49then your fellow citizen has the right to be redeemed. One of his brothers, his uncle, his cousin, or any *more distant* relative may buy him back. If he makes enough money, he can purchase his own freedom. 50As for the man who bought him, he and the buyer will determine the price based on how many years are between the year he sold himself and the year of jubilee. The time with his owner must be valued as if he were a hired hand. 51-52Whether there are many years left before the jubilee or just a few, the cost of his redemption is determined by those remaining years. 53He must be treated as a laborer hired

year to year, and you need to make sure the owner does not treat him harshly. 54If he is not able to gain his freedom this way, he and his children will be freed in the year of jubilee. 55For the Israelites are *truly* My servants; I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the Eternal One, your God.

26 **Eternal One:** Do not fashion any idols or *blasphemous* images. Do not erect any sacred pillars *as the nations around you do*. Do not set up any carved stones in your land and bow down to them. I am the Eternal your God. 2Honor My Sabbaths, and treat My sanctuary as a holy place. I am the Eternal One.

3If you walk in My decrees and keep My commandments in your daily lives, 4I will grant you plenty of rain in the seasons when you need it, and your land will produce *abundant* crops and your trees will be filled with fruit. 5Your *grain* threshing will last until the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest will continue until it is time to plant again. You will fill your bellies with food and feel secure as you live in the land. 6I will see to it that you have peace in your land. You will be able to go to bed at night without a worry on your mind. I will take away the dangerous animals that roam your land, and no armies will invade your land. 7-8When you go after your enemies, they will fall by your sword. Five of you will go after 100 of your enemies, and 100 of you will cause 10,000 to flee. 9I will grant you My favor, and you will be fruitful, multiply, *and have many healthy children,* and I will continue to honor My covenant with you. 10You will have so much surplus food *from year to year* that you will have to make room for the new harvest *when it comes in*. 11I will make my home among you and never turn away from you. 12I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people.* 13I am the Eternal One, your God, who led you out of the land of Egypt so that you would no longer be their slaves. I have shattered the yokes *that broke your backs* and helped you walk *straight and* upright.

14However, if you do not obey Me or live by all I have commanded, 15if you turn your backs on My decrees and despise what I have commanded so that you fail to do as I have directed and break the covenant that exists between us, 16then this is what you can expect: I will bring *a horrific cloud of* terror over you, and you will waste away in disease and *burning* fevers, your eyes will grow dark, and your *restless* souls will long for life. The seeds you plant will provide you no sustenance because raiders will consume whatever you grow. 17I will turn My face against you and stand by as your enemies strike you down. Those who despise you will reign over you, and you will run away even when no one is chasing you. 18If, after all this, you still do not listen to Me, then I will increase your punishment until you have paid seven times for your sins. 19I will break you of your powerful pride, and I will make the heavens above you as *cold as* iron and your earth below you as *hard as* bronze. 20Your strength will be wasted because the land you work will not yield its crops, and the trees you plant will not bear fruit.

21And if, after all this, you still rebel against Me and fail to listen to Me, I will strike you until you have paid seven times for your sins. 22I will unleash *ravenous* wild beasts against you, and they will deprive you of your children and destroy your livestock; *before long* your numbers will dwindle and your *busy* roads will be deserted.

23And if, after all these punishments, you still have not turned back to Me but continue to rebel against Me, 24I will move against you, and this time I will punish you Myself until you have paid seven times for your sins. 25I will march armies against you that will execute My vengeance against you for the covenant *you have broken*. When you retreat into your cities, I will send a *vicious* plague among you until you fall to your adversaries. 26I will cut off your food supply until there is so little bread that 10 women will need only one oven to bake it. When they serve it, your portion will be carefully *weighed and* rationed and you won't have enough to satisfy you.

27If, after all this, you still do not listen to Me but continue to rebel against Me, 28I will move against you with the full heat of My fury. I will punish you Myself until you have paid seven times for your sins. 29*You will become so hungry that some of* you will eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters. 30I will

* 26:12 2 Corinthians 6:16

demolish your high places *where false worship taints the land* and tear down your incense altars. I will pile your lifeless bodies on the rubble of your *lifeless* god-images. I will detest you. 31I will turn your *bustling* cities into wastelands. I will empty *and silence* your *pagan* sanctuaries. *When you do sacrifice to Me,* I will pay no attention to the pleasant aromas. 32*Yes,* I will move against the land until it lies in ruins, and those who conquer you and settle there will be horrified by what they see. 33I will scatter you among the nations. I will draw My sword against you. Your land will become an *eerie* wasteland, and your cities will lie in ruins.

34While you are scattered among your enemies, your land will bask in its Sabbaths. For as long as the land is barren, it will enjoy the Sabbaths and the rest *it deserves.* 35For all the days it lies desolate, it will have the rest it never had while you were living on the land. 36-37For those of you who may survive, I will make your hearts despair as you live in lands occupied by your enemies. *You will be so fearful that* the noise made by a windblown leaf will startle you and send you running away in panic. Even when no one is chasing after you, you will run away and trip over each other as if you are being chased by an army. You will have no power to stand up to your enemies. 38You will die *far from home* in foreign lands. The land of your adversaries will devour your corpses. 39Those of you who survive will waste away in the lands of your adversaries because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors; they will *surely* waste away *to nothing.*

40But if they own up to their sins and acknowledge the sins of their ancestors, if they admit that they have been unfaithful to Me, defied Me, and rebelled against Me—41which prompted Me to turn against them and scatter them among their enemies—if they humble their uncircumcised hearts and offer reparations for their sins, 42then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, and I will also remember the land. 43As long as the land lies deserted without them, it will catch up on the Sabbaths it has missed and be renewed. *In the meantime,* they must offer reparations for their sins because they turned their backs on My decrees and despised My commands. 44But even then, as long as My people are dwelling in the land of their adversaries, I will not reject them or hate them so much that I break My covenant with them and annihilate them. I am the Eternal One, their God. 45Still they will benefit when I remember the covenant I made with their ancestors when I led them out of the land of Egypt with the whole world watching so that I could be their God. I am the Eternal One.

46These are the directives, commandments, and instructions the Eternal One gave through Moses on Mount Sinai *to establish the covenant* between Himself and the Israelites.

27

The Eternal One gave Moses *the rules regarding the fulfillment of vows.*

► Now there is nothing to suggest that God requires His people to make vows; but when they do, they must be taken seriously. So if a person pledges to give God something in exchange for His help or blessing on a matter, then that person is bound to keep his promise. It would be better not to make a vow in the first place than to make it and not fulfill it.

Eternal One: 2*Go,* talk with the Israelites and tell them that whenever someone makes a special vow to Me regarding the value of a human being, 3the *proper* value of a 20- to 60-year-old male is 20 ounces of silver, according to the sanctuary weights. 4The *proper* value of a female *of those ages* is 12 ounces. 5If the person is 5 to 20 years old, the *proper* value for the male is 8 ounces; for the female 4 ounces. 6But if the person is anywhere from one month to 5 years old, the *proper* value is 2 ounces of silver for males and 1¼ ounces of silver for females. 7If the person is 60 years old or older, it is to be 6 ounces for the male and 4 ounces for the female. 8If someone cannot afford these prices, then bring him to stand before the priest, and the priest will assess the situation and value him according to what the person can afford.

9Whenever someone vows to give an animal that is acceptable as an offering

to Me, then that animal is sacred *and is the property of the sanctuary.* 10Whoever makes the vow should not switch one animal for another, a good animal for a bad, or vice versa. If someone does switch one for another, then both animals are considered sacred. 11But if the vow involves an animal that is impure and not acceptable as an offering to Me, he needs to bring the animal before the priest. 12The priest will determine its value—either high or low—and whatever he determines will be its price. 13If the owner desires to buy the animal back *from the sanctuary,* he must pay that price plus ⅕.

► Animals that are unclean according to the law are not to be donated in fulfillment of a vow because they are not acceptable as sacrifices. They are taken to the market and sold; the money gained from the sale supports the priests and their service.

Eternal One: 14If a man dedicates his house as a sacred gift to Me, the priest will determine its value—either high or low—and whatever he determines will be its price. 15If the person who dedicates his house desires to buy it back, he must pay that price plus ⅕, and the house will be his *once again.*

16If a man dedicates any piece of his property to Me, the value fixed must be in proportion to the amount of seed it requires for planting. Six bushels of barley seed is worth 20 ounces of silver. 17If he dedicates his field during the year of jubilee, the fixed value still stands. 18If he dedicates his field after the jubilee year, the priest will determine its value according to how many years remain until the jubilee and reduce it accordingly. 19If the person who dedicates the property desires to buy it back, he must pay that price plus ⅕; then the piece of land will be his *once again.* 20If he decides not to buy the property back, or if he has sold it to another person, then he forfeits the right to redeem it. 21If the original owner releases the field in the jubilee, it must be treated as a holy gift dedicated to Me; then it will become the property of the priests.

22If someone dedicates land to Me that he has bought and is not part of his ancestral lands, 23then the priest will determine its value according to how many years remain until the jubilee. The man must pay that amount as his sacred gift to Me. 24In the jubilee year, the property will revert back to the one who sold it, its original owner; it will be his *once again.*

25All of your assessments should be based on the sanctuary's weights: the basic unit is ⅔ of an ounce.

26Firstborn animals already belong to Me, so no one is allowed to dedicate any firstborn animal—be it an ox or a sheep. It is already Mine. 27If it is an impure animal—*unsuitable as a sacrifice*—then the person *making the vow* may redeem it for its value plus ⅕. If the owner decides not to redeem it, then it must be sold for its *proper* value *and the sanctuary will keep the proceeds.*

28Surely nothing devoted to Me *as an irrevocable vow,* regardless of what it is—a person, an animal, or a piece of property—can be sold or bought back; it must be destroyed. Anything devoted in this way is most holy to Me *and cannot be put to another use.* 29No person who is devoted irrevocably *to Me** can be redeemed. He must be put to death.

30One-tenth of everything the land produces—seeds from the ground and fruits from the trees—belongs to Me and is sacred to Me. 31If a man desires to buy back a portion of My ⅒, he must pay its value plus ⅕. 32Regarding your livestock, ⅒ of the herd or flock must be set apart for Me as holy. *As you count them,* every tenth animal that passes beneath the *shepherd's* rod belongs to Me. 33It does not matter whether the animals are good or bad, and one must not think about switching or replacing one for another. If he does, then the original and the replacement are both sacred and cannot be redeemed.

34These are the commandments the Eternal gave to Moses for the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

* 27:29 Exodus 22:18-20; Deuteronomy 13:12-18

NUMBERS

01 02 03 04 05 06

The journey in the wilderness

By Moses, shepherd of God's people

At first glance, it is understandable why the Book of Numbers is not the most popular book in the Old Testament; it contains long lists of numbers, and it tells of a long wandering through the desert. But if you read carefully, you realize that Numbers chronicles an amazing journey filled with promise, conflict, victory, adventure, and disappointment. Some of the most dramatic and memorable moments in Scripture are found in these chapters—the spies sent out to reconnoiter the promised land of Canaan, the rebellion of Korah and its deadly aftermath, the bitter defeats and sweet victories of Israel's forces, the constant complaining despite God's provision for His people, the fiery serpents sent to punish the complainers, the oracles and cryptic predictions spoken by the prophet Balaam, and finally, Moses' fateful decision to disobey God. All these add up to tell a remarkable story of how God is moving step-by-step to fulfill His promises to His people.

The story begins with Israel encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. God has some final instructions for the people before they break camp and begin their long march. As before, despite divine guidance during the journey, the people constantly complain against God and His leaders. Their rebellion reaches its climax at Kadesh—a large oasis on the southern edge of the land of Canaan—when the people reject God's gift and threaten to return to Egypt. Had it not been for Moses' pleading, God would have destroyed them right then. Instead, He punished that generation by making them wander "in the wilderness" (which is the Hebrew title for this book) for 40 years and denying them the privilege of living in the land of promise. Now God's promises may have been delayed, but they were not frustrated. Another generation is born in the desert. And so, when the story ends, that new generation is standing on the eastern edge of Canaan ready to possess the land and realize another component of God's covenant with them.

Paul, the emissary of Jesus, had the Book of Numbers in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians. He appealed to these defining moments and said they were written down as an example to teach us, so that we will not make the same mistakes our spiritual ancestors did when they hungered after evil, worshiped false gods, and tested the limits of God's patience (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). Numbers reminded him—as it should us—that God's covenant promises are His gifts to His people. Still they demand something of us. They bring out the best in us when we hear and follow God's teaching. Ultimately, the horizon of God's promises lies beyond Abraham and Israel; His purpose in Numbers involves nothing less than the redemption of the entire world.

The people of the Lord have been out of Egypt for more than a year; and God has provided direction, instruction, and correction from inside columns of smoke, from on top of mountains, from anywhere His people were located. But now they have the special congregation tent—a complex, multilayered tent within an enclosed court, which they can take along on their journeys and set up anywhere. This is a holy place for the people of the Lord. It is the place for them to offer sacrifices; and inside this special tent, behind a heavy curtain, is the holiest place of all, where their spiritual leaders receive revelation from God. There are two Hebrew words used for this special place. One is literally "tent" while the other is "dwelling." The word "tent" usually refers to the entire congregation tent, where any Israelite may come to the outer court and sacrifice. The word "dwelling" is used for that extra holy place or sanctuary behind the curtain, the residence of God or the place of His revelation where only certain priests were allowed.

Now the people are ready to begin the preparation to move into the land promised to them by the Lord. First, He sets about organizing this enormous band of escaped slaves.

1 Nearly two years after they had left Egypt, the Israelites were *still* in the wild desert area of Sinai. But on the first day of the second month, the Eternal One spoke to Moses in the tent of congregation.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2Add up exactly how many Israelites there are, *but don't merely count them.* Identify all the people by their clans and families, right down to the individual name of every male. 3*Furthermore,* those who are 20 years old or older shall be considered potential soldiers. Aaron can help you organize them *into groups* and record them as armies. 4Your leadership team will include someone from each tribe who is the head of his extended family. 5They are: Elizur (Shedeur's son) from the Reuben family; 6Shelumiel (Zurishaddai's son) from the Simeon family; 7Nahshon (Amminidab's son) from the Judah family; 8Nethanel (Zuar's son) from the Issachar family; 9Eliab (Helon's son) from the Zebulun family; 10from the *two* branches of Joseph's family, Elishama (Ammihud's son) from the Ephraim family and Gamaliel (Pedahzur's son) from the Manasseh family; 11Abidan (Gideoni's son) from the Benjamin family; 12Ahiezer (Ammishaddai's son) from the Dan family; 13Pagiel (Ochran's son) from the Asher family; 14Eliasaph (Deuel's son) from the Gad family; 15and Ahira (Enan's son) from the Naphtali family. 16These are the tribal leaders and representatives of the extended families, chosen by the community. They are the heads of the clans that compose Israel.

17Moses and Aaron gathered these chosen leaders by name; 18and on the first day of the second month, they brought the whole community together to register by their clans and extended families and to specify individuals who were 20 years old and older. 19This Moses did in the wild desert area of Sinai, just as the Eternal One had directed him to do. 20-21This is the tally of the *twelve* clans by extended family, identifying those for battle (20 years old and older): from Reuben's tribe (Reuben was the firstborn of *Jacob, whom God renamed* "Israel")—46,500; 22-23from Simeon's tribe—59,300; 24-25from Gad—45,650; 26-27from Judah—74,600; 28-29from Issachar—54,400; 30-31from Zebulun—57,400; 32-35from Joseph, the Ephraim tribe—40,500; from Joseph, the Manasseh tribe—32,200; 36-37from Benjamin—35,400; 38-39from Dan—62,700; 40-41from Asher—41,500; 42-43from Naphtali—53,400. 44This is the organization that Moses, Aaron, and the heads of the twelve clans recorded according to their extended families. 45Those who were 20 years old or older and could fight in the army 46totaled 603,550.

► Three times God calls the Israelites to count their people. In Exodus 30, they count the population to develop an orderly funding program for the construction of the congregation tent.

Tribe	chapter 1 First Census	chapter 26 Second Census	change after 38 Years
Reuben	46,500	43,730	–2,770
Simeon	59,300	22,200	–37,100
Gad	45,650	40,500	–5,150
Judah	74,600	76,500	1,900
Issachar	54,400	64,300	9,900
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	3,100
Ephraim	40,500	32,500	–8,000
Manasseh	32,200	52,700	20,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	10,200
Dan	62,700	64,400	1,700
Asher	41,500	53,400	11,900
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	–8,000
Total	603,550	601,730	–1,820

Here God tells them to count the men eligible for fighting in their militia; and in chapter 26, after a plague has ravaged the people, they will once again determine the size and makeup of their fighting force. It is interesting to note the change in the number of warriors within each of the extended families. Some tribes experience a tremendous loss in the number of fighters, and other tribes have a considerable increase.

47-49The Levites were not included in this *registration and* organizing of the extended families' tribe members because the Eternal One had expressly told Moses not to count them.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 50You will make the Levites responsible for the congregation tent that houses the terms of the covenant, its furnishings, and accoutrements. They will be the ones who carry all of it, maintain it, and camp around it. 51When it's time to move, it will be the Levites who pack up that tent; they are the ones who shall set it back up. If any outsider tries to get involved, he will be killed. 52The rest of the Israelites will camp according to their troops, each *extended family* under its own banner. 53*Remember: only* the Levites shall camp around the congregation tent that houses the terms of the covenant, guarding and servicing that place to spare the Israelites an outbreak of My wrath.

* 2:15 Most Hebrew manuscripts read, "Reuel's son."

54The Israelites did all this, exactly as the Eternal One had commanded through Moses.

2 The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron.

Eternal One: 2Here's how the Israelite camp should be arranged, each man with his own banner under his extended family's ensign, all around the congregation tent, but facing the tent at a distance. 3-4*Group the twelve families according to the following four divisions:* The Judah division shall camp under their banner nearest sunrise, on the east. It will comprise the 74,600 troops of the Judah extended family with its head, Nahshon (Amminidab's son); 5-6next to them, the 54,400 troops from the Issachar tribe, headed by Nethanel (Zuar's son); 7-8and the 57,400 from the Zebulun tribe, headed by Eliab (Helon's son). 9These *three extended families* constitute the Judah division (186,400 total troops). They shall march first.

10-11On the south side, the Reuben division shall camp under their banner. It will comprise the 46,500 troops from the Reuben extended family with its head Elizur (Shedeur's son); 12-13and next to them the 59,300 troops from the Simeon tribe headed by Shelumiel (Zurishaddai's son); 14-15and 45,650 from the Gad tribe, with its head Eliasaph (Deuel's son).* 16Total troop numbers for the Reuben division are 151,450. They shall march second.

17The congregation tent, with its *attendant* Levites, shall always camp and

move at the center of these divisions. Their camping order shall be the same as their order when they travel—well organized, each identified by its own banner.

18-19The Ephraim division will camp under their banner on the west. It includes the 40,500 troops from the Ephraim extended family, whose head is Elishama (Ammihud's son); 20-21and next to them, the 32,200 troops of the Manasseh tribe, headed by Gamaliel (Pedahzur's son); 22-23and finally 35,400 troops from the Benjamin tribe, headed by Abidan (Gideoni's son). 24The Ephraim division's total numbers are 108,100. They shall march third.

25-26*Finally*, the Dan division shall camp under their banner on the north side. It is composed of the 62,700 troops from the Dan extended family headed by Ahiezer (Ammishaddai's son); 27-28camping next to them, the Asher tribe, headed by Pagiel (Ochran's son) with its 41,500 troops; 29-30and the Naphtali tribe's 53,400 troops, headed by Ahira (Enan's son). 31The total numbers for the Dan division are 157,600, and they shall march out last under their banners.

32This is the organization of Israelites according to the *twelve* extended families—603,550 total arms-bearing troops. 33*Of course,* this does not include the Levite organization because the Eternal commanded Moses not to count them.

34*And things went according to plan.* Just as the Eternal had commanded Moses, the Israelites organized and camped and traveled by the *twelve* clans and their extended families, each with its own banner. Then they left.

3 At that time (when the Eternal One spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai), the lineage of Aaron and Moses went like this: 2Aaron's sons were Nadab (the eldest), Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar—3*actually*, they were his sons who were anointed as priests, who were supposed to work as priests. 4But Nadab and Abihu perished in the presence of the Eternal when they *failed to follow God's instructions and* offered profane fire at Sinai. They didn't have any children. *The other two,* Eleazar and Ithamar, carried on as priests for Aaron's lifetime.

5Then the Eternal One told Moses,

Eternal One: 6Summon the Levi tribe, and send them to Aaron, the priest. 7They are to serve him and all the people in front of the tent of the congregation. They are to do the work for the tent, *My sacred dwelling place.* 8They are in charge of the tent's furnishings. Their work in service to the congregation tent is on behalf of the people of Israel. 9These Levites are to be given exclusively to Aaron and Aaron's sons. 10Aaron and his descendants alone are the priests. If any outsider gets involved, he will be killed.

11And the Eternal One spoke later to Moses.

Eternal One: 12-13*As you know,* all firstborn children of each woman belong to Me. I made that clear when I killed all the Egyptian firstborn but spared Israel and its animals, setting them apart just for Me. But rather than giving all Israel's firstborn to Me, I accept the Levites as a substitute. They will be Mine. I am the Eternal One.

► The Levites as a whole are given into religious service sacrificing the animals and serving in the congregation tent rather than taking all the firstborn males, as was done with the livestock. To have drawn the servants of the Lord from the entire nation would have resulted in great disruption of each of the families and tribes.

14God formerly gave these instructions to Moses in the wild desert area of Sinai.

Eternal One: 15Organize the male Levites (including infants, one month old and older) by their clans and extended families.

16So Moses did just as the Eternal One told him. 17Levi's *three* sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 18Gershon's sons, by their clans, were Libni and Shimei. 19Kohath's sons, by their clans, were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 20Merari's sons, by their clans, were Mahli and Mushi. These, *remember*, are *specifically* the Levite clans by their extended families.

21So within Gershon were the Libnite and Shimeite clans. 22Counting just the males one month old and older, 7,500

were organized. 23They camped in the area behind the congregation tent on the west. 24Eliasaph (Lael's son) served as head of the Gershonite extended family. 25Their jobs were to take care of everything related to the congregation tent, both the place of revelation and its covering, the screen for the congregation tent's entrance, 26the curtains for the court surrounding the place of revelation and the altar, its entrance screen, the ropes, and anything else for the tent.

27Within Kohath were the Amramite, Izharite, Hebronite, and Uzzielite clans. 28Counting just the males one month old and older, there were 8,600* who worked for the sacred place. 29They camped on the south side of the congregation tent. 30Uzziel's son, Elizaphan, was their head. 31These Kohathites were to take care of everything associated with the chest, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the furnishings of the sanctuary that the priests use, the screen, and anything else *inside the sacred place*. 32Priest Aaron's son, Eleazar, was head of the Levite leaders. He was in charge of overseeing the people who took care of the sacred place.

33Within Merari were the Mahlite and Mushite clans, 34of whom 6,200 males one month or older were organized. 35Abihail's son, Zuriel, was their leader. They were instructed to camp on the northern side of the tent area, 36and their work was to maintain the planks of the tent, its bars, posts, and sockets; plus all the furnishings and any other *wood items*; 37as well as the posts surrounding the courtyard together with their sockets, pegs, and ropes.

38Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons camped in front of the congregation tent, on the east facing sunrise, where they worked according to the needs of the sanctuary and on behalf of the Israelites. If an outsider trespassed in this area, he would be killed. 39-45The total number of Levites whom Moses and Aaron organized, according to the Eternal's command, were 22,273. These males, one month or older, Moses listed by name.

The Eternal One told Moses,

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: As a substitute for all the Israelite firstborn children and animals (as all of them are Mine), take all the Levites and all the Levites' animals, which shall belong to Me.* 46But because there are 273 more Israelite firstborn children than there are Levites, you shall pay a substitute price: 47five shekels for each (calculated by the sanctuary weight, which is 35 pounds to the shekel), 48and give that money as a substitute price to Aaron and Aaron's sons.

49-51So Moses did all that concerning the substitute price, just as the Eternal commanded, and it amounted to 47,775 pounds *of metal*.

4 The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron.

► A census can be ominous or encouraging. Sometimes everyone on the list has to die before a new generation can take the land (chapter 1), but sometimes, like in this chapter, it is an occasion to highlight God's people, the Levites.

Eternal One: 2From among the Levite clans, organize Kohathite men by their extended families 3between the ages of 30 and 50, who serve in the congregation tent. 4They are the ones who shall deal with the most sacred objects associated with the congregation tent. 5When it's time to break camp, *follow these instructions:* Aaron and his sons shall take down the screen curtain and cover the covenant chest. 6Over that, they shall lay a sea-cow skin,* and over that, a pure blue cloth. They shall then slide in the chest's poles. 7Regarding the table that displays the offerings, they shall spread it with a blue cloth and set the bowls, ladles, cups, pitchers for the drink offering, and regular bread on it. 8This they shall cover with a crimson cloth, and over that a sea-cow skin. And they shall slide in its poles *too*. 9Regarding the *seven-branched* lampstand, they shall cover it—the lamps, tongs, fire pans, and all the oil receptacles used with it—with a blue cloth. 10They shall put it and all its furnishings in a sea-cow skin and set that on the frame for carrying. 11Concerning the golden altar *for incense,* they shall cover it first with a blue cloth,

* 3:28 Some Greek manuscripts read "8,300." * 3:39-45 These verses have been rearranged for clarity because of repetition in the Hebrew. * 4:6 The identity of this animal skin is uncertain.

and over that with a sea-cow skin. They shall insert its poles. 12*Likewise,* all of the furnishings used in sanctuary service should go into a blue cloth, be covered with a sea-cow skin, and set on a carrying frame. 13They will need to empty the *fat* ashes from the *burnt offering* altar before spreading a purple cloth over it. 14Then load all the things used with it—the fire pans, long forks, spatulas, and basins—and cover the whole with a sea-cow skin. Then they shall slide in the poles. 15When Aaron and his sons are done covering all the holy objects and furnishings, then *and only then* (so that they don't touch the sacred things and die), the Kohathites can approach. They are the ones who shall transport these items of the congregation tent. 16Aaron's son, Eleazar, shall be responsible for the oil used for light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, the oil used for anointing, the whole congregation tent, and every holy thing within it, including each and every furnishing.

17(continuing instructions to Moses and Aaron) 18-19Take special care *to pack everything well* so that the people of the Kohathite clans are not killed on account of *touching* the most sacred things *when they shouldn't.* Aaron and his sons can direct each person's role and their transportation of the items. 20The Kohathites should never look on the sacred things for even a moment, or else they'll die.

21(continuing instructions to Moses) 22-24Add up the Gershonites, ages 30-50, by their extended families and clans. These are the ones who shall perform the following specific tasks required for the congregation tent: 25They shall be responsible for transporting the tent curtains, the congregation tent with its covering and the sea-cow skin over that (as well as the screen for the tent's entrance), 26the hangings for the courtyard area, the screen at the entrance gate of the designated area around the tent and altar, the ropes, and everything they need for service. And they shall do whatever is needed *to maintain and care* for these things. 27-28These Gershonites shall answer to Aaron the priest and his sons (particularly Ithamar) with respect to what exactly they should carry and do; and you shall assign into their care what they need to carry. This is what the Gershonite clans are to do concerning the congregation tent.

29-30Number the Merarites *in the same way*—those ages 30-50 by extended families and clans, whoever qualifies to work for the good of the congregation tent. 31They are to carry the following things (and that's all they need to do for the congregation tent): the tent framework with its bars, pillars, and foundations; 32the pillars of the courtyard area along with their bases, pegs, ropes, and all their furnishings and related items. Specify each object that each one must carry. 33That's all the Merarite clans need to do for the congregation tent. They'll answer specifically to Ithamar (the son of Aaron the priest).

34-37So Moses, Aaron, and all the heads of the community *did as the Lord had instructed.* They organized the Kohathites by the clans and the extended families, ages 30-50, who were eligible to work on behalf of the congregation tent and found that there were 2,750. 38-45The Gershonites whom Moses and Aaron organized by each clan and extended family numbered 2,630; and the Merarites—3,200. 46All were listed from the Levites organized by Moses, Aaron, and the heads of the families, 47who were between the ages of 30 and 50 and capable of performing their designated congregation tent tasks of maintenance and transportation, 48numbered 8,580. 49Each one had a job specified by the Eternal One and dictated through Moses. Each one was recorded by his job as the Eternal had commanded Moses to do.

5 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

► Now that the arrangement of the camp, the ordering of the families, and the organization of their defenses is complete, God begins sanctifying the people. Because this camp is a holy place—a place where God has chosen to dwell among His people—purity is an obvious concern. But beyond the religious regulations, concern for cleanliness and rules for social interaction are essential because of the vast number of people traveling together. There are more than 600,000 males over the society's average age of 20 years, and logically these men make

up one-quarter of society. The laws given to the people are not simply religious instruction, but are necessary for the good morale and accompanying social concerns of such a large population, concerns such as transmission of diseases, mistreatment of individuals, and suppression of crime.

Eternal One: 2-3Tell the Israelites to send outside of the camp anyone, male or female, *who is ritually unclean and could spread it to others, namely those* with skin lesions, and discharges, or who have touched a dead person. They need to stay outside of the camp in order not to *ritually* contaminate My dwelling place among them.

4The Israelites did exactly that and sent them outside the camp, just as the Eternal told Moses.

5The Eternal One continued.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 6Tell the Israelites that sinning against each other is just like abandoning Me. All incur guilt, men and women alike. 7He or she must confess, then pay back in kind *(if the crime is robbery, or some material offense)* what he or she has cost to the wronged person and add one-fifth more. 8If there are no people in the wronged party's *immediate* family to receive the payback, then it should go* to the priest along with a ram, which the guilty party shall supply as an atonement sacrifice. 9-10The priest also gets anything an Israelite donates. Sacred gifts, anything—they then belong to the priest who receives them.

11(continuing instructions to Moses) 12Tell the Israelites that if a married woman sneaks off to commit adultery, 13that is, if a man has sexual relations with her but her husband doesn't know, *even if* no one can say for certain that she tarnished herself because no one saw or caught her, 14and her husband feels suspicious and becomes jealous, whether or not she's guilty; 15then he should bring his wife to the priest along with the requisite offering: two quarts of barley flour. Because it's an offering for *this particular purpose,* jealousy (namely, a grain offering that brings back to mind some kind of wrongdoing), he shouldn't include any oil or incense with it.

16-19Then the priest will set her in front of Me, mix dust from the congregation tent's floor into a jar of holy water, and loosen her hair. He'll make her take an oath and hold the grain offering of jealousy while he holds the curse-causing, bitter water and says, "*If you are innocent of this charge,* if no man had sexual relations with you, if you didn't reject your husband's authority and tarnish yourself; then let this bitter water have no curse on you. 20But if you are guilty of rejecting your husband's authority and having sexual relations with someone other than your husband," 21[here the priest should make the woman say the cursing-oath], "then may the Eternal One make your name a shunning reproach, an insult or a warning among the people, because you will have a miscarriage* and your belly will swell. 22*If you are guilty,* may this curse-causing water run through your bowels, make your belly swell, and your womb miscarry." And the woman shall say, "Amen. Let it be so."

23The priest will write these curses on a scroll and wash the words into the bitter water. 24He'll then make the woman drink the bitter water that will run right through her, causing terrible pain. 25The priest will take the barley-flour jealousy offering that she was holding, raise it up high before the Me, bring it to the altar, 26burn a handful (a memorial portion) of it into smoke on the altar, and then make the woman drink the water. 27The effect (much pain with her belly swelling and her womb miscarrying) *or lack thereof* will show whether or not she's guilty of marital unfaithfulness. If guilty, her name will be a curse among the Israelites. 28If innocent and pure, she'll be free *from the water's effects* and still be able to have children.

► This judgment ritual is a mixture of dust or ash and water to bring objectivity to the accusation of adultery on a wife. The result is either clearing her name or confirming the claim against her. The administration is reserved for the priest, and the results are final.

* 5:8 Hebrew manuscripts add, "to the Eternal One." * 5:21 Literally, thigh to fall away

Eternal One: 29This is what should be done in a jealousy case, when a woman is rejecting her husband's authority and sleeping with other men, 30or simply if her husband gets jealous and suspicious of her. The husband will bring her before Me, and the priest will enact this law. 31The man shall not be *charged with anything or* considered to have done wrong; the woman must deal with the consequences of her behavior.

6 The Eternal One spoke to Moses again.

Eternal One: 2Tell the Israelites that when anyone of them, man or woman, takes the special Nazirite vow, which distinguishes this Israelite as set apart for Me, 3-4he shall abstain from alcohol, even from any grape products—vinegar, juice, or the fruit itself (dried or fresh), seeds, or skin—for the entire time he is a Nazirite. 5Also, the Nazirite shall not cut the hair on his head but let it grow long for the duration of the Nazirite vow because he is holy and set apart for Me. 6And the Nazirite shall not go near a corpse during that time, 7even if the dead person is a parent or sibling, lest the Nazirite become *ritually* impure and ignore the fact of his consecration to God. 8For the entirety of his *Nazirite* separation, he is holy to Me.

9If it happens that someone suddenly dies near a Nazirite, *accidentally* rendering his special hair ritually impure, the Nazirite should shave it off on the day he purifies himself *and again* on the seventh day. 10-11On the eighth day, the Nazirite will purify his head, bring two turtledoves and two young pigeons as offerings—sin and burnt—to the priest at the entrance of the congregation tent. The priest shall offer to make things right after *inadvertent* proximity to a corpse. 12The Nazirite shall also bring a year-old male lamb as an offering for guilt. His head shall be made holy again at that time and the vow reinstated, not counting the previous days because he was defiled.

13The following is how things should be done after the Nazirite has satisfied the duration of the vows: the offering should be brought to the entrance of the congregation tent 14to present the gift to Me—unblemished, one-year-old male and female lambs as burnt and sin offerings, respectively; one unblemished ram as a peace offering, 15a basket of flatbread, delicate cakes of fine flour and oil, crackers spread with oil, plus the regular grain and drink offerings. 16-17The priest shall present all these (sin and burnt offerings, peace offering, and grain and drink offerings) before Me *as the law instructs for each offering*. 18Then and there at the entrance to the congregation tent, the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head and burn the hair in the fire underneath the peace sacrifice. 19Once the ram's shoulder has boiled, the priest shall take it and one piece of flatbread and one cracker from the basket, and place those things on the *outstretched* palms of the shaved Nazirite. 20Then the priest shall raise them up in offering to the Eternal, and keep them as the priest's holy portion along with the wave offering breast and contributed thigh, which were likewise offered up. After all this, the Nazirite may drink wine.

21This is the instruction for the Nazirite who takes a vow. The offerings to Me must be just so, besides anything else that the Nazirite can afford to give. Whatever has been promised, he must do, in keeping with the law for his consecration.

22(continuing instruction to Moses) 23Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the Israelites by saying,

24The Eternal One bless and keep you.
25May He make His face shine upon
you
and be gracious to you.
26The Eternal lift up His countenance
to look upon you and give you
peace.

27In this way, they will set My name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.

7 When Moses finished setting up the congregation tent, sanctifying, anointing, and setting apart it and everything in it—its furnishings, altar, and sacred receptacles, *as befits God's holy dwelling place*, 2then Israel's tribe leaders, the heads of their extended families, the leaders of everyone who had been organized and counted, *came forward to* make an offering. 3*In total,* they presented to the Eternal in His tent six covered carts (one for every two leaders) and twelve oxen *to pull them* (one for each leader). 4Then the Eternal One responded *to the offering*.

► Logistical concerns are paramount with this new reality of a traveling nation. With their large numbers and their countless livestock, moving this caravan is a logistical nightmare. Just moving the congregation tent is a challenge, involving a number of families and special carts to carry the tons of layers of the tent and the many utensils for worship. The most holy items are carried manually, but without physical contact. Thus God provides a system of carrying poles fed through loops so the holy item is not touched. The actual arrangement of the caravan is also specified, as well as the arrangement of the tribes in relation to the congregation tent.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 5Accept these things, and give them to those Levites who need them to service the congregation tent.

6-8Moses did just that, distributing the gifts based on the needs of the Levites' respective tasks: the Gershonites got two ox-carts and four oxen *to haul the tents' many coverings;* the Merarites got four ox-carts and eight oxen *to haul the tents' heavy frames and stands*, and Ithamar (Priest Aaron's son) supervised them. 9The Kohathites didn't get any because the sacred things for which they were responsible *were smaller furnishings and* could be carried on the men's own shoulders. 10As the altar was being *properly* anointed, the leaders came forward at its dedication with their offerings 11because the Eternal had directed Moses *to oversee* that one leader per day came forward with his offering for the altar's dedication.

12Nahshon (Amminadab's son) of the Judah tribe was first. 13He brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds *(to hold the blood of sacrifices as it was dashed on the altar),* according to the sanctuary scales. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 14*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 15and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 16For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 17for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. These are the things Nahshon, Amminadab's son, brought forward.

18On the second day, Nethanel (son of Zuar), head of the Issachar tribe, came forward with their offering—*the same as the Judah family's from the day before*—19bringing one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 20*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 21and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 22For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 23and for a peace sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Nethanel, Zuar's son, brought for an offering.

24Eliab (son of Helon), head of the Zebulunite tribe, brought the third day's offering—25one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 26*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 27and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 28For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 29and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Eliab, Helon's son, brought as an offering.

30On the fourth day, Elizur (son of Shedeur), head of the Reubenite tribe, presented the offering. 31He, *too,* brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 32*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 33and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 34For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 35and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling

male lambs. These things Elizur (Shedeur's son) presented as an offering.

36On the fifth day, Shelumiel (son of Zurishaddai), head of the Simeonite tribe, brought the offering. 37*Like those preceding,* he brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 38*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 39and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 40For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; and 41for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Shelumiel (Zurishaddai's son) brought.

42On the sixth day, Eliasaph (son of Deuel), head of the Gadite tribe, *like those before him,* 43brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 44*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 45and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 46For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 47and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Eliasaph (Deuel's son) brought as an offering.

48Elishama (son of Ammihud), head of the Ephraimite *half-tribe,* brought the seventh day's offering. 49He also brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 50*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 51and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 52For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 53and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. These things Elishama (Ammihud's son) offered.

54Gamaliel (son of Pedahzur), head of the Manassehite *half-tribe,* brought the offering on the eighth day. 55He brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 56*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 57and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 58For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 59and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. So Gamaliel (Pedahzur's son) brought the *same* offering *as his Israelite brothers had on each of the days before.*

60On the ninth day, Abidan (son of Gideoni), head of the Benjaminite tribe, also 61brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 62*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 63and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 64For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 65and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. These things Abidan (Gideoni's son) offered.

66On the tenth day, Ahiezer (son of Ammishaddai), head of the Danite tribe, brought *the same offering*: 67He brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 68*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 69and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 70For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 71and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Ahiezer (Ammishaddai's son) brought as an offering.

72Pagiel (son of Ochran), head of the Asherite tribe, brought the eleventh day's offering, *which consisted of the same things:* 73He brought one silver plate weighing three and one-quarter pounds and one silver bowl of one and three-quarter pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 74*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight)

filled with incense; 75and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 76For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 77and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. This is what Pagiel (Ochran's son) offered.

78On the 12th day, Ahira (son of Enan), head of the Naphtalite tribe, 79brought one silver plate weighing 3¼ pounds and one silver bowl of 1¾ pounds, as the sanctuary weighs things. Both were filled with prime flour mixed with oil to compose a grain offering. 80*He also brought* one gold dish (four ounces in weight) filled with incense; 81and for a burnt offering, he brought a young bull, a ram, and a yearling male lamb. 82For a sin offering, he brought one male goat; 83and for a peace offering sacrifice, he brought two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five yearling male lambs. *Like those before him,* Ahira (Enan's son) brought these things to offer.

84This is what the heads of the Israelite families offered up at the occasion of the altar's dedication (when it was anointed): 12 silver plates, 12 silver bowls *(to hold the blood of sacrifices as it was dashed on the altar),* and 12 gold dishes. 85Because each plate weighed 3¼ pounds and each bowl weighed 1¾ pounds, the total silver was 60 pounds (based on the sanctuary standard); 86and the 12 gold, incense-filled dishes all together weighed three pounds; 87and for the burnt offering, there was a total of 12 bulls, 12 rams, 12 male yearling lambs, plus the grain offering and the 12 male goats for the sin offering. 88As for the peace offering, there were 24 oxen, 60 rams, 60 male goats, and 60 male yearling lambs. All of these were for the altar's dedication after it was anointed.

89*So it was established.* When Moses went into the congregation tent to speak to them, he could hear the voice *of God* speaking to him from between the winged guardians* above the seat of mercy on the covenant chest. Thus the Eternal spoke to Moses.

8 The Eternal One told Moses,

Eternal One: 2Tell Aaron that when he sets up the seven lamps, they should illuminate the area in front of the lampstand.

3Aaron did just that, arranging the lamps so that they shed light in front of the lampstand *across from the presence table*, exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses. 4The lampstand itself was made *entirely* out of hammered gold, its stem and all the petals, in keeping with the pattern the Eternal had given to Moses.*

5The Eternal One continued.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 6Separate the Levites from the other Israelites, and make them *ritually* pure 7by sprinkling the cleansing water on them, making sure their entire bodies are clean-shaven and their clothes are washed. Then they'll be appropriately pure. 8After that, tell them to select a bull-calf along with the prime flour-oil combination (the grain offering). You, too, select another bull-calf for use as a sin offering. 9Get the Levites to the congregation tent, and have them stand in front of it. Gather all the other Israelites, too, 10so that when you present the Levites before Me, the Israelites can lay hands on them *to indicate that they are the substitutes for all Israel's firstborn.* 11*At that point,* Aaron shall present the Levites as an offering lifted up to Me, so that the Levites will work on behalf of all the Israelites in service to Me. 12Next, the Levites can lay their hands on the bulls' *heads,* one of which is going to be a sin offering to Me, and the other will be a burnt offering to cover the Levites, *hiding their sins and protecting them from My presence.* 13*Finally,* make clear that the Levites are to assist Aaron and Aaron's sons, lifting them up in front of and for Me to demonstrate that they are that kind of offering. 14In this way, you will show how the Levites are distinct from all other Israelites. They belong directly to Me.

15After all of this, the purification and presentation as an uplifted offering, they will be ready to do congregation tent *maintenance and* work. 16-17Indeed, they are uniquely designated for Me among the Israelites. Those Levites substitute for the Israelites' firstborn children and animals, which I am within My rights to demand since I killed all the Egyptian firstborn *on My peoples' behalf* and so consecrated all Israelite firstborn as My own. 18But see, I am willing to accept this representative group—that the Levites, from among the Israelites, will

* 7:89 Hebrew, *cherubim* * 8:4 Exodus 25:31-40

be Mine, 19given to Aaron and his sons from the Israelite people *to do whatever is required* concerning the congregation tent: maintaining its service and covering Israel's sins for them so they don't make Me send a plague to them because they overstepped the bounds of My sanctuary.

20Everyone did as ordered—Moses, Aaron, and all the Israelites gathered there—handling the Levites exactly as the Eternal One had instructed Moses to be sure was done: 21the Levites washed their clothes and purified themselves, Aaron presented them as an uplifted offering in front of the Eternal, and Aaron covered them in front of Him so they would *look* pure. 22From then on, they were all set to do what they were supposed to in *maintenance and* work on the congregation tent, under the direction and supervision of Aaron and his sons. Just as the Eternal had instructed Moses concerning the Levites, so it was done.

23The Eternal One continued.

► Just like in Leviticus 4:23, the language of 8:24 suggests that the priestly duty is associated not only with divine service but with divine war. Certain Levites of certain ages would maintain sacred space and behavior as Israel prepared to conquer the land.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 24This is how it shall be for the Levites: Those who are 25 years or older shall do whatever is necessary for the congregation tent, 25but when they reach 50, they shall retire and leave the work *to the younger ones.* 26They can still help out in the fraternity of Levites *occasionally,* but they shouldn't do any of the *priestly* work. This is the way you should handle the matter of the Levites and their role.

9 On the first new moon of the second year after the people had left Egypt, there in the Sinai Wilderness, the Eternal One spoke to Moses *again.*

Eternal One: 2The Israelites should observe Passover at the time it's supposed to happen: 3*offering the sacrifice* at evening twilight on the 14th day of this month, exactly according to the regulations we've already discussed.*

4-5So Moses told the Israelites that they should go ahead with the Passover, *offering the sacrifice* at its designated evening twilight on the 14th day of this month—in the wild desert of Sinai. They did exactly as the Eternal told Moses they should. 6Complicating things, however, was the fact that some men had needed to handle a dead body and so were impure and couldn't offer the sacrifice right then. They came to Aaron and Moses right away.

Men: 7Why should we be disallowed from offering the Eternal's sacrifice along with the rest of the Israelites at the appropriate time, just because the *disposing of a* dead body made us *ritually* impure?

Moses: 8Just hold on a little while. Let me find out what the Eternal has to say about it.

The Lord provides a backup plan for those who can't celebrate Passover properly, but it isn't to replace normal practices.

9The Eternal One told Moses,

Eternal One: 10Tell the Israelites, if any one of you or your descendants becomes *ritually* impure due to *the necessity of handling* a dead body, he can nevertheless still celebrate My Passover *a month after everyone else does.* Likewise, those who are on the road, a long way *from My tent,* can celebrate Passover to the Eternal *then too.* 11It should be observed at evening twilight on the fourteenth day of the second month, eating *the lamb they sacrificed* with unleavened bread and bitter greens. 12Make certain that not one of its bones is broken* and the entire animal is consumed by morning, in keeping with standard procedure for this Passover *festival.* 13Everyone who is present and *ritually* pure *must observe this foundational moment.* If a person fails to observe the Passover, *it is a serious offense.* Such a person will be ostracized from the community, guilty of not offering to the Eternal at the right time. 14If a visiting foreigner would like to

* 9:3 Exodus 12 * 9:12 John 19:36

observe the Eternal's Passover with you, he is welcome. Just make certain that he does so completely, exactly as you Israelites are supposed to do. Everyone must observe it the same way, whether foreigner or native to the land.

15When the congregation tent was *finally* erected *and assembled,* the cloud *of the presence of God* covered it and the place where the terms of the covenant were kept. In the dark of night, *the presence of God* looked like a fire and marked the spot until morning. 16And so it continued—cloud cover by day, and something like fiery *storm clouds* at night. 17Whenever the cloud lifted up, the Israelites would *pack up and* move, and wherever the cloud stopped, they would settle. 18This is how the Eternal One indicated when the Israelites should travel and where they should set up camp. As long as the cloud stayed still over the congregation tent, the Israelites also stayed at their tents. 19When the cloud remained many days over the tent, the Israelites stayed there and served the Eternal. 20When the cloud remained only a few days, they did the same. They always followed the command of the Eternal, whether staying or leaving. 21Sometimes it happened that the cloud remained in place only through the night. So, in the morning, they would get going again. Day or night, in this manner they went as God directed. 22Whether it was a couple of days or just a month or even longer, however long the cloud covered the tent, the Israelites stayed put; but when it lifted, off they went again. 23*So it was* that the Israelites obeyed God's command. When the Eternal One indicated that they stop, they stopped; when He directed them to move, they moved. They served Him exactly as God commanded them through Moses.

10 The Eternal One continued, instructing Moses.

► In the first two months of the second year, the nation is organized for religious service, for war, for civil order, and for travel. On the first day of the first month, construction of the congregation tent is completed and dedication of the altar and the priests begins. On the eighth day, the dedication and ordination of the priests is completed. On the twelfth day, the dedication of the altar is completed, the Levites are appointed, and normal services begin. On the fourteenth day, the Passover is celebrated.

In the second month, the census of the men over 20 years of age is started. On the fourteenth day, a second Passover is celebrated for those who were impure from the first celebration. Finally, on the twentieth day, all the Israelites begin their travels to Canaan.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2To *more easily* get the people's attention and to summon the people and notify the people that they should break camp, make yourself two trumpets out of *fine,* hammered silver. 3When you blow both trumpets, everyone should gather with you in front of the congregation tent; 4but if you blow only one *of the trumpets,* then only the leaders, the heads of the divisions, need to gather with you. 5-6You can *also use them to* sound an alarm. Make the alarm sound when it's time to move on. When you need to break camp, one alarm will indicate that the people on the east side should depart; the second will be the sign for those on the south side of camp to depart. 7But when you only want to gather the people together *(not to break camp)*, simply blow the normal sound.

There are several patterns of trumpet sounds for various purposes; they are distinguished by the length of the blast and the amount of separation between sounds.

8Aaron's people, the priests, shall blow them; this is a decree *of peace* for all generations to come. 9*There will be times,* when you're living in the land *I've promised to you,* that you'll need to fight against people who oppress you. Use the trumpets to sound an alarm. Your God, the Eternal, will remember you, and you will be saved from such enemies. 10Also use the trumpets *in happy times.* Blow them when you celebrate festivals and make sacrifices. On days of joy, feasting and new moons, sound the trumpets

as you offer your burnt offerings and sacrifices of peace offerings. Again, they will be a reminder to your God. I am the Eternal One, your True God.

11 *When* the cloud *finally* rose up (on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year) from over the congregation tent that housed the terms of the covenant, 12 the Israelites set out from the Sinai Wilderness until the cloud indicated they should stop in the Paran Wilderness. 13 This was the first time they *were organized and* traveled in this manner—as the Eternal had instructed through Moses.

14 First the Judahite division left, following their banner. Judah's tribal troops were led by Nahshon, Amminadab's son. 15 The Issachar tribal troops were led by Nethanel, Zuar's son; 16 and Helon's son, Eliab, led the Zebulunite tribal troops.

17 At that point, the tent was properly disassembled and carried out by the Gershonites and Merarites.

18 They were followed by the Reubenite division, following their banner. Reuben's tribal troops were led by Shedeur's son, Elizur. 19 The Simeon tribe's troops were led by Shelumiel, Zurishaddai's son; 20 and the Gadite tribal army followed the direction of Eliasaph, son of Deuel.

21 Next to leave were the Kohathites, who carried the holy things *as instructed*. The tent would be set up again before they arrived by the Gershonites and Merarites.

22 Then the Ephraimite division departed under their banner. Ephraim's tribal troops were led by Elishama (Ammihud's son). 23 The Manassehite tribal troops were led by Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur; 24 and Benjamin's tribal troops were led by Gideoni's son, Abidan.

25 Finally, at the rear came the Danite division following their banner. Dan's tribal troops were led by Ahiezer, Ammishaddai's son. 26 The Asherite tribal troops went under the leadership of Pagiel, Ochran's son; 27 and the Naphtali tribal troops under Enan's son, Ahira. 28 This is the order in which the Israelites broke camp and journeyed *through the wilderness*.

29 *When they were just about to depart,* Moses took aside Hobab (son of Reuel, Moses' father-in-law), *his* Midianite *brother-in-law*.

Moses: Why don't you come with us? We are going to the place that the Eternal promised to give to us. We'll treat you well in the land. After all, the Eternal said that things will be good for Israel.

Hobab: 30 No, *thanks*. I'm going to head back home, to my own place and to my kin.

Moses: 31 Please don't leave us. You know where it's best to camp out here in the wilderness, and we could certainly benefit from your watching out for us. 32 It'll work out well for you! The Eternal has promised good things for us, and we'll be sure that you have a share in them too.

33 So off they went, and they traveled for three days after leaving the Eternal's mountain, *known as Sinai or Horeb*. At the very front of the traveling company was *the precious box containing the terms of Israel's agreement with their God—namely,* the chest containing their covenant with the Eternal to seek out a good resting place. 34 God's cloud led them on by day when they broke camp and set out. 35 When the chest began to move, Moses would *always* say,

Moses: Eternal One, arise! *Get up, and* may Your enemies scatter before You, Your opponents flee from Your presence.

36 And when the chest settled down again, Moses would say,

Moses: O Eternal One, turn back ten thousand to Israel's numbers.*

► The people of God are being instructed by Moses, but they are being led by God Himself. They can see the cloud of God before them and hear the blowing of trumpets telling them to move, but at the very front of their column is the chest of the covenant. God's presence and His promises go before them as they wander through this wilderness. One of the great truths of Scripture is that God may send His people out, but they are never alone and He is ever before them. In the same way the Hebrews

* 10:36 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

have led their sheep rather than driving them, God leads His people rather than forcing them to go first into the unknown or into battle.

11 The people griped *about life in the wilderness,* how hard they felt things were for them, and these *evil* complaints came up to the ears of the Eternal One. He was furious about this *ingratitude, faithlessness, and lack of vision.* His anger was kindled, and His fire raged among them and devoured some of the camp's perimeter. 2The people of Israel cried out and ran to Moses and begged him *to do something*! Moses did. He prayed to the Eternal One, and the flames settled down. 3On account of this incident of the burning fire from the Eternal, the place where it happened is called Taberah, *which means "burning."*

4A contingent of Israelites had a strong craving for different food, and the Israelites started complaining again.

Israelites: Who will give us meat to eat? 5Remember in Egypt when we could eat whatever amount of fish we wanted, or even the abundant cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. *But this, this can hardly be called food at all!* 6Our appetites have dried up. All we ever have to look at is manna, *manna, manna.*

7-9*The thing about the manna is this:* It is like coriander seed but the *golden* color of gum resin, falling on the camp with the morning dew. The people could just walk around and pick it up. After grinding it with millstones *to a kind of flour* or crushing it with a mortar, they boiled it in a pot and then formed it into patties. These tasted something like cake prepared with oil, *a kind of sweet bread.* 10Well, Moses overheard the people in *all* the clans moaning at the door of their tents *about the manna.* The Eternal grew really angry *again,* and Moses thought *the whole situation* was wrong.

Moses *(to the Lord)***:** 11Why are You so hard on me? *I am* your *devoted* servant. Why don't You look on me with affection? Why do I have the great burden of these *spiteful* people? 12Did I conceive them, *bear them,* and give birth to them? Why should You tell me to carry them—as a nanny does some suckling infant—into the land that You swore to their ancestors? 13And now, where am I supposed to find meat to feed this crowd crying out that I give them food to eat? 14I simply cannot keep carrying them along. They are way too heavy. 15If You plan to treat me like this, then just kill me now. If You care about me at all, just put me out of my misery so I do not have to live out this distress.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 16*Listen, just do this for Me.* Get 70 community elders, ones whom you know are real leaders among the people, and bring them into the congregation tent where we meet. Tell them to stand with you there. 17I will then descend among you. I will speak with you, and withdraw some of My Spirit from you and place it on them so that they can help you with the burden of this people. Then you won't have to carry it all alone. 18Then tell the people this: "Purify yourselves for what will happen tomorrow. You will eat meat because you have cried to Me, saying, 'If only someone would give us meat to eat! We were content back in Egypt.' The Eternal will indeed give you meat, and you shall eat it. 19You'll be eating *meat* not just one day, or two or five or ten or twenty, 20but *every single day* for an entire month. *Meat, meat, and more meat. You'll eat meat* until it comes out of your noses and you can't stand it anymore. For you've rejected Me, who is with you, by asking why you left Egypt."

Moses: 21There are 600,000 people walking with me here. You say that You're going to give them *heaps of* meat for an entire month? *Think of the logistics!* 22Are there really enough sheep and cattle traveling with us to slaughter, or enough fish in the sea *for that matter,* to provide such a supply?

Eternal One: 23Do you doubt Me? Do you question My power, that I can do what I've said? Just watch—you'll see what will happen.

24So Moses went out and told the people what the Eternal One had said. He also gathered 70 community elders and situated them around the *congregation* tent. 25Then the Eternal descended in a cloud and talked with Moses, and He took some of the Spirit He laid on Moses and laid it on those 70 elders. At the moment when

the Spirit touched them, each one prophesied, but they did not continue doing this.

26A couple of men (Eldad and Medad) who had been organized *during the Israelite counting,* didn't come to the tent but remained in the *greater* camp area and prophesied there. 27A young man ran to Moses and reported it.

Young Man: Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!

28Joshua (Nun's son and Moses' assistant from the time he was little), *also was alarmed.*

Joshua: Moses, my lord, stop them!

Moses: 29Are you so agitated on my account? If only all of the Eternal's people were prophets, that He would lay His Spirit on them.

Joshua thinks they are usurping Moses' authority. But Moses' response is the opposite—if only there were more like them!

30After this, Moses and the elders of Israel went back into the greater camp.

31*Suddenly* the Eternal One blew a wind carrying quails in from around the sea and letting them drop all around the camp. There were quails *as far as the eye could see*—a day's journey on one side of the camp and another day's journey on the other side, and they were about three feet deep on the ground. 32The people got to work *right away,* gathering the quails. It took them the rest of that day and all night and the entire next day *to pick up all the birds.* Finally, no one had fewer than 60 bushels, and they spread them out all over the camp. 33While the people were still biting meat *off the bone,* before it was even chewed, the anger of the Eternal was unleashed against them. He struck the people down with a terrible plague. 34*Because He killed so many of them* on account of their craving and because of these buried there, the place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, *which means "graves of cravings."* 35The people journeyed on from there to Hazeroth, where they stayed *for awhile.*

12 *While they were at Hazeroth,* Miriam and Aaron chastised Moses for marrying *a foreign woman*—a Cushite (and it was true that he did indeed marry such an African).

Miriam and Aaron: 2Has the Eternal One spoken only through Moses? *No,* the Eternal has also spoken through us.

Now, the Eternal One heard this. 3For his part, Moses was a *uniquely* humble fellow, more humble than anyone in the entire world. 4All of a sudden, the Eternal called *the three siblings together.*

Eternal One: Come here, you three—Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. *Join Me* at the congregation tent.

They did. 5The Eternal One descended in a cloud-column, stood at the tent opening, and summoned *just* Aaron and Miriam. They came forward.

Eternal One: 6Listen to Me. When there are prophets in your midst, I, the Eternal One, will show Myself to them in visions, and will sound My voice in their dreams. 7It's different with My servant, Moses. I have entrusted him above anyone else in My whole house, 8and with him I communicate face-to-face. We speak directly and without riddles. He can even see the very form of the Eternal. So why aren't you nervous about criticizing My servant, Moses?

► Moses is described as uniquely close to the Lord. He is singled out as God's servant, a distinction reserved for a few in the Old Testament, with David being the most notable. His importance is underscored by God's unique communication with Moses. It is direct, plain, and without trances, visions, or dreams. Literally, the communication is right in God's face. The idea here is that it is not veiled but intimate; there is a closeness between God and Moses no other person shares. But in the same way that Jesus will be understood only by those who know Him and are known by Him, God's communication to Moses is different. It is not a riddle that is hard to understand or easy to confuse. God is seen and heard clearly by His servant and friend, Moses.

9The Eternal left, quite angry with Miriam
and Aaron. 10When the cloud lifted from
the congregation tent, you could see that
Miriam had been stricken with a disfigur-
ing skin condition. Her skin looked white,
like snow. Aaron looked at her, saw this,
11and immediately turned to Moses.

Aaron: Please, Moses, my lord, don't pun-
ish us for this offense that we so stupidly
committed. 12Don't leave her in this par-
tial death—like a stillborn baby whose
flesh is already half-rotted away!

Moses *(pleading to the Lord)*: 13O, God, I
ask You to please heal her!

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 14If her father had
*been angry with her and made it obvi-
ous by, say,* spitting in her face, wouldn't
she have to bear her shame for a week?
Just so, you must ostracize her from the
camp for seven days. After that, she can
rejoin the community.

15So Miriam was shut out of the commu-
nity for seven days, which also meant that
the whole group didn't travel until Miriam
was brought back in, 16and they set out
again. They journeyed from Hazeroth into
the Paran Wilderness and set up camp
there.

13 The Eternal One spoke to
Moses.

► There is dissension in the camp. Some of the leaders have been sharing their doubts with the people, and folks are nervous. The thrill of this wilderness camping experience has worn off, and some are thinking that working for the Egyptians wasn't so bad. So barely two years out of Egypt, the Israelites are standing at the door of their promised land. Moses needs to motivate the people, and he selects 12 key men from each of the tribes to explore the land of abundance God has provided. The nation stands to enter into a time of great reward, but first their leaders must bring back a report that will inspire their confidence.

Eternal One: 2Send men who can spy out
the Canaanite land that I'm giving to
the Israelites. Pick one man, with dem-
onstrated leadership, from each of the
tribal families.

3Moses did so. He sent the *twelve* heads
of Israel out from Paran Wilderness camp
just as the Eternal told him. 4These are
the men who went and the tribes they
represented: Shammua (Zaccur's son) for
Reuben; 5Shaphat (Hori's son) for Simeon;
6Caleb (Jephunneh's son) for Judah; 7Igal
(Joseph's son) for Issachar; 8Hoshea
(Nun's son) for *Joseph's tribe, specifically*
Ephraim; 9Palti (Raphu's son) for Benja-
min; 10Gaddiel (Sodi's son) for Zebulun;
11Gaddi (Susi's son) for Joseph's *tribe,*
Manasseh; 12Ammiel (Gemalli's son) for
Dan; 13Sethur (Michael's son) for Asher;
14Nahbi (Vophsi's son) for Naphtali; 15and
Geuel (Machi's son) for Gad. 16These are
the names of the men selected to spy out
Canaan. And Moses changed the name of
Hoshea (son of Nun) to Joshua*, who would
succeed Moses.*

17Moses sent this group to spy out
the land of Canaan.

Moses: Trek through the *southland desert
of* Negev and up into the high country.
18*I want you to* tell us about the land and
especially about its people—are they
strong or weak? Are there a lot of them
or only a few? 19-20Do their cities have
fortifications, or are their camps open all
around? Also, is the land itself good or
bad, its soil rich or poor? Are there any
trees? Be bold, and bring back samples
of what grows there like their grapes.

It was in midsummer when you'd expect
them to find grapes just beginning to
ripen.

21They set out, *these men,* and
explored the land from the flat Zin wilder-
ness, *north of Paran where the rest were
camped,* all the way to Rehob *on the coast*
and Lebo-hamath *much farther north.*
22They trekked first into the Negev and up
to Hebron, a city built seven years before
the Egyptian town of Zoan *in the Nile
Delta.* There, they saw the *giant* Anakite
people, including *the clans of* Ahiman,
Sheshai, and Talmai; 23-24and they checked
out the *lush* Eshcol riverbed that, as its
name suggests, grew bunches of grapes. *So
thick and heavy were the clusters that* when
two of the men cut down one branch
holding one cluster, they had to carry it

on a pole between them. They also picked up some pomegranates and figs *from that place*.

25After 40 days, they returned from exploring 26to *the camp at* Kadesh, in the Paran Wilderness, and went directly to Moses and Aaron and all the Israelite congregation, which had gathered to hear what the scouts had learned and to see what fruits they had brought back with them.

Twelve Scouts *(to Moses)*: 27We checked out the land, just as you'd instructed us to do, and here's what we discovered: *It is rich, very rich. One could say that* it flows with milk and honey; and look, here is some of its fruit. *The land is highly desirable,* 28but the people who already live there are really strong. Their cities are enormous and fortified. What's more, we saw the Anakites there. 29In the Negev, there are Amalekites; and in the high hill country are Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites. As for the seacoast, Canaanites live there and along the Jordan River too.

It is certain the Israelites are deeply discouraged by this report, for what was said about the native inhabitants is most alarming.

30But Caleb calmed the congregation, and he spoke to Moses.

Caleb: We should go straight in, right away, and take it over. We are surely able!

Other Scouts: 31No way. We can't do it. The people who are already there are too strong for us.

32So the report of these other scouts was quite disheartening; *it made the people question God's promise.*

Other Scouts: The land that we surveyed virtually eats its own, and the people themselves are gigantic. 33We saw the *massive* Anakites who descended from the ancient Nephilim!* We look like grasshoppers compared to them, and they know it.

14 At this, everybody with one voice cried out, and the people groaned and wept all night.

Israelites *(blaming Moses and Aaron)*: 2If only we had just died in Egypt or somewhere *along the way* in this wilderness, 3rather than the Eternal One leading us out here to have us slaughtered and our women and the youngsters dragged off as plunder, *too, as objects for their pleasure.* Wouldn't it be good just to go back to Egypt? 4Let's figure out among ourselves who should head the group and then make our way back to Egypt.

5While all the gathered Israelites watched, Moses and Aaron collapsed to the ground before the people. 6Joshua (Nun's son, *Moses' young assistant—the one who would succeed him*) and Caleb (who was Jephunneh's son) *lamented the Israelites' response. These two,* who were among those who journeyed into the *promised* land to explore it and bring back a report, tore their clothes 7and addressed the whole community of Israelites.

Joshua and Caleb: The land that we saw was extraordinary! It's some of the best land ever, 8flowing with milk and honey. *So stop this moaning and wailing!* If we all do what is right in the eyes of God, the Eternal will bring us into the land and make it ours. 9Do not rebel *like this* against the Eternal. Don't be afraid of the land's inhabitants. It is we who will devour them! They are now defenseless, and nothing can protect them from the Eternal, who is with us. You don't need to be afraid of them!

10But the rest of the Israelites *were not convinced. Enraged, the crowd* moved to stone Joshua and Caleb. Suddenly, the glory of the Eternal swept into the congregation tent in front of them all.

► What a sad time it is for the Israelites! Joshua and Caleb have pleaded for courage among the people, and Moses and Aaron must now plead for patience on the part of the Lord. The Israelites stand on the edge of God's promise, and they can't find the courage to believe and to move forward by faith into the promise. Because of their reluctance to believe, they must wander through this wilderness with

* 13:33 Genesis 6:1-4

only God to supply their basic needs until He has purged the nation of those who lack faith. The next 38 years will cleanse the nation and develop the character each person needs to claim the promises of God. This same two-step process is repeated throughout the Bible: refine and cleanse while building the necessary faith. Unfortunately, the fire necessary for refinement is normally painful.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 11How many times will this *ungrateful* people turn their backs to Me? How long will they *persist in their faithlessness,* refusing to recognize all the wondrous signs I performed in their midst? 12I will crush them with dreadful sickness and disinherit them *from Me and the land. However,* I will *accept you and* make you into a *fearsome* nation, far greater and more impressive than they *might be or could ever dream of being.*

Moses: 13*If You kill them*, the Egyptians (whom You forced Your people away from) will get wind of it, 14and they'll tell the people of this new world, because all have already heard that You, O Eternal One, are present among Your people here, that You've been seen face-to-face, and that You personally guide them by a cloud-column during the day and a fire-column at night. 15If You wipe out these, Your *chosen* people, in one fell swoop, then *Your reputation among the other nations will be shot.* All of those other peoples who have heard about You will say, 16"The Eternal One couldn't *finish the job. He couldn't* bring the people into the land He'd promised to them, so He slaughtered them in the desert." 17Instead, demonstrate that great power of Yours when You declared, 18"I am slow to get angry and overflow with consistently boundless love. I forgive wrongdoing and waywardness, but I don't overlook the necessity for justice, so I punish the guilty ones' third and fourth *coming* generations." 19So, in light of the greatness of Your unwavering love, forgive this people's wrongdoing just as You've done before—from Egypt all the way here.

Eternal One: 20I have pardoned them as you've asked Me to do. 21But as I live, the earth will be filled with My brilliant glory; 22-23this particular generation will never get to enjoy the land I promised to their ancestors *so long ago*. Although they witnessed My glory and signs firsthand, and the amazing feats I accomplished *on their behalf* in Egypt and on this desert *sojourn,* they tested Me *over and over again,* even 10 times, and even directly disobeyed. None of the people who have turned their backs on Me will ever see the land. 24For Caleb, though, it's a different matter. He's distinct from the others by having a different spirit and has followed My lead wholeheartedly. I will make sure that he is able to enter the land and to live in it—he and his descendants after him.

25Now, to avoid the Amalekites and Canaanites who presently inhabit the valleys, turn around tomorrow, and make for the desert by way of the Red Sea.*

26The Eternal One reiterated to Moses and Aaron,

Eternal One: 27How many times will these bad people grumble against Me *and My choices*? It seems that all I hear is Israelites complaining, *complaining, complaining!* 28So tell them I say, "As I live, I will make sure that what you're complaining about really does happen—29you'll die out here in the desert, every single one of you old enough to have been organized in the counting (20 years or older) who complained about Me. 30Not a single one of that group will have the privilege of entering the land I made an oath to give to you. Only Caleb (Jephunneh's son) and Joshua (Nun's son) will enter. 31Your children, those whom you feared would be taken by the land's present inhabitants, will *eventually* enter the land you've rejected. 32But the rest of you? You'll die out here in the desert. 33Until then, your children *will have to wait it out,* keeping the herds and flocks out here in the wilderness. On account of your faithlessness, they'll have to wait the 40 years it'll take for you all to die. 34The same number of scouting days—40—is the number of years you'll carry the guilt of your wrongs for being so hard-headed and know Me as *only* an enemy." 35*Well, there*

* 14:25 Literally, Sea of Reeds

it is. I, the Eternal One, have spoken, and so I will do it. This *especially* wicked group that banded together against Me will suffer for it, *each and every one,* and will come to an end and die out here in this wilderness.

36-37*Remember that* the men who had been hand-selected by Moses to scout out the *promised* land delivered a less-than-positive report. Consequently, in the assenting presence of the Eternal, they were all killed by a plague. 38All, that is, except for Joshua (son of Nun) and Caleb (son of Jephunneh).

39When Moses delivered this message *from the Lord* to the Israelites, they *were devastated and* greatly mourned. 40But in the morning, they got up with the sun and climbed high into the hills.

Israelites: Well, here we are. Despite our wrongdoings, let's go up into the land the Eternal promised us *on our own.*

Moses: 41Why do you keep doing what you're not supposed to do? You will not succeed in your efforts. 42-43He will not accompany you, so you're vulnerable on all sides. Because you've rejected the Eternal, you won't have Him in your midst and on your side. When you run into the Amalekites and Canaanites, they will slay you on the spot.

44Despite *Moses' protestations,* the people tried. The chest of the Eternal's covenant and Moses himself remained back in the camp. 45*Sure enough,* the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived there descended upon them, attacked them, and chased them clear back to Hormah, *which means the place of complete destruction.*

15 The Eternal One spoke to Moses *about sacrifices.*

Eternal One: 2Give the Israelites these instructions: "When you enter the land I determined would be yours, where you'll settle *and make your homes,* 3-4and when you burn a *food* offering, burnt offering, or sacrifice *of meat* from the herd or flock to make a pleasing aroma for Me; you should always accompany it with a grain offering—about two quarts of really good flour mixed with about one quart of oil. Do this whether your offering is a sworn vow or something you're freely offering during the appointed festival. 5*Oh,* and give a drink offering of some wine: about one quart for each lamb whenever you make a sacrifice or offering. 6*For bigger animals* like a ram offer about four quarts of flour and about one and one-quarter quarts of oil, 7and make about one and one-quarter quarts for the drink offering of wine. *All of* this will be a soothing aroma to Me. 8For a bull (whether burnt or simply as a sacrifice to satisfy a promise or as an offering of well-being), 9about six quarts of flour mixed with about two quarts of oil, 10and make the drink offering two quarts of wine. Offer it by fire to make a soothing smell to Me. 11This is how you should offer oxen or rams, male lambs, or young goats. 12*The specified accompaniments are for a single animal,* so increase it based on the number of offerings you make. 13-14Every Israelite should follow these instructions for an offering by fire to make a soothing smell for Me. Others who happen to be living among you temporarily or permanently should offer sacrifices in the same way. 15-16There should be no difference throughout the community in this matter—Israelite or not—forever. You and the foreigner dwelling with you are the same, as I see it, so you all should follow the same rules and regulations."

17(to Moses) 18Tell the Israelites this *as well*: "After you've entered the land that I'm taking you to, 19whenever you enjoy the land's bread, give a contribution to Me by raising up your offering to Me. 20-21Just as you set aside a little grain on the threshing floor, so you and your descendants should set aside a little cake loaf from the first batch, as an offering to Me.

22"If, *somehow,* someone overlooked or otherwise accidentally failed to do what I spelled out through Moses *for the congregation* 23(all those commandments from the first day I gave them to you and throughout coming generations), 24-26and it only came to the attention of the community after the fact, then the whole congregation should offer a bull together. Offer all of it by fire so that it smells good to Me along with the requisite grain and drink offerings, and sacrifice a male goat since it was a sin of sorts. In the process, the priest will cover all the Israelites, and they'll be forgiven, for it was an unintentional offense. So, if they do all the right things to rectify the situation, then everyone

A constant theme as God instructs His people is to remember or to have a memorial: the family of Abraham builds monuments of stacked stones almost everywhere they go, and these people will do the same as they enter the land. Each child is given a name with clear meaning about either the character of the child or about the faithfulness of God. Each town is given a name that recalls something of significance, maybe the founder or a great war. Likewise, the foods they eat in their feasts have meaning or help them recall a shared memory. The offerings of the Israelites and the later sacraments of the church all serve as memorials or remembrances.

Here God instructs the people to alter their garments as a reminder of His commands and their own responsibilities to obey. Since the punishment for unbelief or disobedience is severe, God in His grace builds reminders into everyday life so the people do not have to struggle to remember these critical rules or truths.

(and not just native Israelites but even all the other people who happen to be living with them at the time) will be forgiven.

27"If an individual sins by accident *(and the congregation catches it in time),* he should offer a female yearling goat as the sin offering. 28Thereby the priest shall cover that individual who sins accidentally in front of Me. Now that the mistake is covered, that person shall be forgiven. 29This is the way it should be for Israelites and outsiders alike—for anyone who accidentally errs. 30-31If it's not an accident—the guilty person simply didn't care about abiding by the instructions I gave to the Israelites *through Moses* and knowingly disregarded them—that's different. Such a person, whether an Israelite or a stranger, has essentially rejected God. The community will ostracize him, and he'll have to bear the burden of his guilt."

32One time, when the Israelites were *wandering* in the wilderness, it was discovered that somebody *had broken the Sabbath rest commandment* by gathering firewood. 33The people who saw the man brought him to Moses and Aaron and the gathered congregation. 34They weren't sure what to do with him because nothing had been declared yet, so they kept him confined. 35The Eternal One told Moses the man should be killed, that the whole congregation should take him outside the camp and stone him to death. 36So they did just as the Eternal told them to do and executed him.

37Once again the Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 38Tell the Israelites to make fringes on each corner of their clothes and include a blue thread in each fringe. They should do this forever, 39as it will bring to mind all My commandments and remind them not to wander off to do whatever their eyes see or hearts desire, and pursue them without restraint. 40Instead, they will remember and do all of My commandments and be holy to your God.

41I, the Eternal One, am your True God, *the One* who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Eternal One, your True God.

16 *Sometime later, a discontented contingent challenged Moses.* Korah (Izhar's son, Kohath's grandson, and Levi's great-grandson) together with the Reubenites Dathan and Abiram (Eliab's sons) and On (Peleth's son) 2gathered another 250 Israelite men, all of them respectable members of the community, some even chosen leaders, and confronted Moses.

Korah and His Men *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** 3You've taken this leadership way too far. We are all holy; indeed each individual *is holy to our God.* The Eternal One is present among the entire congregation. How can you presume to be better than any of us, the Eternal's *chosen* community?

4When Moses heard their complaint, he collapsed to the ground, *again hoping to divert God's anger.*

Moses *(to Korah and his men)***:** 5In the morning, the Eternal One will demonstrate exactly who is who among

us—who belongs to the Eternal* as a holy servant whom He allows into His presence. He will indicate whom He chooses to approach Him. 6All of you, take censers: Korah and your company. 7Light them, put incense on the flame, and set them down in front of the Eternal tomorrow. The person whom He chooses will be the holy one. O Levites, you have taken this too far!

8(to Korah) Listen, you Levites. 9Isn't it enough that the God of Israel has selected you specially, out of the entire Israelite congregation, to allow you to come close to the Eternal in the process of taking care of His very congregation tent and place of revelation? To be so distinguished before all of the other Israelites in your service? 10The Eternal has granted you this privilege, Korah, you and all your fraternity of Levites. Yet you want the whole priesthood too? *You should be ashamed.* 11This has led you to band together against the Eternal. But why should you be so hard and gripe against Aaron?

12Bring *the brothers* Dathan and Abiram (Eliab's sons) to me.

Dathan and Abiram: *Forget it.* We are not going to come *running at your bidding.* 13You took us out of a place that was so rich—*Egypt,* flowing with milk and honey—in order to let us die in this desert wasteland, and now you're actually trying to assert yourself as our ruler. 14You haven't brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey or delivered on your promise of fields and vineyards to call our own. *What else will you do?* Are you going to pluck out the eyes of these *250* men now? There's no way we're coming to you.

15Now, Moses was furious.

Moses *(to the Lord)***:** *Whatever You do,* do not even look at the offerings from these people. I've never taken anything that belonged to them or hurt them in any way.

Moses responds with a justified and righteous anger. He demands that they be ignored because they're full of themselves, and they are liars too.

16(to Korah) You, get your *unruly* mob over here tomorrow. *Assemble in this spot*—before the Eternal One *Himself*—you and your people. Aaron will be there too. 17Then let each person (all 250) take his censer, put the incense into it, and present it to the Eternal. You, too, Korah; and Aaron will do the same.

18They all did this. They ignited the censers, put their incense inside, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the opening of the congregation tent *where God would meet with them.* 19But Korah stirred up the people standing there against Moses and Aaron. The glory of the Eternal One was visible to all, 20and then the Eternal spoke to Moses and Aaron.

► Suddenly the brilliance of God's glory overtakes the place. The people are used to the glory of God being reserved for Moses. But now all could experience it. This rare occurrence is again related to open rebellion against Moses. God makes it clear: His conduit to the people is Moses. They must have thought back on the experience at Hazeroth, when Miriam and Aaron chastised Moses for marrying a Cushite, and God also appeared (chapter 12).

Eternal One: 21You two, break away from this crowd. Step aside so that I can devour them in a moment.

22But Moses and Aaron fell down, bowing low *before the glory of God.*

Moses and Aaron: O God, God of the spirit of all human beings, will You really take out Your anger for one person's wrongdoing on this large group?

23The Eternal One told Moses,

Eternal One: 24*Well, then,* tell *the innocent* people *to step aside,* to distance themselves from the places where Korah, Dathan, and Abiram live.

25So Moses picked himself up and went over to Dathan and Abiram, with all Israel's elders closely behind.

* 16:5 2 Timothy 2:19

Moses *(to the greater congregation)*: 26Get away from the houses of these presumptuous people *who have made the Lord so angry.* Get away from them and from all their possessions so that you're not destroyed *along with them* for their wrongdoing.

27The people *hurried to* distance themselves from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and from their tents. Then Dathan and Abiram, along with their wives and children, stepped out of their tents and stood in the openings.

Moses: 28Watch now, and you'll have proof that I'm not acting out of self-interest but was truly sent by the Eternal One to do everything *I've done so far*. 29If these instigators die normally, of natural causes, then I am not sent by Him. 30But if He does something completely extraordinary, if the ground *underneath them* opens up and swallows them whole along with everything they have (so that they go straight down into the land of death even while they're still alive); then you can be absolutely sure that these men have willfully turned their backs on the Eternal One.

31No sooner had Moses finished speaking than the earth split underneath them. 32The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them down—them and everything and everyone associated with Korah. 33Then, *just as suddenly,* the ground closed up over them again, and so they perished, taken alive to the land of the dead. 34Those who remained ran away, terrified.

Surviving Israelites: What if the earth swallows us up too?

35A fire shot out from the Eternal One and incinerated the 250 men who were offering the incense *on Korah's behalf.*

36The Eternal One continued speaking to Moses.

Eternal One: 37-40Tell Priest Aaron's son, Eleazar, to pull the censers out of the smoldering pile and scatter the burning coals all around, *as far as he can.* Take the censers used by these men, at the cost of their lives, and hammer them down into sheets that can cover the altar. After all, the objects are now holy, having been presented to Me. They'll also serve as a cautionary reminder for the Israelites that anyone who isn't related to Aaron shouldn't presume to approach Me with incense—or else he'll end up like Korah and his men, just as I told you to warn would happen.

So Eleazar the priest hammered the bronze censers down into a covering for the altar. 41Nevertheless, on the very next day, all of the Israelite people railed against Moses and Aaron.

Israelites: You murdered *Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their families,* those people of the Eternal One.

42-43When the congregation gathered to attack them, Moses and Aaron headed for the congregation tent and stood in front of it. The cloud was there, and the brilliance of the Eternal's presence was obvious to all. 44There, the Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 45Stay clear of this *rebellious* lot because I am going to devour them right now.

Moses and Aaron fell to the ground, *hoping to abate God's anger*.

Moses *(to Aaron)*: 46Hurry, light your censer off of the altar's flame, put incense on the flame, and bring it out into the midst of the congregation to cover their *sins*! The Eternal One's anger has already headed into the crowd, carrying plague *and destruction with it.*

47So Aaron rushed into the crowd with his *sacred* censer, even as people had already begun to suffer the plague. He stood there covering their sins with the incense smoke, 48and where he stood, the plague stopped—dead people on one side, the living on the other. 49*Thus the plague ended as swiftly as it had begun,* but a full 14,700 died that day, in addition to all those who died in the Korah affair. 50Then Aaron walked back to join Moses in front of the congregation tent since the plague had stopped.

17 The Eternal One continued.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2-3Tell the Israelites that you'll need twelve staffs—one for each of the extended families. Engrave on each one the respective leader's name. (Aaron's name

should be on the Levi family's staff.)
[4]Bring the staff of each of them into the
congregation tent and lay them in front
of My tablets of witness with you in the
place where I meet you. [5]I will indicate
the person whom I choose by making
his particular staff grow *shoots and*
leaves. This will end *once and for all* any
complaints about your leadership.

[6-7]Moses passed these instructions on to the Israelites, and they all agreed to do it. They each gave their staffs as leaders representing their extended families with Aaron's staff among them. Then Moses placed them before the Eternal One in the tent of the congregation and before the covenant. [8]The next day, when Moses went into the tent where the covenant was kept, it was obvious that *Aaron of* the Levite family *was God's choice*. Aaron's staff had grown not only little buds, but it had actually flowered and developed fully-ripened almonds. [9]Moses carried the staffs out of the Eternal's presence, showed them to the congregation, and redistributed them to the *twelve* leaders.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: [10]Return Aaron's
staff to the tent *and place it* in front of
the covenant, to serve as a reminder *of*
whom I've chosen to lead this people. Let
it be a warning to any who would ques-
tion or undermine *your leadership*. I *have*
made My choice clear and will kill any-
one who persists in challenging it.

[11]So Moses returned Aaron's staff to the tent just as the Eternal told him to do.

► The rod or staff is a symbol of guidance, protection, and power. At this time, the people are confused and afraid because the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—followed by their sudden and absolute judgment—has caused the Israelites to think hard about their situation. Remember they said in response to God's judgment, "What if the earth swallows us up too?" They are truly in awe of God. Immediately after this upheaval, God establishes the leadership of Aaron and his successors using the staff of Aaron. Only his staff and not those of the other leaders is affected. His staff not only buds but it bears fruit—almonds. Like the symbols of the testimony and the manna, the staff is a memorial for the people. With the staff, they are reminded that the Lord provides and protects.

Israelites *(to Moses)*: [12]We're going to die!
We will be destroyed! [13]If anyone comes
close to the tent where the Eternal One
is supposed to meet with us, then he'll
die. Will we all die, then?

18 **Eternal One** *(to Aaron)*: It's on
you and your sons and your
extended family *that the respon-*
sibility for this sanctuary lies. Any offense
against the sacred meeting place, whether
the sanctuary or the priesthood, is to be
born by the members of your ancestral
house. [2]So gather your extended family,
your immediate family and those belong-
ing to your staff, the tribe of Levi, so that
they understand you're all in this together.
Your brothers *from the greater Levi family*
will assist you while you and your sons
come up to the tent holding the cov-
enant. [3-5]Those Levites will answer to you
and help out with the tent as a whole,
but they *absolutely* may not touch the
vessels of the sacred place or approach
its altar. If they do, they and you will die.
Also, an outsider may not approach you.
This way, the whole congregation will be
forever spared My destructive fury. [6]So I
hereby appoint, as your assistants, your
fellow Levites out of all of the Israelites. I
give them to you as persons set apart for
Me to do what is necessary for the main-
tenance of this congregation tent. [7]That
way, you and your sons will be free to
carefully attend the altar and My dwelling
place behind the veil, *which is forbidden*
to everyone else. Think of it as a kind of
gift *for the whole people,* since it is fatal for
anyone else to approach My sacred space.

► Since the Levitical tribe inherits God Himself rather than a territory of land that they can farm and have for livestock, they are given a portion of the meat, grain, and drink offerings offered up by the people.

Eternal One *(continuing to Aaron)*: 8As for you in particular, everything people give to Me for all time, I put you in charge of and give to you and your sons as a priestly portion as a perpetual decree. 9When anything the people give as an offering to Me isn't burnt in its entirety, you will keep it—as the most holy items from the grain offerings, the sin or guilt offerings. All of this is most sacred to you and your sons. 10While recognizing its holiness, you and every Levite male should go ahead and eat it in the most holy place. 11Also, I am giving as a perpetual decree to you, your sons and daughters, too, whatever people raise up in offering to Me. Whoever is *ritually* pure from your house may eat from those offerings. 12That includes, of course, the very best items—oil, wine, grain, and produce. Whatever people bring by way of offerings to Me, I give to you. 13-14The first of the harvest and anything which is set aside for Me shall be yours; any in your family can eat from it, so long as he or she is *ritually* pure. 15-16Likewise, the firstborn of men or animals, which are of course Mine, I hereby pass on to you. For the firstborn sons and ritually unclean animals should not be sacrificed; rather the people should simply pay five coins (calculated as the value of a one-month-old), each worth the two ounces (according to the sanctuary standard). 17As for the *other animals,* the firstborn of a cow, a sheep, or a goat, you shall carry through on their sacrifice. They are indeed holy *to Me.* Make sure to throw some of their blood on the altar and incinerate their fat because it is to Me a soothing aroma. 18You can have the meat itself, though, just as you get to have the breast of an uplifted offering and the right thigh too. 19Everything sanctified and offered by the Israelites to Me, I am giving to you and your sons and your daughters as a perpetual decree. This is *a binding agreement for all time*—a covenant of salt, made in the presence of Me *and preserved* for you and your descendants after you.

20(continuing to Aaron) *And you'll need these things because* you are not allowed to own land or any part of it *in the place I've promised. Rather,* I am your portion and possession among the Israelites. 21-24Your family, the Levites, shall not have any property, but they shall have what the Israelites bring to My tent as a tenth portion. Because the Levites alone can approach the congregation tent without dying and must do so to perform the necessary maintenance, but have no land of their own, they get to keep a tenth of the Israelites' offerings.

25(to Moses) 26Tell the Levites that they should set aside a tenth portion of what they get from the Israelites' sacrifices to give back to Me. In other words, they must give a tenth offering of the tenth offering given to them from the people of Israel. 27Tell them, "This portion will be counted as your gift *to Me,* as if it is all the grain harvested and threshed and all the wine pressed and decanted. 28In this way, you will be making an offering to Me from what you received from the Israelites (though you'll do so by entrusting this tenth portion to the priest Aaron). 29Out of everything you get, you should set aside the very best as a holy portion to Me. 30After this, what's left is absolutely yours, as if it is all the grain harvested and threshed and all the wine pressed and decanted. 31You can eat *and drink* it anywhere—you and your whole household—because it's what you've earned by working on behalf of the congregation tent. 32After you've given up that superior portion, you may do with the rest as you wish. Just be careful that you treat the holy portion, what was set aside *for* Me by the Israelites, with utmost respect; or else you'll die."

19

The Eternal One told Moses and Aaron *about purity rituals.*

Eternal One: 2I want to remind you about a decree of instruction by My command: "*When they need to make a sin offering,* instruct the Israelites to bring a *young* female cow, red in color, that is perfect in every visible way and has never worked. 3Hand it over to the priest, Eleazar. He will then oversee its slaughter outside the camp, 4dip his finger in the blood, splatter the blood seven times in the direction of the congregation tent's opening, 5and make sure that the carcass is burned, *every bit of it*—hide, flesh, blood, and dung. 6While the cow burns, the priest will throw onto the fire some *aromatic woods*—cedar and hyssop—*bound together by* scarlet thread. 7-8Afterward, the priest should *carefully* wash himself and his clothes; then he can reenter the camp. Likewise the one who burns the fire should also

wash himself and his clothes. But recognize that they are *ritually* impure until that evening. 9-10Someone else, someone *ritually* pure, should collect the ashes that remain from the *completely burnt* offering and put them all in a *ritually* pure place outside the boundaries of the camp. Then that person, too, should wash his clothes and understand he is *ritually* impure until evening. The ashes will be used to make a cleansing solution for the Israelites. This is a sin offering.

Remember and observe this perpetual statute *concerning ritual contamination and cleansing,* which applies to the foreigner who lives among you as well as to all native Israelites: 11Anyone who touches a dead human body will be considered impure for a week. 12*Midweek and at the end,* on the third and seventh days, he will use the *burnt offering ashes dissolved in* water to purify himself. If he fails to do so, he will not be pure. 13*This is a serious business,* for everyone who comes into contact with a human corpse must purify himself *like this*. Otherwise, he pollutes My tent and so must be banished from Israel. If he has not been doused with the special cleansing water, his impurity still clings to him. He is impure.

14*Now* if someone dies indoors, then everyone entering or inside the tent will be impure for the full seven days. 15*Not only that, but* any cup, jar, or bowl that is open or didn't otherwise have a cover attached *when that person died* will also be impure. 16Out in the countryside, *the same general rule applies*. If someone happens to touch a person either killed outright or who simply died naturally, or if he touches a *single* human bone or a whole gravesite, he shall be impure for the week. 17For such a person, take some of the aforesaid ashes mixed in a container with running water. 18A person who is *ritually* pure should then dip a hyssop branch into the water and splash some water on the *contaminated* home—and on all the things in it and the people, too—or on the person who touched a corpse or some part of a dead person. 19The ritually pure person must do this for the impure individual on the third and seventh days. Then he must purify himself, washing his body and clothes in water, so that he's pure when it becomes evening on the seventh day.

20Those who don't so purify themselves shall be cast out of the community because they have *scorned and* polluted My holy place. Since the cleansing water hasn't been splashed on them, they are impure. 21This is a perpetual decree. The person who sprinkles the water and the one who touches the water for impurity also needs to wash his clothes after handling the cleansing water and will be ritually impure until evening. 22Everything any impure person touches will be impure and make others who touch it impure, too, until evening.

20 After the Israelites, the whole group of them, journeyed into the Zin Wilderness during the first month, they set up camp in Kadesh. And it was there that Miriam died and was buried.

2They ran out of water and *again* blamed *their leaders,* Moses and Aaron.

Israelites *(arguing with Moses)*: 3It would have been so much better if we had simply died along with the rest of our relatives, *Korah, Abiram, and Dathan,* right in front of the Eternal One.* 4-5Why in the world would you drag us, the Eternal's own group, out of Egypt into this wilderness where we'll soon die and our livestock too? And there aren't any grains, figs, grapes, or pomegranates, and there isn't even any water!

► Will these people never learn? But why should they be any different than the rest of us? We all tend to forget God's provision, and we focus on the challenge before us. God has been leading them through a region full of challenges. You would think that after 40 years of daily provision from God in the wilderness these people would quit fearing the worst, especially since they have already gone through this very same experience once before—when they came out of Egypt in Exodus 17. Unfortunately, Moses doesn't follow God's instruction just as it is delivered to him, so he, too, is unfaithful. Instead of "provision" or "water-of-plenty," the place is known as Meribah

* 20:3 Numbers 16:35

("rebellion"). They are to remember their lack of faith and their active rebellion against God their savior every time they mention this place.

6After *hearing them out,* Moses and Aaron walked away. At the congregation tent's opening, they collapsed to the ground, *interceding for the people.* Then *and there,* the Eternal's glory shone for them to see, 7and He spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 8You and Aaron grab the staff *before the covenant chest,* gather the whole group so that all the people can see *and hear* you, and speak to the rock. Tell it to release its water for them to use. In this way, you'll get water from the rock for everyone to drink, including all the animals.

9So Moses did that. He took the staff just as God told him to do. 10Then he and his brother gathered all the people in front of the rock.

Moses *(to the Israelites)***:** Listen up, you rebellious lot. Should we get water for you from this rock?

11*And as he spoke,* Moses raised his hand and hit the rock—once, twice—and *immediately* the water came gushing out. All drank their fill, people and animals alike. 12But the Eternal One scolded Moses and Aaron *for their actions.*

Eternal One: Because you didn't trust Me and treat Me as holy before the Israelites, you will not lead this group into the land I have given them.

13Because at this spot the Israelites rebelled against the Eternal and the display of His holiness, the water here is called Meribah, *which means "rebellion."*

14Also while in Kadesh, Moses sent a message to the Edomite king.

► Kadesh ("holy") is the place where God was not treated in a holy manner by the Israelites, including Moses and Aaron. And neither do Israel's ancient relatives from Esau, the Edomites, who shared a common ancestor with Israel—Isaac.

Moses' Message *(to the king of Edom)***:** *Greetings* from your brother, Israel. You've heard how hard these past years have been for us; 15how *in the midst of famine,* our ancestors journeyed down into Egypt; and how after settling there a long while, the Egyptians began to treat our ancestors and then us harshly. 16The Eternal heard and answered our *pitiful* cry, actually sent a messenger and led us out of Egypt. Now here we are in Kadesh, right at the border of your country. 17Would you please grant us permission to cross through? I promise that we won't take anything from your seeded farmland or cultivated countryside. Nor will we drink from your wells. We will stick to *the main road,* the king's highway, and not step off it either to the right or left until we're *well* past your country's limits.

Edom's Message: 18No. If you so much as put a foot in our territory, we'll attack you.

Israelites' Message: 19But we will keep strictly to the highway and pay you if any of us or any of our animals drink any water, only let us pass through.

Edom's Message: 20Absolutely not.

At that point, the Edomites indeed came out in force, fully armed, against the Israelites. 21This response proved there was no negotiating with Edom for passage, so the Israelites turned to go another direction.

22-23The whole Israelite community packed up and left Kadesh. They journeyed to the edge of Edomite territory, to Mount Hor, *specifically.*

Eternal One *(to Moses and Aaron)***:** 24Because you *two* didn't follow My orders back at the waters of Meribah, it is time for Aaron to die and be with his ancestors. 25So bring Aaron, along with the son *who will be his successor,* Eleazar, up to Mount Hor. 26There, you shall strip Aaron of his priestly garments that distinguish him *as the priest of priests* and put them on Eleazar. There, Aaron will join his ancestors in death.

27 *With a heavy heart,* Moses did just as the
Eternal One had instructed. These *brothers, now old, slowly* made their way up
Mount Hor while the whole community
watched. 28 *When they reached* the top,
Moses stripped Aaron of his priestly robes
and put them on Aaron's son, Eleazar. And
Aaron died there. Then Moses and Eleazar
went back down the mountain. 29 Understanding that Aaron was dead, the family
of Israel wept for 30 days.

The customary mourning period is seven days, but as with Moses' death later, they mourn for 30 days.

21 *Meanwhile,* the Canaanite king
of Arad (which is in the Negev
region) heard that the Israelites
were approaching through Atharim, so
he engaged them in battle. He even took
some Israelites as prisoners of war.

Israelites *(vowing to the Lord)***:** 2 We pledge
to You that if You help us win against
these people, we will *dedicate every last one of them to You and* completely
destroy their towns.

3 The Eternal One agreed to their proposal.
He gave the Canaanites to the Israelites,
and they promptly decimated the population and place. Consequently, the site is
called Hormah, *which means "destruction."*

4 And the Israelites set out again. They
left Mount Hor and traveled by way of the
Red Sea,* skirting Edom; but *again,* the *difficult* travel gave everyone a short temper.
5 They challenged both God and Moses.

Israelites: What were you thinking to
bring us up out of Egypt and let us die
out here in this desert land? There's
nothing to eat and no water either. We
are sick *and tired* of *living on* what food
we have.

6 *As a divine response,* the Eternal One sent
venomous snakes* among them and the
people were bitten. A number of Israelites
were indeed killed by them. 7 They then
appealed to Moses.

Israelites: *We are so sorry!* We know that it
was wrong to speak against the Eternal
and against you. Please talk to the Him,
and get Him to take these *awful* snakes
away.

So Moses appealed to God on behalf of the
terrified and chastened congregation, 8 and
He instructed Moses.

Eternal One: Make a venomous snake
that looks like the ones tormenting the congregation, and put it on a pole. Everyone who gets bitten can simply look at
your serpent and be healed.

9 So Moses took some bronze and cast a
likeness of those *vicious* snakes *to serve as an antidote* for anyone who had been
bitten. If they were to look on the bronze
serpent, they would then live.

10-13 And the Israelites continued on
their journey. They camped at Oboth; then
at Iyeabarim (bordering Moab's eastern
border); then in the Wadi Zered; and
then on the far side of the Arnon, which
put them in the wilderness between the
Moabite and Amorite territories. 14 This is
what is described in The Book of the Eternal One's Wars:

Waheb in Suphah*
and the river beds of Arnon;
15 The riverbeds that run right up to the
settlement of Ar
and along the edge of Moab.

16 From there, they journeyed on
to Beer, *the place called "the well"* where
the Eternal One told Moses, "Gather the
congregation, so I can give them water."
17 At that time, they all sang the Song of
the Well:

Israelites: Spring up, O well!
Sing, sing to the well,
18 The well our leaders dug for us,
our noblemen dug with their own
scepters and staffs.

And they carried on from the wilderness to Mattanah, 19-20 and from there to
Nahaliel, then Bamoth, and on to the valley that's in *the higher places of* Moab, at
Pisgah's peak where one can look down on
the *Jeshimon* Wilderness.

At that point, the Israelites came to the borderlands of another people and needed permission to pass through the land.

21 So Israel sent messengers to the
Amorite king, Sihon.

* 21:4 Literally, Sea of Reeds * 21:6 Hebrew, *seraphim,* which literally is "fiery snakes" * 21:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

Israel's Message: 22Please grant us permission to cross your country. We promise not to deviate and take anything from your seeded farmland or cultivated countryside. Nor will we drink from your wells. We will stick to *the main road,* the king's highway, until we're past your country's *far* limits.

► The Amorite King Sihon receives the same envoy as the Edomite king, and his response is the same: "You can't pass through here." Many of the other nations in this chronicle are aware of the divine provision of the Israelites because it is obvious that the survival of this enormous group in such an inhospitable environment is the work of God. With this understanding, the Amorite king nevertheless chooses to pick a fight with them. Not only did he say "no" to the Israelites crossing their territory, but he attacked. There is a very important principle here: don't be on the opposite side of God in a fight.

23Sihon would not allow them to pass. Instead, he roused all the Amorites and attacked the Israelites right there in the wilderness. They battled it out at Jahaz. 24Israel met Sihon head-on and won the battle. They killed Sihon and took possession of the whole territory. That land goes from the Arnon to the Jabbok River and extends up to the Ammonites' border, which is very well fortified.* 25-26Israel took over all that area, claimed the Amorite cities and *surrounding* villages, and settled there. *This included* the *capital* city of Heshbon from where King Sihon ruled the Amorites. (It was Sihon who had challenged the late king of the Moabites *and prevailed,* making the territory of Moab all the way to the Arnon part of the Amorites' lands.) 27That's where the singers get this *taunting* song:

Come gather at Heshbon, the city built
up and strong—
the city of Sihon.
28For a fire went out from Heshbon,
a flame from Sihon.
It consumed Ar of Moab,
swallowing the heights of Arnon.
29How terrible for you, O Moab!
You are destroyed, O people of
Chemosh!
Chemosh has made the Amorite, Sihon,
set your sons to rout
and take your daughters into slavery!
30But we destroyed them, from Heshbon
to Dibon,
and ravaged them to Nophah, even
to Medeba.*

31So it was that Israel then took this land from the Amorites and settled there. 32They also captured the Amorite *town of* Jazer and took its villages and removed the Amorites living in the area.

33Then they went *northeast* up the road to Bashan, where King Og and his people confronted the Israelites. When they clashed at Edrei, 34the Eternal One encouraged Moses.

Eternal One: Don't be afraid of him. I've already determined that you'll defeat King Og. He, his people, and all his land *shall be yours.* You'll treat him just as you did the Amorite king, Sihon, in Heshbon.

35Sure enough, the Israelites *defeated Og. They* killed him, his sons, and everyone, *for that matter*. No one survived. So the Israelites took possession of Bashan.

22 *But they didn't remain there.* The Israelites traveled on to the Moabite plains, where they set up camp, just across the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho. 2*The Moabite* Balak (Zippor's son) knew about the Israelites' victory over the Amorites and what they had done there. 3*Actually, everyone in* Moab was terrified of the Israelites. And Moab hated the Israelites, because there were so many of them!

► Now we overhear this very unusual dialogue between the Moabite leader Balak and the respected prophet Balaam. While Balaam is not an Israelite, he has a healthy respect for the God of the Israelites. No matter how Balak tempts Balaam to curse the people of the Lord, God continues speaking to Balaam and frustrating Balak's plans. Eventually it comes

* 21:24 Other manuscripts read, "Jazer." * 21:30 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

down to a not-so-dumb donkey instructing the great prophet. Both Balaam and Balak learn that God is not one to be toyed with. He can frustrate the plans of even the greatest kings and prophets.

Interestingly, a discovery was made in Jordan of an inscription containing prophecies of Balaam. He specialized in animal divination, slaughtering animals for his prophetic purposes. So Balaam was used to hearing God "speak" through animals, if not always so directly.

Moabites *(to elders in the neighboring Midianite community)*: 4This *voracious* horde, *these Israelites,* will wipe us out *without so much as a second thought.* They'll devour us *and move through our land* as a herd of hungry cows mows a field.

Balak (Zippor's son), *you'll remember,* was then the king of Moab. 5*In the face of this threat,* he sent messengers to *the famous prophet* Balaam (Beor's son), who lived in a town that belonged to his country on the *Euphrates* River called Pethor. Balak wanted the prophet *to come to Moab.*

Since the victories over Sihon and Og, the Israelites have gained a reputation of taking over. Their size and strength frighten the local inhabitants.

Moab's Message *(to Balaam)*: There is a group of people who came from Egypt and who have settled right near me. They cover the land with their numbers. 6Come quickly, and curse them for me. There's no other hope that I have of defeating so many of them and driving the rest away. They're too strong. But I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed.

7So the messengers went—elders, actually, from both Moab and Midian—with money in hand, to pay the prophet *to come back with them and curse the Israelites.* They gave him Balak's message.

Balaam *(to the messengers)*: 8*It's been a long trip for you.* Spend the night, and I'll give you the prophecy the Eternal tells me.

So the Moabite *and Midianite* elders stayed *overnight* with Balaam. 9But God came *in the night* to Balaam and questioned him.

Eternal One *(to Balaam)*: Who are these people staying with you?

Balaam: 10*Messengers.* Balak, the king of Moab and Zippor's son, sent them to ask me *for help on their behalf.* 11He says that a certain people, coming from Egypt, seem to be taking over the land. He wants me to curse those people for him so he can fight them and make the survivors leave.

Eternal One: 12Don't do it. The people whom Balak wants you to curse are already blessed.

13So first thing in the morning, Balaam confronted Balak's elders *with the news.*

Balaam: You'll have to go back to your land without me. The Eternal has prohibited me from returning with you.

14The Moabite contingent returned and told Balak that Balaam wouldn't come. 15But Balak *wouldn't take "no" for an answer.* He sent another, bigger contingent of even more highly esteemed men *to solicit Balaam's help.*

Balak's Second Message *(to Balaam)*: 16Don't let anything stop you from coming to Moab; 17there's a lot in it for you—whatever you desire—and I'll make sure you are treated with the greatest honors. Just, please, come and curse these people for me!

Balaam *(to Balak's messengers)*: 18Even if Balak gave me everything he has, riches of silver and gold in his house, I simply couldn't do it. It is impossible for me to say anything less or greater than what the Eternal One, my God, directs me *to say.* 19But, listen, why don't you spend the night, and I'll let you know whatever else the Eternal might tell me *in the meantime.*

20Again, God came to Balaam in the night and spoke with him.

Eternal One *(to Balaam)*: If these men have indeed come to get you, go ahead. Go with them, but do only what I tell you to do.

21So when morning came, Balaam got his donkey ready. He set out with the Moabite elders. 22Nevertheless, God was angry that Balaam was going. He sent His own messenger as an adversary to stand in Balaam's way, *blocking the prophet's path*. Now Balaam was riding on his donkey, and he had two servants too. 23But it was the donkey who saw the Eternal's messenger standing in the road with a sword in his hand, drawn *and ready*. The donkey went off the road and into the field, and Balaam, *not seeing the messenger as his donkey had,* hit the beast to drive it back onto the road; 24but then the messenger of the Eternal stood in the narrow walkway separating two vineyards, and there was a wall on either side. 25Spooked by the Eternal's messenger, the donkey pressed herself against one of the walls, trapping Balaam's foot. Balaam hit her again. 26The Eternal's messenger got ahead of them again and faced them in a narrow spot where they had no way to avoid him. 27This time, the donkey, seeing the Eternal's messenger, just lay down, Balaam still sitting on top. Balaam was furious, and he beat the beast with a rod. 28But the Eternal One gave the donkey the ability to speak.

Donkey *(to Balaam)*: What have I done to you that you would hit me three times?

Balaam: 29You've made me look stupid! If I'd had a sword, I'd have killed you by now!

Donkey: 30Aren't I the very same donkey you've always ridden? Have I ever been disloyal or hurt you?

Balaam: No.

31At that point, the Eternal opened the eyes of Balaam to see His messenger standing in the road, sword drawn. Balaam bowed low to the ground, lying with his face in the dirt.

Eternal One's Messenger: 32Why were you *so hard on* your donkey, beating her these three times? I came here as an adversary against you because I do not approve of the direction you're taking, *in more ways than one*.* 33Your donkey did the right thing. She saw me and turned away all three times. *This donkey saved your life*. Perhaps I would have killed you on the spot and let her live.

Balaam *(to the messenger)*: 34I confess I was wrong, but I didn't know you were there, trying to block my way. Now, please, if you don't want me to go any farther, then let me go back *home*.

Eternal One's Messenger: 35No, go ahead with this *Moabite* escort, but only say what I tell you to say.

So Balaam traveled on with Balak's men.

36When they neared the very edge of Moabite territory, Balak (who'd heard they were on their way) met Balaam at Moab's city on the Arnon.

Balak *(to Balaam)*: 37Didn't you understand it was I who requested you again and again? Why didn't you come? Am I not able to give you honor?

Balaam *(to Balak)*: 38Well, I'm here now. But do you think I can say whatever I please? I can only say what God tells me to say. God puts the words in my mouth.

39*Nevertheless the two went off together.* Balak led Balaam to Kiriath-huzoth *in Moab.* 40*Later on,* Balak had some oxen and sheep sacrificed, which he made sure Balaam received (along with the officials who accompanied him).

41The next day, Balak led Balaam up to a high place of Baal worship, an altar dedicated to pagan lords.* Looking down from there, they could see a section of the Israelite camp.

23 **Balaam** *(to Balak)*: This is what I need from you. Build seven altars here, *and then* get seven bulls and seven rams ready *to sacrifice*.

2Balak did just as Balaam had asked him to do. Then together they offered a bull and a ram on each of the *seven* altars.

Balaam *(to Balak)*: 3You stay here, close to these burnt offerings. I'm going to go *a little ways away,* in case the Eternal wants

* 22:32 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 22:41 Hebrew, *Bamoth-baal*

to meet *just* with me. Whatever He lets me know, I'll *be sure to* pass on to you.

So Balaam went over to an exposed area on the heights, [4]and God met Balaam there.

Balaam *(to the Lord)*: I made seven altars and set an offering of a bull and a ram on each one.

Eternal One *(giving Balaam the right words to say)*: [5]Go back to Balak and recite what I've told you.

[6]So Balaam walked back *down and over* to where Balak stood waiting next to the burnt offerings, along with the officials of Moab. [7]Balaam recited His words.

Balaam: The king of Moab got me to come
here, *all the way* from *my home in* Aram.
Balak summoned me from the
eastern mountains.
"Come, curse Jacob for me!"
"Come, denounce Israel!"
[8]*But I ask you,* how can I curse any
whom God has not cursed
or denounce whomever the Eternal
has not denounced?
[9]Here on the heights, from the rocky
places *where I stand,*
I can see them; from these hills I
observe them below.
And what do I see but a *unique and*
solitary people
who do not have a place among the
nations.
[10]Who can count the dust of Jacob
or even a fourth of their number?
It's impossible to count even one
quarter of Israel.
Let me die as one who has done
what is right.
Let my end be like his!

Balak *(to Balaam)*: [11]What are you doing to me? I brought you *all the way out here* to curse *these people*—my enemies—yet what have you done? You've blessed them!

Balaam: [12]But don't you agree that I have to be very careful to make sure I say *only and exactly* what the Eternal has given me to say?

Balak: [13]Well, come over here. *Admittedly,* from the place where I'm bringing you, you can only see a small part of that whole congregation. But *I am commanding you:* from this new place, curse them!

[14]So Balak brought Balaam to the fields of Zophim, on the top of Pisgah's *peak. As before,* he built there seven altars on which he sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

Pisgah dominates the Abarim Mountains and is thus used as a lookout to warn of possible attack.

Balaam *(to Balak)*: [15]You stand here, by the *altars with their* burnt offerings, while I go just over there to talk with the Eternal One.

[16]*And once again,* the Eternal met Balaam and gave him the words to say.

Eternal One: Go back to Balak, and recite what I've told you.

[17]So Balaam returned to where Balak stood waiting next to the burnt offerings along with the Moabite officials.

Balak *(to Balaam)*: What did the Eternal say?

[18]And Balaam recited His words.

Balaam: Listen up, Balak, and attend to
these words:
Hear, son of Zippor, *what God has*
to say to you.
[19]God is not a man—He doesn't lie.
God isn't the son of a man to want
to take back what He's said,
Or say something and not follow
through,
or speak and not act on it.

[20]Look here, I received a word of blessing,
and He has spoken a blessing.
I cannot take it back.
[21]There is no vision of wrongdoing by
Jacob;
God has seen no trouble for Israel.
The Eternal One abides among them;
and the shout of a king is among
them.
[22]God, who leads them out of Egypt,
His splendor is like the wild bull:
[23]There is no divination against Jacob
or enchantment against Israel.
Soon, people will say of Jacob and
Israel,
"Look at what God has
accomplished!"

24 Look at this people rise up like a lion,
like a lion who gets up and does not lie down
until it devours its prey,
even drinking the blood of the slain.

Balak *(to Balaam)*: 25 Don't curse them, but don't bless them either!

Balaam: 26 Haven't you been listening? Whatever the Eternal tells me, I must do.

Balak: 27 I think we should try a different spot. Come on and maybe God will be happy to let you curse them for me from over there.

28 So *off they went again. This time,* Balak took the prophet to the top of Peor, from where they could look down over the whole broad spread of Jeshimon, *which some call simply* "the wasteland."

Balaam *(to Balak)*: 29-30 *You know what to do:* get the seven altars ready and burn the offerings, just as you did before.

And so Balak did—he built seven altars, on each of which were sacrificed a bull and a ram.

24 Meanwhile, it was obvious to Balaam that the Eternal One was quite happy to bless Israel, so he didn't *go through the trouble of* looking for omens *of God's intent.* Instead, Balaam contemplated the wilderness *stretched out before him.* 2 Seeing the Israelites camping there, *in their orderly arrangement* by tribes, he was *suddenly* overcome by God's Spirit. 3 He recited God's words.

Balaam: This is an oracle of Balaam
(Beor's son),
a man whose eyes have been opened,
4 Whose ears hear God-given words,
and whose eyes see visions from the God of the Mountains.*
I fall down with eyes opened.
5 "O, the lovely tents of Jacob,
even the dwelling places of Israel.
6 Like date trees spread out as a garden along the river,
as aloe trees planted by the Eternal,
Like cedar trees along the waters.
7 I can see overflowing water, its seed in many waters
and its king lifted higher than Agag,*
even its kingdom lifted up.
8 God leads them from Egypt like the splendor of a wild bull.
He will devour the nations, even his adversaries,
And he will crush their bones and strike them through with his arrows.
9 He lies low and crouches down as a lion or lioness.
Who would dare rouse him?
Blessed are those who bless you and cursed those who curse you."

Balak and his men have been engaged in preparing the altars and making the sacrifices; he doesn't like the sound of this at all.

10 He was absolutely furious with Balaam, smacking his hands together with anger.

Balak *(confronting Balaam)*: *I can't believe this!* I brought you *all this way and asked you* to curse my enemies, but instead you actually blessed them. And you did that not just once, *mind you, or twice,* but three times. 11 Now get out of here! *Get out of my sight*—go back to that *miserable* place you call home. Yeah, sure, I said I'd greatly honor you, but the Eternal has withheld the honor that I had planned for you.

Balaam *(to Balak)*: 12 Remember the first time that you sent messengers to get me? Even then I told them 13 I don't care how much silver and gold you have or what all you'd give to me; I cannot alter what God would have me say. Whatever the Eternal One puts into my mouth is what will come out, whether good or evil words. 14 So, yes, I'm heading home. But before I go, I will tell you what those people will do to your nation when your time is up.

15 He recited God's words.

Balaam: This is an oracle of Balaam
(Beor's son),
a man whose eye has been opened,
16 Whose ears hear God-given words,
who understands the very thoughts of the Most High *God,*

* 24:4 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 24:7 1 Samuel 15:8

And whose eyes see visions from the
God of the Mountains.
I fall down with eyes opened.

17I see him, but at a later time, I'll
recognize him, even though he
is far away.
A star will come out of Jacob,*
A scepter shall rise out of Israel.
It will break Moab and tear down
the people of Seth.*
18Edom will be its possession, even Seir
will belong to its enemies,
but Israel will have power.
19One from Jacob will rule,
and he'll destroy whatever remains
of the city.

20Then Balaam turned toward the land of the Amalekites and spoke his prophecy.

Balaam: Amalek was first among the
nations,
but its end is destruction.

21Then Balaam turned toward the land of the Kenites and spoke his prophecy.

Balaam: Your dwelling is lasting,
and your nest is set on a rock;
22Yet Kain will be burned up.
"Until when?" When Asshur takes
you away as captives.

23Balaam took up his answers:

Balaam: I ask, "Woe, for who will remain
alive when God does this?*
Who will survive?"
24Ships will come from Kittim* and will
afflict Asshur and Eber,
who is also set for destruction.

25Then Balaam went his way to his country, and Balak went his way *toward his country.*

25 *Now it happened that* while Israel was biding its time at Shittim, *on the edge of the wilderness near Jericho*, some of the men *got mixed up with* Moabite women. *They got friendly* and had sexual relations. 2The Moabites invited these Israelites to participate in Moabite religious rituals and worship of their gods, 3and God's people bound themselves to the deity Baal of Peor, which made the Eternal One furious at Israel.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 4Grab them! Every *wicked* leader of this people. Then in broad daylight, in front of the Eternal, string them up *on stakes to twist and turn* so that My burning rage doesn't consume the entire population.

Moses *(to the Israelite judges)*: 5*Look to your people, and* kill whoever pledged himself to the deity Baal of Peor.

6Just then, *even as people were dying right and left,* one Israelite returned from among the Midianites with a woman whom he planned to make a part of his family. With her in tow, he walked right past Moses and everybody else while they were mourning in front of the congregation tent. 7When Priest Aaron's grandson Phinehas (Eleazar's son) saw them, he took a spear in his hand. 8He charged into the Israelite's tent and ran the spear straight through the bellies of the couple. *That one act appeased God's anger* and put an end to the death cascading through the Israelite camp. 9*Nevertheless,* 24,000 people died before it was all over.

10The Eternal One explained to Moses *what had happened.*

► It is difficult in our age of diversity, tolerance, and equality to accept the prohibition of intermarriage between the Israelites and the peoples of the land and the command to eliminate the natives as the Israelites later occupy the land. Now this is not a command about ethnicity or purity of race; it is about shared purpose and complete devotion. The people cannot tolerate devotion to other deities and still serve the Lord. It is for their protection and well-being that God aggressively punishes those who pollute the faith.

Eternal One: 11Phinehas (Eleazar's son and Priest Aaron's grandson) has *done well.* He saved the Israelites. Because he

* 24:17 Matthew 2:2 * 24:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 24:23 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 24:24 Designation for Cyprus

was so zealous on My account, *tolerating no compromise,* I did not consume the people of Israel with My jealousy. 12So I want you to declare this: "I, *your God,* do pledge to Phinehas a covenant of peace, 13not only for him but for his descendants too. I promise they will always be priests because in his jealousy for Me, Phinehas covered *the wickedness of* the Israelites."

14*For the record,* the Israelite man killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri (son of Salu, a leader of the Simeonite extended family). 15The Midianite woman's name was Cozbi. She was Zur's daughter, and Zur was the leader of one of the extended families in Midian.

16The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: 17*It's time to* go *after* the Midianites. Frustrate them, and crush them; 18after all, they frustrated you by luring you into that Peor affair, including the business with Cozbi, who was killed to stop My punishing destruction from the plague, also because of that Peor affair. She was a Midianite leader's daughter.

26 After the deaths *of so many Israelites from the plague,* the Eternal commissioned *another census through* Moses and Eleazar (Priest Aaron's son).

Eternal One: 2Add up exactly how many Israelites there are, those who are 20 years and older who are able to go to war. Identify them by their extended families.

3So Moses and Priest Eleazar got everyone together in the Moabite flatlands next to the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho.

Moses and Eleazar: 4Add up the people 20 years old and older, just as the Eternal One commanded Moses.

This is the record of the twelve Israelite families, the clans within them (according to the names of their founders) who actually enter the land.

The total number of the Israelites who had left Egypt were:

5-9From Reuben (the eldest of Israel's *twelve* sons)—the clans of Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; the clans of Reuben number 43,730. *Within this extended family*, Pallu had Eliab, who had *three* sons—Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. Those *last two* are the same Dathan and Abiram, who (along with Korah) led that revolt against Moses and Aaron and the Eternal One. 10They are the ones who (along with Korah) were swallowed up by the earth when so many people died and 250 were burned to death, too, as a future warning to the people. 11(Korah's sons were not killed in that episode, however.)

12-14From Simeon—the clans of Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin, Zerah, and Shaul; the clans of Simeon number 22,200.

15-18From Gad—the clans of Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ozni, Eri, Arod, and Areli; the clans of Gad number 40,500.

19-22From Judah (*remember that* Judah *also* had Er and Onan, the sons who died in Canaan)*—the clans of Shelah, Perez, and Zerah. *Within this extended family,* Perez had Hezron and Hamul; the clans of Judah number 76,500.

23-25From Issachar—the clans of Tola, Puvah (they're called Punites), Jashub, and Shimron; the clans of Issachar number 64,300.

26-27From Zebulun—the clans of Sered, Elon, and Jahleel; the clans of Zebulun number 60,500.

28From Joseph—the clans of Manasseh and Ephraim. 29*Within this extended family,* Manasseh had Machir, who generated his own clan and fathered Gilead, who also generated a clan. 30-32Gilead's descendants also became clans—Iezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Shemida, and Hepher. 33(Hepher is the one whose son, Zelophehad, didn't himself have any sons. His daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.)* 34The clans of Manasseh number 52,700. 35-37*Also within Joseph's extended family,* Ephraim had Shuthelah, Becher, and Tahan. From Shuthelah came the clan of Eranites. The clans of Ephraim number 32,500. *So the total number* from Joseph's descendants, *Manasseh plus Ephraim and counted* by clans, *was 85,200.*

38-41From Benjamin—the clans of Bela, Ashbel, Ahiram, Shephupham, and Hupham. Bela had *two* sons, Ard and Naaman, each of which became a clan; the clans of Benjamin number 45,600.

42-43From Dan—the clans of Shuham; the clans of Dan number 64,400.

* 26:19-22 Genesis 38:6-10 * 26:33 Numbers 27:1-11

44-47From Asher—the clans of Imnah, Ishvi, and Beriah. Beriah gave rise also to the clans of Heber and Malchiel. Asher's daughter was Serah. The clans of Asher number 53,400.

48-50From Naphtali—the clans of Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem; the clans of Naphtali number 45,400.

51The grand total of Israelites organized was 601,730.

52The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

God has promised the children of Abraham from the very beginning until this day that they will inherit this land. Now it is time.

Eternal One: 53The land shall be divided up following the number of *ancestral families—twelve*. 54If one *clan* has a lot of people in it, then it should receive a large amount of land; if *the clan is* small, then assign it a smaller plot. Every extended family will be allotted land in proportion to its size, and that particular land will be considered its inheritance. 55Nevertheless, the assignments will be based on lots, and the assigned land will be inherited only within the clan. 56Among the large and small *clans*, property will be divided by lots.

In this system, Levi is an exception. Because of their priestly status, they don't serve in the military and don't get a portion of land.

57So the Levites were listed according to their clans of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 58The clans of Levi include Libnites, Hebronites, Mahlites, Mushites, and Korahites. 59*For the record,* when Levi was still in Egypt, he had a daughter, Jochebed. She married Amram*, the son of Kohath.* Jochebed bore Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam. 60Aaron fathered Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 61Nadab and Abihu died when they presumed to offer a strange fire to the Eternal One. 62The total number of Levite men, one month and older, was 23,000. They were not counted along with the rest of the people of Israel since they did not have a land inheritance.

63These are the people and their numbers that Moses and *his nephew,* Eleazar the priest, organized *into armies* when they stood on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho. 64Not a single one of the people organized this time by Moses and Priest Aaron were among those so many years ago, when they added up the Israelites in the Sinai Wilderness. 65The Eternal One had declared that the previous generation had to die in the wilderness. No one was remaining from that generation except for Caleb (Jephunneh's son) and Joshua (Nun's son).

As God has said, an entire rebellious generation must die off before anyone can enter the long-awaited and much-anticipated land of milk and honey.

27 Now Zelophehad's *five* daughters came forward. Zelophehad came from the Manasseh family (he was a son of Joseph's). Zelophehad's father was Hepher, his grandfather was Gilead, and his great-grandfather was Machir. The girls' names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2They approached the congregation tent and *boldly* stood in front of Moses, the priest Eleazar, the Israelite clan chiefs, and even before the whole congregation.

Zelophehad's Daughters: 3Our father died in the wilderness; he wasn't part of Korah's coup that tried to undermine *the authority of* the Eternal One. He just died having committed his own wickedness *like everyone else in his generation,* but he left no sons. 4Why should his name disappear from his clan simply because no boys were born to him? *We request that you* give us land of our own, just as you are giving it to *the descendants of* our uncles.

Zelophehad didn't have any sons, and their inheritance—claim to the land—will die with him and his place among the people for all generations.

5Moses *disappeared inside the tent to* ask the Eternal One what should be done, 6and He answered Moses.

Eternal One: 7Zelophehad's daughters *make a good point.* They're right, *so do as they ask.* Give them an inheritance such as would be given to a son. They shall have land alongside their uncles' *families.* 8Moreover, tell the Israelites that in the future they should pass the inheritance to the daughter if there is no son. 9If a man doesn't have any daughters either,

then *after he dies,* his property shall go to his brothers. 10If he has no brothers, then it should go to his uncles. 11If no uncles, then whoever is his closest relative, give the property to him. This is *the system you should apply as* a permanent law for the Israelites, coming from Me through Moses.

12(later God called to Moses) Hike up *here,* to the top of this mountain amidst the Abarim peaks. *When you get to the top,* you'll be able to see the land I've *already* given to the Israelites. 13After you've had that glance, you will join your ancestors, as your brother Aaron did *not so long ago.* 14*You will not set foot in the promised land, even after all you've done for Me and this people* because you didn't follow My instructions back in the Zin Wilderness when the people argued *and rebelled.* You failed to treat me as holy at the waters before the eyes of the people. This happened at the water called Meribah, in Kadesh of the Zin Wilderness.

15Then Moses addressed the Eternal One.

Moses: 16-17*Please, take care of these people.* Eternal One, God of the spirit in all human beings, see to it that an able leader is appointed to guide and direct Your people by going out and coming in before them so that they are not like sheep without a shepherd.

Eternal One *(to Moses)***:** 18-19Single out Joshua (Nun's son). In him is the breath of My Spirit. Before the whole congregation, bring him to stand before the priest, Eleazar. Put your hand on him, and commission him into leadership. 20*You should make clear that* you are investing him with some of your authority, so that every Israelite accepts his leadership. 21Joshua shall consult with Eleazar the priest, who will ask of Me (by consulting the Urim *and Thummim*) to show how they should proceed. *In other words,* Eleazar will *consult the oracle and* indicate when the people should go forward and when they should pull back, both he and the congregation of Israel.

► Attention now shifts to their future in the land. Just as God has used Moses and Aaron to lead the congregation up until now, a new leader must be trained and in place for Israel to move forward. Remember that Moses and Aaron must be replaced because they are part of that unfaithful generation God won't allow into the land; they, too, acted against Him and are being punished in spite of their consistent favor with God. The preparation to enter the land needed only a couple of years for God to provide the law, the plans for the congregation tent, and an orderly structuring of the tribes. But the time in the wilderness has stretched on for another 38 years because it took a generation for God to purge the lack of belief on the part of the people.

22-23Moses did with Joshua and Eleazar exactly what the Eternal One instructed; he laid his hands on Joshua to indicate this transfer of authority. Just as the Eternal One commanded, Moses did.

28 The Eternal One said to Moses,

Eternal One: 2Make clear to the Israelites that they should make their offerings for My food and fire offerings as a soothing aroma, when they bring their sacrifices at the appointed time. 3Tell them that the gifts they present to Me each and every day by fire should include two spotless, male, yearling lambs—4one in the morning and the other between dusk and evening. 5*They should be sure to* include *a grain offering* (about two quarts of the best flour mixed with about one quart of oil, from the *first* pressing). 6I commanded at Sinai that this is to be done regularly, burned up to Me by fire in that soothing aroma as a food offering. 7The drink offering to go with each lamb *each time* should be about one quart of the strong wine, poured out for Me in the sacred area. 8Do the same for the second lamb and its grain and drink offerings between dusk and evening as a soothing aroma to Me.

9-10*Once a week,* on the Sabbath, *they shall* add to the regular daily offering of meat and drink another two male yearling lambs (unmarred by injuries or deformities) and *make the* grain offering of about four quarts of the best flour mixed with oil and a drink offering.

11At the beginning of each month, *add to the regular, daily burnt and drink offering these things*: two male calves, a ram, and seven male lambs, *all perfect yearlings*. 12-13As for the grain offering *to go along* with each bull, mix about six quarts of that prime flour with oil; prepare another offering to go with the ram out of about four quarts of prime flour mixed with oil and an offering for each lamb out of about two quarts of prime flour mixed with oil. These should be burnt. It is a soothing aroma of a food offering to Me. 14The drink part of the offering shall be figured like this each month: accompanying each bull-calf, offer about two quarts of wine; one and one-quarter quarts for the ram; and one quart for each lamb. With this particular monthly offering, 15they should add a male goat and the corresponding burnt and drink offerings to serve as a gift in recognition of their sin offering.

16*Midway through the* first month *of the year,* on the fourteenth day, you shall make a Passover memorial to Me, 17followed on the next day by a celebration. *The whole festival shall be observed in this way:* For a full seven days, only bread without any yeast shall be eaten. 18The period shall begin with a ritual marking its holiness, and don't do any work *during this time*. 19-21*Each of those seven days,* offer by fire to Me *the same type of animals* (two male calves, a ram, and seven male lambs, *all* perfect yearlings) and the corresponding grain offerings (with each bull, mix about six quarts of that prime flour with oil, with the ram about four quarts *of prime flour mixed with oil,* and an offering for each lamb out of about two quarts *of prime flour mixed with oil*) as you do each month, 22including the male goat for your sin offering to cover your evil actions. 23And be sure to make the normal, morning offering too. 24These things shall be offered daily for seven days to Me (as a food offering of pleasing aroma), along with the drink offering. 25The seventh *and final day* will *also* have a ritual marking its holiness, and you won't do any work *during this time either*.

26You should also have a holy ritual and not do any work when the new grain comes in and you offer it to Me during your Feast of Weeks. 27-31On the day marking the first harvest, make a fire offering as a pleasing aroma to Me *by killing and burning the same type of animals* (two male calves, a ram, and seven male lambs, *all* perfect yearlings) as you do each month and by giving the usual burnt and grain offerings that accompany each animal (with each bull, mix about six quarts *of that prime flour with oil,* with the ram about four quarts *of prime flour mixed with oil,* and an offering for each lamb out of about two quarts *of prime flour mixed with oil*). You shall burn a male goat to cover your wrongs, and don't forget the drink offering or that the animals should be without defect.

29 **Eternal One** *(continuing to Moses)***:** When the seventh month comes around, its first day shall have a ritual marking its holiness, and you won't do any work on it. Blow the trumpets, 2-5and make a burnt offering *out of the same animals* (one male calf, a ram, and seven male lambs, *all* perfect yearlings—including the goat) as your sacrifice for a soothing aroma to Me; but use one, rather than two bull-calves. And follow the same procedure for the grain offering, using about six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for the bull, about four quarts for the ram, and about two quarts for each lamb. 6This shouldn't take the place of either the daily or the regular monthly offering of meat, grain, and wine. Rather, it is in addition to the regular one. I receive these as a pleasing aroma.

7On the tenth day of that seventh month, you shall have a ritual marking its holiness. Celebrate it soberly, don't do any work, 8-11but make an offering just like the one on the first day (one male calf, a ram, and seven male lambs, *all* perfect yearlings—including the goat as a sin offering). Also *follow the same procedure for* the grain offering using about six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for the bull, about four quarts for the ram, and about two quarts for each lamb. This will cover all the evil you did *in the last year* with the burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offering.

12*Mid-month,* on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you shall observe another ritual marking that day's holiness, and you won't work. Celebrate for a full seven days a festival of Mine. 13Prepare another burnt offering of animals that have no signs of injury or illness—thirteen bull calves, two rams, and fourteen yearling lambs. 14-16Make your grain offerings as you always do for each of the

Offerings for Tishri, the seventh month

Animal Sacrifice and Grain Offerings		Bulls	Rams	Lambs	Goat (sin offering)
		6 quarts	4 quarts	2 quarts	
Trumpets	1st	1	1	7	1
Day of Atonement	10th	1	1	7	1
Festival of Ingathering					
Date					
first day	15th	13	2	14	1
second day	16th	12	2	14	1
third day	17th	11	2	14	1
fourth day	18th	10	2	14	1
fifth day	19th	9	2	14	1
sixth day	20th	8	2	14	1
seventh day	21st	7	2	14	1
solemn ritual	22nd	1	1	7	1

animals offered; include the sin-offering goat. These, *again,* are in addition to the regular burnt offerings with their respective grain and drink offerings.

17On the second day *of that week-long festival in the middle of the seventh month,* offer twelve bull calves, two rams, and fourteen male yearling lambs—all unblemished—18along with the grain offerings in amounts coordinating with each animal. 19Include the goat as a sin offering, and don't neglect the regular offerings of meat, grain, and wine.

20On the third day, offer eleven bull calves plus the two rams, fourteen male lambs, 21corresponding amounts of grain and drink offerings, 22and the sin-offering male goat in addition to the usual offering. 23-34On the fourth day, the number of young bulls *that you offer* should be ten; on the fifth, nine; on the sixth, eight; on the seventh, seven and on each of those days you shall also offer two rams and fourteen male lambs along the sin-offering male goat in addition to the usual offerings of burnt, grain, and drink. 35On the eighth *and final* day, gather everyone together for a solemn ritual, and don't do any work. 36-38In addition to the regular gifts and the goat whose offering covers sins, offer the following by fire, sending a sweet smell to God: one bull, one ram, and seven perfect male yearling lambs. Mix up the grain offerings in proportion to each animal, and prepare the corresponding burnt, grain, and drink offerings.

39These are the offerings you should give to Me when observing these particular festivals. They are not a substitute for the other required offerings—the ones accompanying certain promised vows; those you make freely; and the regular burnt, grain, and drink offerings; as well as your offerings of well-being.

40Moses passed these instructions on to the Israelites just as the Eternal One told him to do.

30

Moses gathered the heads of the *twelve* Israelite tribes and explained *vows.*

► The situation concerning vows with men is clear and straightforward: keep your word. With women, it's more complicated. The promises made by women have certain restrictions that don't apply to men's vows: whatever a woman promises to God or others is subject to review by her father, if she still lives at home, or by her husband, if she's married. Those men have the power to nullify her promises.

Moses: 2Whatever a man promises to God or others, whether a vow or a binding oath with a pledge, he must do. He is bound by his word: *no excuses and no exceptions.*

3-12If a woman makes such a binding statement in the hearing of her father

(if she's not married) or husband *(if she is married),* and he keeps quiet, then the promise stands. But if her father or her husband *(depending on her marital status)* disapproves of what she said, then she's not bound by whatever she promised, and the Eternal won't hold it against her. If she gets married after making a vow or pledge (even a rash one) and her husband knows about it but says nothing, then she's responsible for keeping those promises. But if her husband hears about some *rash* promise she made and says that he thinks it's foolish, then he can erase any obligation she had to keep it. The Eternal will forgive her. *A woman who's not connected to any man*—a widow or divorcée—must take full responsibility for keeping her promises.* 13*Now if a woman is already married and* vows to undertake some kind of self-denial, *fasting or the like,* her husband has the power to either approve or reject it. 14If he doesn't say anything about it while she is doing it, then whatever she's pledged to do is truly binding; *he cannot come back later and change his mind about it.* 15If he does require her to break her promise while she's doing it, then the punishment for breaking it will be on him, not her.

16This is what the Eternal determined should be the rules for fathers or husbands evaluating a woman's vows, whether she's a youngster still living under her father's roof or has married.

31 **Eternal One** *(to Moses)***:** 1-2It's *finally* time for the Israelites to make the Midianites suffer for the trouble they caused *back at Peor* and then you will *leave this world and* join your ancestors.

► The Israelites took Midianite women as wives and consequently started worshiping their gods. Some 24,000 Israelites died in that judgment. Moses is now told to pick up where the priest Phinehas left off and kill the Midianites.

Moses *(to the Israelites)***:** 3-5Get yourselves ready for war. From among your men, select 1,000 from each of Israel's tribes. Arm them, and send them out to fulfill God's desire to make the Midianites pay for their treachery.

So it was that 12,000 Israelite men went off to war. 6Moses sent *the zealous priest* Phinehas (Priest Eleazar's son) with each tribe's contribution *toward the army* of 1,000 men, too, carrying the holy vessels and trumpets to sound the alarm. 7At the direction of God through Moses, the Israelites fought *fiercely. By the time it was over, they had managed to* kill every single Midianite male. 8They killed all five of Midian's kings (Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba), and they even executed Balaam (Beor's son) too.

► This is a surprising note about Balaam. He honored the Lord and would only speak blessing over Israel (22–24). Here and later (Joshua 13:22; 24:9-10), Balaam is cast as an enemy of God's people (also 2 Peter 2:15; Revelation 2:14).

9-11They captured Midian's women and children and everything of value—livestock, luxury items, whatever seemed good—to bring back with them, and they burned *what was left of* the cities and camps. 12The *victorious* Israelites headed back to present these prisoners, animals, and things to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all of the Israelites who had gathered at their camp on the Moabite plains, just across the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho.

13Moses, Priest Eleazar, and the leaders of the community went out to meet them, just outside the settlement. *But instead of commending them for their bravery and success,* 14in his anger, Moses *berated* the men who just a little while earlier were commanding battalions of hundreds or thousands of soldiers.

Moses: 15*What were you thinking that* you would allow these women to live? 16They are the ones, on the advice of *that instigator* Balaam, who are responsible for seducing our men by leading Israelites to reject the Eternal at Peor. They brought down on us that *punishing* plague that

* 30:3-12 These verses have been rearranged to help clarify meaning.

killed so many *of* the people of the Eternal One. 17Now you must slaughter every last boy *in this Midianite group* and kill every woman who has ever slept with a man. 18As for the virgins, you can take them, as you desire. 19-20*According to the purity laws*, you must stay outside the boundaries of the camp for seven days. Anyone who has killed or otherwise touched a corpse, remember to wash up on the third and seventh days as prescribed. Every piece of clothing—cloth, leather, or goat's hide—and every wooden object on your person must be purified too. This applies to you and your prisoners.

► Because of the details concerning priestly matters of ritual process and purity, Eleazar the priest explains how the Lord commanded they should proceed. They have been in contact with corpses, blood, and pagan objects, and it is essential that they cleanse themselves properly as members of this holy congregation.

21Then Eleazar stepped forward *and took it from there.*

Priest Eleazar *(to the soldiers)*: It is a law that God made clear *to us* through Moses. 22-23Whatever *you wear or have with you that* is not flammable—*all metals such as* gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead—shall be cleansed by fire. To fully purify such objects, wash them in the water for ritual impurity too. But anything that cannot stand fire, wash with the water. 24On the seventh day, *strip and* wash what you're wearing. After that, you shall be considered pure and may return to the camp.

25The Eternal One told Moses *how to divide the spoils.*

Eternal One: 26Get Priest Eleazar and the heads of the extended families of the group to help you inventory everything the soldiers brought back *with them from Midian,* prisoners and possessions. 27Then divide it in half. One part will go to the men who went to war, and the other to the people who stayed here. 28Out of the warriors' half, take a portion as a gift to Me. For every 500 items of any kind—persons or animals—set one aside *for God* 29by giving it to Eleazar the priest (*who will make* the actual offering to Me). 30Out of the general population's half, take one out of every 50 of any particular item—persons or animals—and give it to the Levites who are in charge of maintaining God's special tent.

31Moses and Priest Eleazar did as the Eternal One commanded Moses, 32and *even after they had killed the boys and a lot of the women,* the war booty *was substantial.* There were 675,000 sheep, 3372,000 oxen, 3461,000 donkeys, 35and 32,000 virgin women. 36From the half that was for the warriors, there were 337,500 sheep 37(675 for the Eternal), 3836,000 large oxen (72 for the Eternal), 3930,500 donkeys (61 for the Eternal), 40and 16,000 people (32 for the Eternal). 41Moses handed God's portion over to the keeping of Eleazar the priest as the Eternal had commanded Moses. 42-46The general community received the same amounts: 337,500 sheep, 36,000 large oxen, 30,500 donkeys, and 16,000 people. 47Out of the general community's half, Moses took one out of every 50 of any particular item—persons or animals—and gave it to the Levites, the ones who were in charge of maintaining God's tent just as he had been told by the Eternal One. 48Then the military officers of all ranks approached Moses *with yet more stuff.*

Officers *(to Moses)*: 49Each of us, who loyally answer your call to serve, has counted up the people in our battalions. *We are happy to report that* not a single person is missing. 50*Yet* to cover any sins we may have committed before the Eternal, we wish to present to you all the articles of value we found *in Midian*—objects of gold, *jewelry of all kinds* (armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and pendants).

51-52Moses and Eleazar the priest received from the commanders and officers these pieces of gold fashioned into all shapes and sizes. Collectively, the officers' offering to the Eternal equaled 420 pounds. 53The soldiers had also raided things for themselves. 54But Moses and Eleazar set up the gold objects from the officers inside the congregation tent to commemorate the Israelites' *actions* before the Eternal One *Himself.*

32 Now *it so happens that a couple of the tribes* (the Reubenites and Gadites) had an exceptionally large herd of livestock. They observed that *on this eastern side of the Jordan,* in the regions of Jazer and Gilead, there was some excellent grazing land. 2So *the heads of* the Reuben and Gad tribes approached Moses, the priest Eleazar, and other of the community's leaders.

Reubenites and Gadites: 3-5This territory, which the Eternal One has already enabled us to dominate, is for livestock land; and we have livestock. If it is pleasing to you, may we settle here instead of crossing the Jordan *into the promised land*? We'd like this territory to be ours (Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon) *rather than laying claim to any territory across the Jordan.*

► Although slightly misunderstood by Moses, Reuben and Gad still express loyalty to the Lord and to their Israelite kin, but they like the prospects of settling in the fertile land that they will also share with the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites.

Moses: 6-9*You're missing the big picture.* How can I let you settle *here on this side of the Jordan,* while your kinsmen *on the other side of the Jordan* may have to go to war in order to possess the land? Why would you dishearten the rest of the people *today* just as the spies did who disheartened the people in the last generation after I sent them from Kadesh-barnea and they saw the Eshcol Valley and the surrounding land? 10*Remember* how angry the Eternal became *with them* that day? He declared that 11-13even though that particular land had been promised to *the Israelites beginning with* Abraham, then to Isaac and to Jacob after him, the whole generation that left Egypt when they were 20 years or older would have to die, wandering *aimlessly* in the desert, before God would allow the community to enter that great land. Only Caleb the Kenizzite (Jephunneh's son) and Joshua (Nun's son) *out of that generation* would be allowed to enjoy settlement there because they followed Him completely. 14Now *you dare to propose this*—you're as sinful as your predecessors! The Eternal will surely loose His tremendous anger against us again. 15If you decide to stop following God's plan for the land, He will abandon the whole congregation out here in the wilderness, and it's you who will be blamed for our people's destruction.

Reubenites and Gadites *(approaching Moses)***:** 16-19What if we lay claim to the land here, but then proceed with the others *west* across the Jordan and into their land? We would fight alongside all the other Israelites, but we wouldn't take any of that land for ourselves since our inheritance is on the eastern side of the Jordan. Only after we've seen to it that everyone else is safely settled there would we return here to take up our lives as residents of this place. We could set up *preliminary* dwellings now for our sheep and livestock and towns for our women and children. The towns should be fortified, since there are still inhabitants in the land *who would like to run us out.* We really feel that we've found our home here, east of the Jordan.

Moses: 20If you keep your word—to fight with us before the Eternal One Himself 21until by our warfare God drives out His enemies 22and that land becomes undeniably ours—then, yes. Then you will have satisfied your responsibilities to the Eternal and to Israel, and you may count this land as your own. 23But if you fail to follow through, your sin against the Eternal will follow you. Wherever you go, it will go badly for you. 24Then go ahead and build the enclosures you need for your flocks and the cities for your youngsters *that you'll leave behind.* But *don't forget to* live up to your promise.

Reubenites and Gadites: 25We are your servants, our lord, and we'll do as you tell us. 26Here in Gilead, we'll get our women and the little kids settled along with all of our animals. 27Then you can count on us, armed and ready to battle for the Eternal. We will obey your orders *and see to it that the other families successfully gain their own territory.*

28Moses gave instructions to Eleazar the priest, Joshua (Nun's son), and the heads of the other extended families of the Israelite clans.

Moses: 29If indeed the Gadites and Reubenites fight in front of the Eternal One and beside the rest of you to successfully dominate that land across the Jordan *River,* then you must honor their desire to return here to have this Gilead land for their own. 30But if they don't take up their weapons and go with you into battle, then *their ownership of this territory is null and void*, and they shall be assigned land in Canaan along with the rest of the Israelite tribes.

Reubenites and Gadites: 31Exactly as we understand this to be the will of God, we will do it. 32We'll arm ourselves *and fight with you* under His direction in Canaan, but with the understanding that our home is right here, on this side of the Jordan *River*.

33*With this agreement established,* Moses gave the Gadites and the Reubenites, along with Manasseh (half of the greater Joseph clan), King Sihon's Amorite land and King Og's Bashan land, including the cities and their neighboring towns inside those boundaries. 34The Gadites *immediately got to work* rebuilding the cities of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran with strong defenses and enclosures for their livestock. 37As for the Reubenites, they rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38Nebo, Baal-meon, and Sibmah. They gave names to each of the *new* cities and changed the names of those they rebuilt. 39As far as the Manasseh family goes, Machir's clan overran the Amorites in Gilead, 40so Moses gave them that land to live in. 41Jair's Manassite clan also captured settlements *for themselves* and named them Havvoth-jair, 42and Nobah took over *the former* Kenath with its surrounding villages and renamed it Nobah, after their own clan.

► In this next chapter, Moses outlines the Israelites' journey to this point, and in doing so reminds them of the events that have brought them to this place. In that walk down memory lane, it can be difficult to place the locations within a linear reference of time. The entire book moves through a few months in the first 14 chapters, and suddenly it is 38 years later. After that, time seems to stand still as the people are prepared to go into the promised land. It is hard to determine when things happened in those 38 years.

33 1-2Based on the *meticulous* records of departure points Moses kept, at the direction of the Eternal One, he reported that the Israelites' *wilderness* journey from Egypt led by Moses and Aaron followed this itinerary: 3They started out from Rameses *in Egypt* on Month 1, day 15 (the day after observing the Passover), and were exalted before the Egyptians' eyes 4(who were burying their firstborn dead, struck down by God, and whose gods the Eternal was punishing). 5The Israelites' first camp after Rameses was Succoth. 6The next, Etham, was right where the wilderness begins. 7From Etham, they went toward Pi-hahiroth, facing Baal-zephon, and camped in front of Migdol. 8From Pi-hahiroth, they crossed the sea and entered the wilderness *proper*. For three days, they crossed that Etham Wilderness, stopping over at Marah 9and then Elim. *That was a good spot* to camp. Elim *was an oasis* with 12 springs and 70 palm trees. 10After Elim, their next stop was at the coast of the Red Sea;* 11then they camped in the Sin Wilderness. 12After leaving Sin, they traveled to Dophkah, 13then Alush, 14and then Rephidim. At that point, the people were getting desperate for water *and ornery on account of their discomfort and thirst. There, God told Moses to produce water for them from out of a rock.** 15After that, the Sinai Wilderness. 16-17Their stopping places after Sinai were first Kibroth-hattaavah, then Hazeroth. 18-23They camped as they moved from place to place through Rithmah, Rimmon-perez, Libnah, Rissah, Kehelathah, and Mount Shepher. 24-27From there they moved through Haradah, Makheloth, Tahath, and Terah. 28-33Continuing their journey *from place to place,* they went through Mithkah, Hashmonah, Moseroth, Bene-jaakan, Hor-haggidgad, and Jotbathah. 34-37They camped in Abronah, Ezion-geber, Kadesh (in the Zin Wilderness), and then Mount Hor (on the Edomite border). 38It was at Mount Hor that Aaron the priest went up

* 33:10 Literally, Sea of Reeds * 33:14 Exodus 17:1

the mountain and died as the Eternal said he would. That was in the 40th year after the Israelites had left Egypt, and it happened on the first day of the fifth month. 39Aaron was 123 years old when he died on Mount Hor. 40That was also when the Canaanite king of Arad, from the Negev region, caught wind of the Israelites' arrival *and attacked them.*

► One battle between the Amorites (a people of Canaan) and the Israelites seems to be mentioned in four different passages (14:45; 21:1; 33:40; Deuteronomy 1:44). In this chapter, Moses is looking back at what has brought them to this place, ready to enter the land. He rehearses the death of Aaron (20:27-29) and the battle that followed. Initially, the Amorites overcome the Israelites at Hormah (14:45; 33:40; Deuteronomy 1:44) and take prisoners (21:1). Then with the Lord's help, the Israelites rebound to defeat the king of Arad and rescue the people who have been captured (21:2-4). For some reason, this battle is mentioned in different contexts three times and with two different outcomes.

41-47After Mount Hor, their next camp site was Zalmonah, then Punon, Oboth, Iye-abarim (on Moab's border), Dibon-gad, Almon-diblathaim, and Nebo's foothills of Abarim. 48From Abarim, they set up camp on the flatlands of Moab, on the *western* banks of the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho. 49Their camp stretched from Beth-jeshimoth on the riverbank to Abel-shittim in the flatlands.

50In that Moabite flatland, next to the Jordan, *east* of Jericho, the Eternal One told Moses to speak to the people.

Moses is instructed to remind the people of their mission to take the land and utterly decimate the peoples who are presently living there.

Eternal One: 51Tell *this new generation of* Israelites that as soon as they cross the Jordan into Canaan, 52they must make its inhabitants flee. They must obliterate any carved or molded images *of other gods and goddesses* and the high places where they're worshiped. 53Tell them they must take that land. I promised it to them and have determined they should live in it as their own. 54Divide it up among the people by clan, and make decisions about who gets what partly based on the size of the groups. *But once you've made that rough distinction,* draw lots for the specific territories. Whatever you draw, that's how the land shall be allotted. Each of the tribes from Jacob's extended families shall have their own land. 55If they do not fully conquer and take the land from its native inhabitants, those remaining people will be a constant irritation, causing trouble *and annoyance* like thorns in their eyes and barbs in their sides 56*because if they don't fully dispossess the present occupants,* I will do to the Israelites what I would have done to the Canaanites.

► Aaron is now dead, and Moses is given the final instructions about the division of the land. Even knowing he will not enter the land, Moses doesn't whine or step back from leadership. He continues following God until the nation is about to cross through the waters of the Jordan and begin their new adventure, realizing God's destiny for themselves, because he is the faithful servant of God even when he knows there will be no reward.

34 The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 2Command the Israelites, "This is the exact territory you should take, as promised to you by Me for an inheritance *throughout the succeeding generations*—the entire land of Canaan. 3The southern part runs from the Zin Wilderness along the border with Edom. The southern boundary begins at the end of the Dead Sea* on the east, 4turns south of the Akrabbim highlands, and crosses over to Zin. Its far end is south of Kadesh-barnea, over

* 34:3 Literally, Sea of Salt

to Hazar-addar, across to Azmon, [5]and from there to the Egyptian Wadi straight out to the *great Mediterranean* Sea. [6]This great sea will be your western boundary. [7]At the northern end, make a line from the great *Mediterranean* Sea to Mount Hor, [8]then to Lebo-hamath, and up to Zedad. [9]Your territory will be south of Ziphron and Hazar-enan. All that makes up your northern boundary. [10]As for the east, mark your boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham, [11]down to Riblah (east of Ain), follow the eastern slope of the Sea of Chinnereth, [12]and down the Jordan *River* all the way to the Dead Sea.* That's it. Those are the boundaries of your *promised* land."

Moses *(to the Israelites)***:** [13]Exactly which parts of it go to which family shall be determined finally by lot. *That is, at least,* for the nine remaining tribes and for *Ephraim,* the other half *of the Joseph* tribe. [14-15]The extended families of Gadites, Reubenites, and Manassehites *(from Joseph's line)* have already gotten their land on this eastern side of the Jordan River.

[16]Again the Eternal One spoke to Moses.

Eternal One: [17]The priest Eleazar and Joshua (Nun's son) shall *have the honor of* assigning the territories that will henceforth be each one's ancestral land. [18]One from each of the tribes will then execute these directions. [19]Those men are: for Judah—Caleb (Jephunneh's son); [20]for Simeon—Shemuel (Ammihud's son); [21]for Benjamin—Elidad (Chislon's son); [22]for the Danites—Bukki (Jogli's son); [23]out of the greater Joseph family, for the Manassehites—Hanniel (Ephod's son), [24]and for the Ephraimites—Kemuel (Shiphtan's son); [25]for Zebulun—Elizaphan (Parnach's son); [26]for Issachar—Paltiel (Azzan's son); [27]for Asher—Ahihud (Shelomi's son); [28]and for Naphtali—Pedahel (Ammihud's son).

[29]These are the men whom the Eternal One determined should head up the process of dividing the Canaanite land among the Israelites.

35 *In that area,* on the Moabite flatlands across the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho, the Eternal One issued more directions mediated by Moses *to the Israelites.*

God ensures that an allowance is made for the Levites, who will not have any territory of their own.

Eternal One: [2]Tell the Israelite families that once they've received the land that will be *undeniably* theirs and theirs alone, they must each set aside some cities and those cities' surrounding fields within their particular territory for the Levites. [3-4]The Levites can then live in those cities and use the surrounding fields, 1,500 feet from the wall all around, to keep and raise their animals. [5]In other words, with the city at the center, the fields designated for the Levites should encompass a territory with a radius of 3,000 feet.

[6-8]*Make sure they are allocated* according to the size of the territory that each group has. The biggest families will give the greatest number of towns; the smaller tribes only a few. Included among the Levites' towns, 48 in total, shall be the six cities of refuge to where a person who killed someone *by accident* can run for safety *from revenge,* along with 42 other cities.

[9](continuing to Moses) [10]Tell the Israelites that once they've crossed the Jordan into Canaan *and can see the land for themselves,* [11-12]they should pick out which cities they want to make safe havens for persons accused of manslaughter. If someone kills another person by accident, the guilty party should be able to live in one of those cities without fear that he'll be killed in revenge before he's had a fair trial in front of his peers. [13-15]It's up to the people exactly which six cities they designate for this purpose, *but be sure* three are beyond the Jordan and three are in Canaan. These are to be safe places for anyone who unintentionally caused another person's death whether he is an Israelite or a foreigner.

[16-21]If someone picks up an instrument—iron, stone, wood, *whatever*—and batters somebody else so badly that the victim dies, or if he otherwise kills with intent (fatally pushes with hatred or throws an object from some hidden place that kills its target), the perpetrator is guilty of murder. His

* 34:12 Literally, Sea of Salt

punishment is death in return, and someone shall be assigned to kill him. The one to carry out this death penalty is called the "blood avenger." Whenever the avenger has a chance to kill the murderer, he should do so.

22-28Sometimes it happens, though, that a person pushes his *friend or* acquaintance, throws an object, or happens to drop a heavy stone on someone else without any intention of hurting (much less killing) the person, but the other person happens to die from it. The guilty person should be able to take refuge in one of the *six* designated cities, safe from the one who would avenge the death he caused. Then people from among the greater community shall judge whether it was indeed an accident or not. When the congregation determines it was an accident, the person who accidentally killed shall be saved from the blood avenger. He must live within the city of refuge, though. If he leaves it, the blood avenger is allowed to kill him with impunity because the man knew not to leave his sanctuary city. However, once the anointed high priest of Israel dies, *that restriction shall be lifted, and* the person who unintentionally killed another may return home, *free and clear*. 29This is the way it should be, a binding law based on precedents, for this community down through the generations and wherever they happen to be living.

30The case of intentional murder is different. A person so guilty shall be put to death, but only if there are enough witnesses to render a reliable account. If only one person claims to have seen the crime, you shall not put the accused to death. 31If someone is indeed guilty, there shall be no alternative of life ransom for the death penalty. This crime cannot be paid off. 32Neither shall you take money to get a person *accused of manslaughter* out of his obligation to live in the city of refuge. He simply must stay there till the term is up, when the high priest dies. 33Failure to honor life in this way contaminates the very land itself. Do not pollute the land where you live *by allowing blood guilt to go unpunished.* Once the land has been subjected to such violence, it must be purified, so the blood of the one who caused bloodshed must be shed. 34You won't pollute the land where you live and where I also have chosen to dwell among you. I, the Eternal One, dwell among the Israelites.

► These regulations and ordinances detailed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are not just to help the Israelites live better together; they also affect the condition of the nation. Even more importantly, they reflect on the Lord. What the people do or fail to do affects the reputation of God, and that has more far-reaching implications than the people can imagine. God uses the people of His kingdom to demonstrate to the surrounding nations what it means to live in obedience and according to the will of God. It also impacts the purity of the worship made to the Lord and the environment of His holy tent and later the temple. His program in general that is being accomplished through the nation is colored by the moral behavior of the people.

36 The heads of the extended families traced back to Joseph through Gilead (son of Machir, son of Manasseh) approached Moses, the community's leaders, and the heads of Israel's extended families *to share their concerns.*

One critical issue related to Zelophehad (the man whose daughters claimed his inheritance because he didn't have any sons) remains to be cleared up.

Zelophehad's Family: 2*We appreciate and accept that* the Eternal One told *Moses,* my lord, that among the land given by lot to the Israelites, whatever would have gone to Zelophehad (our kinsman) as an inheritance should be passed down to his daughters. 3*The trouble is,* if they marry outside of our tribe into another Israelite tribe, their land will go with them. That will reduce the territory designated to our family and increase the other tribe's inheritance. 4And in *the great 50th year, the Sabbath of Sabbath years called* the Jubilee of the

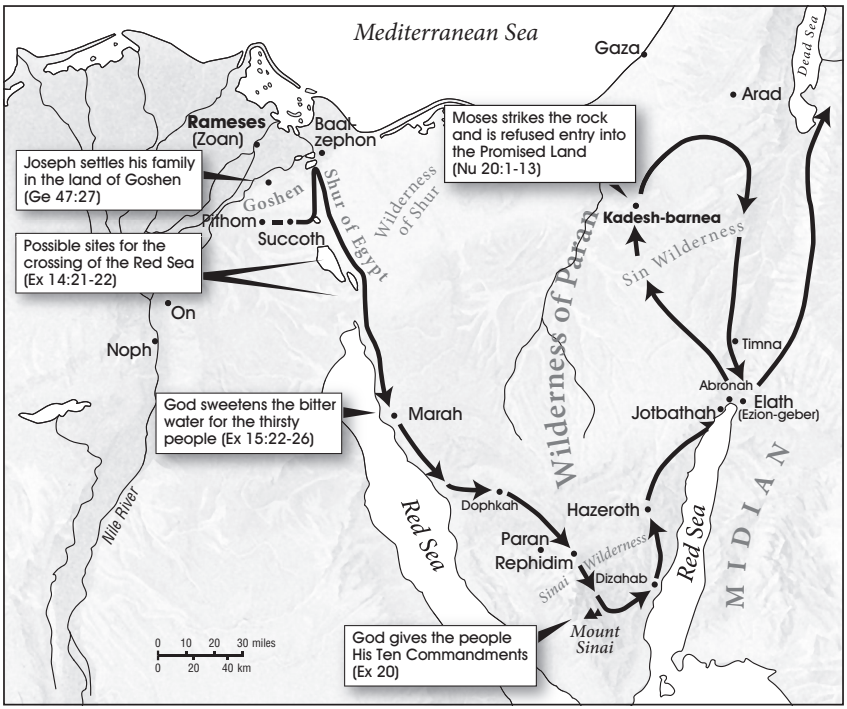
Israelites, whatever land used to be ours through their connection to our family will certainly revert to whichever tribe they married into.* *In other words,* their inheritance will be *forever* taken away from the territory that belongs to our extended family.

Moses *(to all the Israelites)*: 5The Eternal has said that these descendants of Joseph are right. 6-9*In light of it,* He has determined that Zelophehad's daughters should marry whomever they think is best, but they should do so within the clan of their extended family so that their land stays in the family. The same goes for any future Israelite daughters in a similar situation. Let them marry *whomever they will,* but only within the clan of their father's extended family. There shouldn't be any *permanent* transfer of land from one tribe to another because the territories should be fixed as each tribe's inheritance *for all time.*

10-11The daughters of Zelophehad *didn't argue or dissent. They* obeyed the command of the Eternal One as articulated by Moses. Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah each married one of their cousins 12from a clan of Manesseh (Joseph's son). Thus, they and their land stayed within the Manasseh clan.

13These are the directions and instructions the Eternal One gave through Moses to the Israelites *before they entered Canaan, as they stood* on the Moabite flatlands next to the Jordan *River, east* of Jericho.

* 36:4 Leviticus 25:8-34



The Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings

DEUTERONOMY

Farewell to Moses

By Moses, shepherd of God's people

Deuteronomy has traditionally been attributed to Moses. As a unit, the books of Moses are the foundation of the Scriptures. They lay out the details of God's early encounters with His people as He calls, instructs, and commissions them to extend His blessings to the world. Along the way, God selects a remarkable man named Moses to be His servant; he challenges Pharaoh, rescues the Hebrew slaves, and becomes the mediator of God's covenant with Israel. The books of Moses record some of the high and low points of the prophet's life, and Deuteronomy—the final chapter in Moses' biography—contains his last words to the children of those he liberated from Egypt.

The title "Deuteronomy" means "second law," but it does not refer to an additional law God gives to Israel. It is best understood as a second version of the law God established with Israel at Sinai (17:18). Moses is updating God's law for a new generation facing new challenges as they enter a new land. This new generation watched as their parents, with a weak faith and a grumbling spirit, slowly died in the desert. Now it is their turn to see if they can remain true and faithful to their God who has been true and faithful to them. So they stand on the plains of Moab and listen as Moses reminds them of who they are, where they have come from, and what God requires of them. At the heart of Moses' three farewell addresses is the prophet's call for God's people to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength, and to teach their children to do the same (6:5-8). When asked, Jesus calls this the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40). Many of the stipulations referred to in this updated version of the law demonstrate what the love of God looks like in matters of business, family, justice, property, and war. Covenant life is not to be motivated by fear but by love.

The Book of Deuteronomy has a distinctive literary shape that reflects the social and political world in which it was written. Its structure is comparable to Hittite treaties of the second millennium B.C. and Assyrian treaties of the eighth century B.C. Treaties like these established relationships between rulers and their subjects, and they laid out expectations for the future. The Book of Deuteronomy follows this form, because the Lord is renewing His covenant treaty with a new generation of Israelites, accepting them as His servants and chosen people.

The book ends with an account of Moses' death and burial on Mount Nebo and a touching tribute to his greatness. Before he dies, Moses commissions Joshua to succeed him; now it is his turn to lead.

1 These are the words Moses spoke to all the people of Israel *who were gathered* in the wilderness in the Arabah *Valley* east of the Jordan *River,* across from Suph. *They'd traveled through many places on their way here,* from Paran through Tophel and on to Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

These places serve as various destinations along Israel's wilderness route before they reach the plains of Moab, facing the Jordan River, just outside the land of Canaan.

2It's *only* an 11-day journey by the Mount Seir road from Horeb *(also known as Mount Sinai), where God made a covenant with Israel,* to Kadesh-barnea, *where the people first tried to enter the promised land.* 3-4Now on the first day of the 11th month, 40 years *after the nation left Egypt and sometime* after Moses had defeated Sihon (king of the Amorites who ruled in Heshbon) and Og (king of Bashan who ruled in Ashtaroth and Edrei), Moses began to give *to a new generation of* the Israelites each word the Eternal had commanded him to tell them. 5Beyond the Jordan *River* in the land of Moab, Moses tried to explain this law *and its outworking for the people.*

► Moses now explains to the current generation of Israelites what the Lord has done for them, so the Israelites can confidently give their full allegiance to this One God, who has already proven Himself as their protector and guide. Even today it's helpful for us to remember God's faithfulness to earlier generations in our own families and nations. Our confidence in God is strengthened most when we recall how He has worked directly in our own lives to protect, provide for, and guide us.

Moses: 6The Eternal, our True God, spoke to us back at Horeb. He told us, "You've stayed long enough at this mountain! 7Break camp, and head up into the Amorite highlands, into the territories of all their neighbors—into the arid valley,* the hills, the lowlands, the southern desert,* and the *Mediterranean* seacoast. Go into the land of the Canaanites, *as far north as* Lebanon and all the way *east* to the great Euphrates River. 8Look! I've brought you right to the edge of the land that I, the Eternal, swore I'd give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants after them. Go in, and take possession of it!"

9I had to tell you at the time, "I can't bear you *as a people and deal with all of your cases* by myself anymore. 10The Eternal your God has kept increasing your numbers, and just look at you today! There are as many of you as there are stars in the sky! 11I hope the Eternal, the God of your ancestors, makes you a thousand times more numerous and blesses you just as He said He would. 12But how can I alone handle your problems and burdens and cases? 13Choose some wise, perceptive, knowledgeable men from your tribes, and I'll put them in authority over you." 14You told me you thought it was a great plan, 15so I took some leaders from your tribes who were wise and well respected; I chose them as authorities over you all—of groups of thousands or hundreds or fifties or tens, and I appointed some as tribal representatives. 16Then I gave your judges careful instructions: "Listen to the disputes between your neighbors *that are brought to you,* and judge them fairly regardless of who is involved—two Israelites or an Israelite and a foreigner. 17Don't show any favoritism when you judge; whether a person is important or unimportant, hear him out. Don't be intimidated by anybody because it's really God who is the judge; *you are just His agents.* If any case is too difficult for you, bring it to me, and I'll handle it." 18At that time, I told you everything you needed to do.

19Then we left Horeb, as the Eternal, our True God, commanded us; and we went through that awful, vast wilderness—none of us will ever forget the sight! We headed toward the Amorite highlands until we got to Kadesh-barnea. 20I told you, "You've reached the Amorite highlands, and the Eternal our God is going to give them to us soon. 21Look! The Eternal, your True God, has put this land within your grasp! Go up *into these highlands,* and

* 1:7 Hebrew, *Arabah* * 1:7 Hebrew, *Negev*

The Book of Deuteronomy, even as it follows a covenant-treaty form, has almost a cinematic quality to it. Much of the action takes place in flashbacks as Moses recalls events and describes them to the Israelites in a drama. As we've been seeing in this opening historical section of the book, sometimes there are even layers of voices. At one point, Moses speaks in the voice of the people as they speak in the voice of the spies. Shortly we'll see Moses speaking in the voice of the Lord as He speaks in Moses' own voice! It begins by showing a storyteller and then shifts locations repeatedly in space and time to depict the various episodes he's describing, with his voice providing continuity throughout. Deuteronomy has a timeless, ancient-modern feel because the story of God's work on earth really is written and told by people as they struggle, with varying degrees of success, to understand God's purposes and to join with those people of God who have gone before us.

take possession of them as the Eternal, the God of your ancestors, promised you would. *Go!* Don't be afraid, and don't be intimidated!"

22But you approached me *with ideas of your own*: "Couldn't we send *a few* people in *to investigate* first? They could explore the land, come back, and tell us what route we should take and what cities we'd come to *along the way*." 23I agreed this was a good idea, so I chose 12 of you to go, one from each tribe. 24They went up into the highlands. They explored the Eshcol Valley 25and picked some of the *enormous* fruit growing there. Then they came back down to us with the fruit and a report: "This is a wonderful land that the Eternal our God is going to give to us!"

26But *even after all this encouragement,* you still weren't willing to go up *and fight*. You rebelled against what the Eternal your God told you to do. 27In your homes, you complained *to each other,* "The Eternal hates us! That's why He brought us out of the land of Egypt—so He could hand us over to the Amorites. They're going to destroy us! 28*He tells us,* 'Go up,' but go up where? The report of the rest of those we sent out was terrifying: 'The people there are bigger and taller than we are. Their cities are huge, with walls as high as the sky! We even saw *giants* there—descendants of the Anakim.'"

29So I told you, "Don't be scared! Don't be afraid of them! 30*You won't have to fight this battle yourselves;* the Eternal your God, who *always* goes ahead of you, will fight for you just as He did in Egypt—you saw Him do it! 31And here in this wilderness, all along the route you've traveled until you reached this place, haven't you seen the Eternal, your True God, carrying you the way a parent carries a child? 32But you still don't trust the Eternal your God, 33even though He *always* goes ahead of you as you travel and finds places for you to camp. In *a pillar of* fire by night and in a cloud by day, He *always* shows you the right way to go."

34When the Eternal heard your *untrusting* words, He angrily swore an oath: 35"Not a single person in this wicked generation will see the good land I swore to give to your ancestors! 36There'll be only one exception: Caleb (Jephunneh's son). He will see it. I'll give the *very* land he walked through *when he spied it out* to him and his descendants because he remained completely loyal to the Eternal." 37And He was angry with me, too, because of the way you acted. He told me, "Not even you will go into the land! 38It will be Joshua (Nun's son), a man you've already entrusted *with important responsibilities,* who will enter it instead. Encourage him, because he will *lead the people into the land and* give it to Israel as their possession. 39You said *that if you fought, all your soldiers would be killed and* your little ones would become plunder *for your enemies*. But it will be those children *under age 20,* who don't know right from wrong yet, who will enter the land. I'll give it to them, and it will belong to them. 40But as for you, head back into the wilderness, toward the Red Sea."*

41After *God's judgment* you responded, "We've sinned against the Eternal! We'll go up and fight now, just as the Eternal, our True God,

* 1:40 Literally, Sea of Reeds

commanded us." So each of you strapped on your weapons and prepared to fight. You thought it would be easy to get up into the highlands. 42The Eternal tried to warn you *that it was too late* by telling me, "Tell them not to go up and not to fight! I am not with them. They'll be crushed by their enemies." 43I told you *everything,* but you wouldn't listen. You rebelled against the Eternal's command, and you went up arrogantly into the highlands. 44The Amorites who lived there came out and attacked you, and you ran away from them as if they were a swarm of bees! They crushed *more and more of* your soldiers *all the way* from Seir to Hormah, *until they gave up the chase.* 45You came back and wept before the Eternal. But He wouldn't listen to a word you said. 46So you just stayed in Kadesh and didn't leave for a long time.

2 **Moses:** Finally we did as the Eternal had commanded me, and we headed back into the wilderness toward the Red Sea.* For a long time, we wandered around Mount Seir, 2until *at last* I got new instructions from the Eternal: 3"You've wandered around this mountain long enough. Turn north, 4and give the people these directions *from Me*: 'You're going to cross into the territory of a people who are related to you. They're the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They'll be afraid of you, so be very careful *what you do*. 5Don't incite a fight with them because I won't give you even a square foot of their land. I gave Mount Seir to Esau, *and I want his descendants* to live there. 6'You may purchase food from them with silver and eat; you may buy water from them with silver and drink.'" 7*You are not to plunder this nation* because the Eternal your God, has blessed you in every way. He's watched over you as you've journeyed through this vast wilderness. Throughout these 40 years, the Eternal your God has been with you, and you haven't lacked a thing.

8So we traveled *peacefully* past our relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. We left the road through the arid valley,* bypassing Elath and Ezion-geber, and took the desert road to Moab. 9There the Eternal gave me more instructions: "Don't attack the Moabites, and don't fight any battles with them because I'm not going to give you any of Moab's land. I gave Ar to these descendants of Lot, so it belongs to them."

10The Emim were formerly living in Ar. They were a large and powerful nation, and they were as tall as the *giant* Anakim were. 11They and the Anakim are usually known as "Rephaim," but the Moabites call them *just* "Emim." 12The Horites were formerly living in Seir, but the descendants of Esau drove them out. *The Edomites* destroyed them and took their place, just as Israel did in the land the Eternal gave them as their possession, saying, 13"Now cross the Wadi Zered *into their territory*."

Moses: So we crossed the Zered Valley. 14At that point, we'd been traveling for 38 years, from Kadesh-barnea to the Zered Valley. The last of the people in our camp who had been old enough to fight back then, those men of war, finally died. The Eternal had sworn to them *that none of them would be left among us when we did enter the land,* and this happened *just as He said.* 15The Eternal struck them with one disaster after another inside the camp until they were all dead.

16Just as soon as the last man of war was gone, 17the Eternal spoke to me: 18"Today you will pass into the territory of Moab when you cross Ar. 19When you get to the other side, you'll be facing the descendants of Ammon. Don't attack them, and don't fight any battles with them because I'm not going to give you any of Ammon's land. I already gave this land to these descendants of Lot, so it belongs to them."

20The land *of the Ammonites* is also considered the land of the Rephaim because the Rephaim (whom the Ammonites call the Zamzummin) were formerly living in it. 21They, *too,* were a large and powerful nation, as tall as the Anakim, but the Eternal destroyed them so the Ammonites could take their place. 22He did the same thing for the descendants of Esau who now live in Seir: He destroyed the Horites so the Edomites could take their place. Esau's descendants are still living in Seir. 23In the same way, some Caphtorim came from Caphtor* and destroyed the Avvim, who were *the first to* live in villages as far away as Gaza, and took their place.

* 2:1 Literally, Sea of Reeds * 2:8 Hebrew, *Arabah* * 2:23 Most likely the Isle of Crete

Episodes like the one described in 2:34-35, in which entire populations are wiped out, are among the most deeply troubling parts of the Bible. Particularly when this is done under the leadership of people appointed by God, or even on God's direct instructions, many serious questions are raised. How is this consistent with God's mercy? Interpreters have taken different approaches to try to account for episodes like these, but many problems still remain.

Perhaps the best that can be done is to acknowledge that the Bible presents us with a mixture of materials. Mostly God's mercy, kindness, and forgiveness are stressed; but sometimes we do see judgments of God, whether through natural forces such as flood and fire, or through human armies, carried out against entire populations. Which of these attributes, mercy or justice, most essentially characterizes God? Which passages should we consider normative for our own guidance today, and which ones should we see as exceptional and interpret in light of the others? Discerning why and how these exceptional circumstances arose remains a matter for thoughtful students of the Bible to reflect on with reverence and concern.

Moses: 24*The Lord continued, saying,* "Get up, get going, and move on through the Arnon Valley. Listen: I'm going to defeat Sihon, the Amorite king of Heshbon, for you; I'll give you his land *as the beginning of your new territory*. Go get it, and attack him! 25Starting today, I'm going to make every nation under the sky terrified of you. When they hear about you, they will tremble and despair."

26We were in the wilderness of Kedemoth when I sent messengers to King Sihon in Heshbon and offered him these terms of peace: 27"Allow me to go across your land. I'll keep to the *King's* Highway; I won't turn off to the right or to the left. 28*I ask only for these rights*: sell me food and water for silver, so that I can eat and so that I can drink. Just let me walk across your land. 29The descendants of Esau who live in Seir let me pass through their territory this way, and so did the Moabites who live in Ar. I'll keep going right to the Jordan *River,* where I'll cross into the land the Eternal, our True God, is giving to us." 30But Sihon, king of Heshbon, refused to let us go through his land *marching so close to his capital*. The Eternal your God made him stubborn and obstinate so that he would *fight and* be defeated by you, and that's just what happened. 31The Eternal told me, "Look! I have already begun to hand Sihon and his land over to you. Go and take it! His land will be *the first of* your new territories." 32Then Sihon and his whole army came out to fight against us at Jahaz. 33The Eternal, our True God, defeated him for us; we destroyed Sihon and his sons and his whole army. 34We captured all his cities at that time, and we killed all the men, women, and children in each one of them. We didn't leave a single survivor. 35We kept only the livestock as our plunder, along with the loot from the cities we had captured. 36Not a single city was strong enough to keep us out—from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Valley, including the settlement down in the valley, all the way to Gilead! The Eternal our God gave all of them to us. 37But you didn't go near the land of the Ammonites along the Jabbok River, or toward their cities in the highlands, or anywhere else the Eternal our God told us *not to go*.

3 **Moses:** Then we left *those conquered regions* and continued up the road toward Bashan. Og, the king of Bashan, came out with his whole army to fight against us at Edrei. 2But the Eternal reassured me, "Don't be afraid of him! I'm going to defeat him and his whole army for you, and I'll give you his land. You'll do the same thing to him that you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon." 3The Eternal, our True God, defeated Og, king of Bashan, for us. We destroyed his whole army—there were no survivors *left to fight for him*. 4-5We captured all 60 of his *large* cities *and their surrounding villages* at that time; there wasn't a single one we didn't take from them in the whole region of Argob (which was the kingdom of Og in Bashan) in spite of their strong defenses: high walls, *fortified* gates, and

strong bars *latching the gates' doors, but we took them all,* and a large number of villages. 6We killed all the men, women, and children in each one of them, just as we had done to Sihon, king of Heshbon. 7We kept *only* the cattle and the loot from the cities as our plunder.

8This is how at that time we conquered the whole land east of the Jordan *River. We captured it all* from those two *ruling* Amorite kings, everything from the Arnon Valley *all the way up* to Mount Hermon:* 10all the cities of the plateau, all of Gilead, and all of Bashan, right out to the cities of Salecah and Edrei (which were in King Og's Bashan). 12aFrom then on, all of that land belonged to us.

9The Sidonians *in the north* call Mount Hermon "Sirion," and the Amorites call it "Senir." 11King Og of Bashan was the last of the *giant* Rephaim. He had a bed made of iron; it was over thirteen feet long and six feet wide! You can still see it in *the city of* Rabbah in Ammon.

Moses: 12bTo the children of Reuben and Gad, I gave *the kingdom of Sihon,* the area *north* of Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Valley, including half the Gilead highlands and all the cities there. 13I gave the kingdom of Og to half *of Joseph's descendants in the* tribe of Manasseh *who settled east of the Jordan,* including the rest of Gilead, the region of Argob, and Bashan.

All of Bashan is known as the "land of the Rephaim" *because of the size of King Og and his ancestors.* 14Jair, a leader of Manasseh, conquered the *outlying areas in the* whole region of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites. He named them after himself, so *that portion of* Bashan is now known as Havvoth-jair, *which means "the villages of Jair."*

Moses: 15I gave *the city of* Gilead to Machir, *another leader of Manasseh, because he conquered it.* 16And I gave the children of Reuben and Gad the land from Gilead *south* to the middle of the Arnon Valley, *north* to the Jabbok River, *east to* the border with Ammon; 17and *west* to the Jordan *River* Valley, from the Sea of Galilee* down to the Dead Sea,* beneath where Mount Pisgah rises to the east. 18Do you remember what I commanded you at the time? *I told the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh*, "The Eternal your God has given you this land, and now it belongs to you. I want all of your warriors to cross *the Jordan,* fully armed, ahead of your fellow Israelites. 19Only your wives and children and cattle (I know you have a lot of cattle *thanks to the plunder you earned*) will stay behind in the cities I've given you. 20When the Eternal your God has given the rest of the Israelites the land that will belong to them on the other side of the Jordan, when they are living in peace just as you are now, then each of you can come back here and live on your own land which I've given you."

21I told Joshua, "You've seen with your own eyes everything the Eternal your God has done to these two kings. He will do the same thing to the kingdoms you're now going into. 22Don't be afraid of them—*any of you!* The Eternal your God will do the fighting for you."

► The conquered Ammonite land on the eastern side is given to Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. But this allocation does not occur until these tribes help their brothers conquer the land on the western side of the Jordan.

Moses: 23Then I pleaded *again and again* with the Eternal *on my own behalf.* 24"Eternal Lord, You've only just begun to show me, Your servant, how very great and powerful You are. What other god in heaven or on earth can do the great and powerful things You do? 25Please let me cross the Jordan and see that good land and those beautiful highlands and Lebanon." 26But the Eternal was angry with me because of you, and He wouldn't listen to me.

► The Lord answers so many of Moses' other prayers, so why can't forgiveness and pardon be extended

* 3:9 Verses 9-12 have been rearranged to assist in the comprehension of the passage. * 3:17 Hebrew, *Chinnereth* * 3:17 Literally, Sea of Salt

to Moses now? Why is this man of God banned from entering the promised land? At a time when the people need water in the desert (Numbers 20:2-13), even though in their lack of faith they complain bitterly, the Lord mercifully decides to provide water for them. He chooses to give them a miracle through Moses, who is supposed to command a rock (only verbally) to bring forth water. But Moses is enraged with the people. First he castigates them for being "rebels" and then strikes the rock twice with his staff. This act of disobedience will keep Moses from entering the promised land, and in this case, no appeal is possible.

Moses: The Eternal said to me, "That's enough! Don't ever bring this up to Me again! 27You can go up to the top of *Mount* Pisgah and look to the west and north and south and east to see the land from there. *Take a good look,* because you're not going to cross the Jordan *River*. 28So instruct Joshua, and strengthen and encourage him, because he's the one who will lead the people into the land you see and make it their territory. *He will conquer it for them.*" 29And that's why we've stayed here in this valley by Beth-peor *at the foot of Mount Pisgah.*

4 **Moses:** So now, Israel, pay close attention to the laws and judgments I'm going to teach you. If you follow them, you'll enter and live in the land the Eternal, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. *You'll conquer it,* and it will become your territory. 2Don't add anything to what I command you, and don't take away anything from it; just follow the commands of the Eternal your God that I'm giving you now.

3You saw with your own eyes what the Eternal did *about your immorality* at Baal-peor, the *mountain-god*. When some of you followed after the Baal god, the Eternal your God killed them right in front of you—*not one of them survived!*[*] 4But all of you who remained loyal to the Eternal your God are still alive today. 5So pay attention—I'm teaching you the rules and judgments the Eternal my God has given me *for you*. You're to follow them when you enter the land and settle there. 6If you obey them carefully, all the nations around you will marvel at your wisdom and understanding. They'll hear about these rules and say, "This is a great nation—its people are so wise and understanding!" 7Indeed, what other nation is so great that it has a god that compares to the Eternal our God as He is near to us whenever we call on Him? 8What other nation is so great that it has rules and judgments as just as the ones contained in this whole law I'm presenting to you today?

► The Lord chooses Israel from among all the nations to be His own people; but that choice, paradoxically, is for the sake of all the other nations too. Israel is supposed to create a model society, following His laws, and this is supposed to attract other nations to true faith in Him. Most of the Old Testament describes how the Lord is at work in close relationship with one nation. But it also provides continual glimpses, like this one, of the way that relationship is designed to be a vehicle to reach all nations. The "law" is a complex legal code designed to build a new society out of former desert wanderers.

Moses: 9So watch what you do! Be careful with your very life! Don't forget the things you saw with your own eyes, and don't let them fade from your memory. Remember them your whole life; teach them to your children and your grandchildren. 10Remember the day you stood before the Eternal, your True God, at Horeb *when He called you to come close*. He told me, "Bring all the people to Me. I want them to hear My words, so that they will learn to fear Me as long as they live on this earth and will teach their children to do the same." 11You all came and stood at the foot of the mountain. It blazed with fire all the way up into the sky while dark clouds and mist obscured your view. 12Then the Eternal spoke to

[*] 4:3 Numbers 25:1-5

you from inside that fire. You heard His voice, you heard His words, but you didn't see His shape—you only heard a voice. 13He told you what to do to keep the covenant He made with you. He gave you the Ten Directives and engraved *two copies of* them on two stone tablets. 14The Eternal commanded me at that time to teach you the rules and judgments *that make up the law* He wants you to follow in the land where you're going to live when you cross *the Jordan*.

15So be very careful! *Your souls are at stake!* You didn't see any shape when the Eternal spoke to you at Horeb from inside that fire, 16so don't ever become so corrupt that you carve an idol *representing Him* for yourselves in any shape, whether in the form of a man or a woman, 17or in the form of an animal that lives on the land, or a bird with wings that flies through the sky, 18or anything that crawls on the ground, or a fish that swims in the sea. 19And don't ever *become so corrupt that you* look up into the sky and see the sun, the moon, and the stars—as if each of them were a god—and be led astray to bow down to them and worship them, which the Eternal your God has given to all the people on earth. 20But the Eternal *has done something unique for you*: He chose you and delivered you from *slavery in* Egypt *where you were purified as if in* an iron furnace, and He made you His very own people, which you are today. 21The Eternal was angry with me because of you, and He swore I would not cross the Jordan *River* and enter the good land the Eternal your God is giving you to live in. 22I'm not going to cross the Jordan. I'm going to die over on this side, but you will cross the river and take ownership of that good land. 23So be very careful! Don't forget the covenant the Eternal your God made with you; don't make yourselves an idol in the shape of anything. The Eternal your God has commanded you not to! 24The Eternal your God burns with jealousy *when you're not completely loyal to Him*.

25It would be disastrous if, after you've lived in the land for a long time and had children and grandchildren, you made an idol in any form. You know the Eternal your God considers this an evil thing to do, and it would make Him furious. 26I call the heaven and the land as witnesses against you today, that *if you do this,* even though you're going to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land, you won't last long on it. You will die quickly—you will certainly be destroyed. 27The Eternal will scatter *what's left of* you among all the other nations. Only a few of you will be left in each of the nations He takes you to. 28And there you will worship *useless* items made of wood and stone carved by human beings, *so-called* "gods" that can't see or hear or eat or smell. 29But when you're there, you'll look for the Eternal your God. If every part of you is invested in the search, heart and soul, then you'll find Him. 30When you're in trouble in those days yet to come because of all these things, you'll come back to the Eternal your God, and you'll listen to His voice. 31He is a compassionate God. He won't abandon you or destroy you or forget the covenant He made with your ancestors—He swore to them *that He'd keep it*!

32Ask anyone who's ever lived: has anything this great ever happened before? Has anyone even heard of anything like it? *Not* since the day God first created humanity, *not* anywhere in the cosmos, from one end to the other. 33You heard the voice of God speaking from inside the fire *at Mount Horeb,* and you survived! No other nation has ever done anything like that. 34You saw with your own eyes what the Eternal, your True God, did for you in Egypt: He claimed you as His own nation, and He took you right out of another nation *that was holding you captive. He rescued you* by testing them *with plagues,* by warning them with signs and omens, by fighting against them with overwhelming strength, and by totally terrifying them! No other god has ever tried to do anything like that. 35You saw all this so you would know the Eternal is the only God who truly exists. There is no other. 36You heard His voice from heaven as He admonished you; He showed you His blazing fire on the earth, and you heard His words from inside that fire—*all at His will.* 37Because He loved your ancestors, He's also committed to their descendants who came after them, and that's why He personally brought you out of Egypt by His own great power. 38He defeated nations that are greater and stronger than you, and He let you live on their land. It will belong to you! 39You just need to know with every fiber of your being that the Eternal, and no

one else, is God up in heaven and down here on the earth. 40If you remember His rules and keep His commands, which I'm teaching you today, things will go well for you and for your children after you. You'll live a long time on the ground the Eternal your God is giving you. He wants you to have it forever.

41Then Moses designated three cities east of the Jordan 42as places where a person could flee if he or she unintentionally killed someone when there was no grudge between them. By fleeing to one of these cities, a person could *be safe from revenge and* stay alive. 43*These were the cities:* Bezer on the plateau in the wilderness for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.

► Establishing these cities of refuge for those who will be living on the east side of the Jordan is the last thing Moses needs to do before sending the people across the river to conquer the rest of the promised land. But they will keep living in that land only if they remain faithful to their covenant with the Lord. So as Moses continues to represent Him, he now describes the people's obligations to the Eternal, beginning with exclusive loyalty and obedience to the one True God.

44This is the law Moses gave to the children of Israel; 45these are the precedents, rules, and decrees Moses taught the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt. 46They were east of the Jordan, in the valley across from Beth-peor, in the land of Amorite King Sihon who ruled in Heshbon. Moses and the children of Israel crushed him when they came out of Egypt. 47Sihon and Og, the Amorite king of Bashan, ruled the territory east of the Jordan. The Israelites took over their land, 48from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Valley all the way to Mount Sion* (that is, *Mount* Hermon), 49including the arid valley* east of the Jordan *River,* down to the Dead Sea,* at the foot of Mount Pisgah.

5 **Moses:** Listen, Israel, as I proclaim these rules and decrees directly to you today! Learn them, and put them into practice. 2The Eternal our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. 3The Eternal didn't make that covenant just with our parents; He also made it with all of us who are alive here today, because we were included *in the covenant when He made it with them.* 4The Eternal *tried to* talk to you directly at that mountain from inside the fire *that rose up into the sky.* 5But you were afraid of the fire and wouldn't go up the mountain, so I stood between you and the Eternal and told you what He was saying.

Eternal One *(speaking to the people of Israel through Moses)***:** 6I am the Eternal. I am your *True* God. I led you out of Egypt where you were slaves.

7You are to worship no other gods before me—*My presence is enough.*

8You are not to make idols of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or down in the sea. 9You are not to bow down in worship of any images *of other gods,* for I am the Eternal your God. I am jealous *for worship,* bringing punishment on you and your children to come, even down to your great-grandchildren, to whoever hates Me. 10Instead, those who obey My commands and truly love Me will receive My loyal love *endlessly,* even for a thousand generations.

11You are to not use My name lightly or flippantly *or as a curse.* I will punish anyone who treats My name as anything less than sacred.

12*You and your family are to* honor the Sabbath *by setting it aside for the Lord your God.* Make sure it remains holy, just as I commanded you. 13You should do all of your work in six days, and 14on the seventh—the Sabbath—do not do any work. This goes for you, your sons, your daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and cattle, and foreign travelers staying at your house. My Sabbath rest is for all to enjoy. 15Remember what it was like when you were a slave in Egypt. Then with overwhelming power I brought you out of there. That's why I have commanded you to observe the Sabbath each week.

16Honor your father and mother,* as I have commanded you. If you do, you will

* 4:48 Other manuscripts read "Sirion." * 4:49 Hebrew, *Arabah* * 4:49 Literally, Sea of the Arabah * 5:16 Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10

be blessed with long life and all will go well for you as you live on the ground I am giving you.*

17You must never murder *anyone*.
18You must never commit adultery.*
19You must never steal.
20You must never lie when you're called to give testimony about another person.*
21Never look at someone else's wife and wish you could have her. Never look at anything that belongs to someone else and wish it was yours—his house, field, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything else he owns.

Moses *(summarizing)*: 22When all of you were gathered at the mountain, the Eternal told you these things in a loud voice, speaking from inside the fire while dark clouds and mist obscured your view, and He added nothing more. He engraved *two copies of* them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. 23Then all of your tribal representatives and elders approached me *because you were so afraid* when you heard His voice coming from the darkness, as the mountain blazed with fire. 24*They told me what* you were saying: "Today the Eternal our God has displayed His glory and power, and we've heard His voice from inside that fire. We see that God can speak to mortals, and they can survive! 25But if we keep listening to the voice of the Eternal, our True God, that huge fire is going to burn us up, and we'll die! Why should we let that happen? 26Who on earth has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking from inside a flame, as we just did, and survived? 27You, go up and listen to everything the Eternal our God is saying, and then come tell us everything He tells you. We'll listen, and we'll obey."

28The Eternal heard everything you said when you told me this. He responded to me, "I've heard what the people told you. They have a good idea! 29I wish they would always think this way—that they would fear Me and keep all My commands. Then everything would go well for them and their children forever. 30Tell them they can return to their tents, *and I will speak solely through you*. 31But you are to stand here by Me; and I'll tell you all the commands, rules, and judgments I want you to teach them to follow in the land I'm giving them to live in."

► Moses deals with God directly because the people are simply too terrified of the Lord! These well-known Ten Directives or Commandments teach broad principles for godly life and relationships by presenting specific rules meant to be applied more widely, through thoughtful reflection. There are ten because this is the "human" number in the Bible—people ordinarily have ten fingers and ten toes. But our moral reflection is not supposed to be limited only to the ten areas considered here. The same principles of right relationship illustrated in these areas can be carried into all other areas of human life. The genius of the instruction here is that it's brief enough to be carved on a stone tablet a person can carry or to be remembered when looking at one's fingers or toes, but it has implications that are limitless.

Moses: 32So be very careful to do what the Eternal your God commanded you! Don't turn to the right or to the left; 33stay on the path the Eternal your God has marked out for you. That way you won't die, everything will go well for you, and you'll live a long time in the land that's going to be your territory.

6 **Moses:** The Eternal your God commanded me to teach you these rules and judgments so that you would obey them in the land that is yours when you cross *the Jordan*. 2You are to fear Him and obey His rules and commands, just as I'm teaching them to you now. Do this your whole lives—you, your children and your grandchildren—and you'll live *in the land* a long time. 3Yes, Israel, if you pay careful attention and obey, everything will go well for you in that land flowing with milk and honey; and you'll have many, many descendants just as the Eternal, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

* 5:16 Ephesians 6:2-3 * 5:17-18 James 2:11 * 5:16-20 Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20

► The phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" is certainly metaphorical. Moses doesn't mean that the rivers and streams of the promised land literally flow with milk and honey rather than with water. But he does want the people to have such a picture in their minds. He wants them to know they will be leaving behind the nomadic, foraging existence they have known in the wilderness. They will settle in a new land where their cattle will be well fed and will be able to provide them with milk in abundance. They will have the freedom to pursue even more discretionary activities since date honey would seep out of the trees without needing cultivating. God's promise isn't just that they will possess the land but that they will find rest, abundance, and health in it.

Moses: [4]Listen, Israel! The Eternal is our True God—He alone. [5]You should love Him, your True God, with all your heart and soul, with every ounce of your strength.* [6]Make the things I'm commanding you today part of who you are. [7]Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you're sitting together in your home and when you're walking together down the road. Make them the last thing you talk about before you go to bed and the first thing you talk about the next morning. [8]*Do whatever it takes to remember them:* tie a reminder on your hand and bind a reminder on your forehead *where you'll see it all the time,* [9]such as on the doorpost where you cross the threshold or on the *city* gate.

[10]The Eternal your God promised your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He would give you this land. When He brings you into it, you'll live in beautiful and spacious cities you didn't build. [11]You'll have houses filled with good things waiting for you—cisterns *to hold water* already dug out *of the rock* for you, and vineyards and olive orchards that you didn't plant. You'll have all you want to eat *and more.* [12]When this happens, be very, very careful! Don't forget it was the Eternal who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. [13]Worship Him, your True God, and serve Him and swear *oaths only* in His name.* [14]Don't become devoted to any of the gods the people around you worship. [15]The Eternal your God is living right among you, and He's a jealous God. He would become furious *if you were unfaithful to Him*—He'd wipe you off the face of the earth!

[16]Don't put the Eternal, your True God, to the test* the way you did back at Massah.

► Massah is a bittersweet memory for the Israelites. The people have complained and grumbled against the Eternal and actually prefer Egyptian bondage or even death to following God in the desert, but the Lord shows up and brings water out of rocks!

Moses: [17]Carefully obey the commands, rules, and precedents the Eternal, your True God, has given you. [18]Do the things He considers right and good. Then everything will go well for you, and you'll go and live in the good land He promised to your ancestors. [19]The Eternal will drive out all of your enemies, just as He said He would.

[20]You'll have conversations about this with your children in the future, and this is how they should go:

Child: What are these precedents and rules and judgments the Eternal our God commanded you *to obey*?

Parents *(to your child)***:** [21]We used to be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but then the Eternal delivered us with overwhelming power. [22]He sent amazing and awful signs and omens to torment the Egyptians, Pharaoh, and his royal court—right before our eyes! [23]He brought us out of there so He could bring us here and give us the land He promised to our ancestors. [24]He commanded us to remember all these rules to *show that we* fear Him, our God, so that things will always go well for us and so that we can keep living here as we are now. [25]If we carefully obey everything the Eternal our

* 6:5 Mark 12:29-30; 6:5 Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27 * 6:13 Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8 * 6:16 Matthew 4:7; Luke 4:12

God has commanded us, then we'll be *living as we should,* in righteousness *and in right relationship with Him.*

7 **Moses:** As the Eternal, your True God, is bringing you into the land where you're going to live *when you cross the Jordan,* He'll drive out many nations ahead of you—Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—seven nations that are bigger and stronger than you are. 2The Eternal your God will put them in your power. You must crush them; destroy them completely! Don't make any treaties with them, and don't show them any mercy. 3*Above all,* don't intermarry with them! Don't marry your daughters to any of their sons, and don't marry your sons to any of their daughters.

Eternal One: 4This would cause your enemies to turn your children away from Me to worship other gods.

Moses: If you did worship other gods, the Eternal would become furious with you and destroy you in an instant! 5So this is what you must do to these nations instead: tear down their altars, smash their monoliths, chop down their sacred poles,* and throw the idols they've carved into the fire!

► One of the most important ways faith is communicated is from parent to child. Most people who do find a lifelong faith come into it by the time they are young adults, and the most significant influence on them is what they've seen modeled at home. Stories and experiences are a compelling influence on the faith of children.

The first stage in building this sense of covenant loyalty to God was to eliminate every trace of pagan worship from the land. None of the Canaanites' existing religious fixtures could be used for worship. The altars other nations used to offer their sacrifices were dedicated explicitly to other gods, like Baal and Asherah, through their distinctive designs and decorations. The True God could not be represented in the shape of any created thing since He is the creator of everything!

Moses: 6Remember: you're a people set apart for the Eternal your God; He is your God and has chosen you to be *His own possession*—His special people—out of all the peoples on the earth. 7The Eternal didn't become devoted to you and choose you because you were the most numerous of all the peoples—in fact, you were the least! 8Instead, He brought you out of Egypt with overwhelming power and liberated you from slavery to Pharaoh the king because He loved you and was keeping the oath He swore to your ancestors. 9I want you to know that the Eternal your God is *the only true* God. He's the faithful God who keeps His covenants and shows loyal love for a thousand generations to those who *in return* love Him and keep His commands. 10But He holds personally accountable those who hate Him, and He destroys them; He does not delay when anyone hates Him, but He holds them personally accountable. 11Therefore, be very careful to obey the commands and rules and judgments I'm giving you today.

12If you pay attention to these judgments and keep them carefully, the Eternal your God will keep the covenant He made with your ancestors and show you His loyal love. 13He'll love you and bless you and increase your population. He'll bless your children, and He'll bless your agriculture. The land He promised your ancestors He'd give you will produce abundantly; and you'll have grain and wine and *olive* oil, many cattle, and new flocks. 14You will be blessed more than any other people. None of your men or women will be unable to have children; all of your cattle will have offspring. 15The Eternal will keep every illness away from you. He won't afflict you with any of those horrible diseases you saw in Egypt—He'll put them instead on those who hate you! 16You are to destroy all the nations the Eternal, your True God, puts in your power. Don't show them any pity! You must not worship their gods—that behavior is a deadly trap!

* 7:5 Hebrew, *Asherah*

17You might say to yourselves, "Those
nations are so much more powerful
than we are! How can we ever displace
them *in the land*?" 18But don't be afraid
of them! Remember what the Eternal,
your True God, did to Pharaoh and to
all of Egypt. 19You saw with your own
eyes how the Eternal your God brought
you out of there by testing the Egyptians
with great plagues, warning them with
signs and omens, and fighting against
them with overwhelming power. He is
your God and will do the same thing to
all the nations you're so afraid of right
now. 20The Eternal your God will even
send *swarms of* hornets against them.
Those hornets will finish off anyone
who escapes from you and tries to hide
from the death you bring. 21So don't be
so terrified of these *other nations*—the
Eternal your God is with you. He's a
great and awesome God! 22But He will
drive out these nations ahead of you
only little by little. You won't be able to
finish them off all at once because *if you
did,* the wild animals would reproduce
rapidly *in the empty land and that would
be dangerous.* 23But the Eternal your God
definitely will defeat these nations in
front of you. He will throw them into a
great panic until they are all destroyed.
24He'll put their kings in your power,
so you will be able to wipe out all their
names. No one under heaven will ever
know they existed! Not a single person
will be able to resist you; you'll destroy
them all. 25Then you must burn up all
of their carved idols in the fire. Don't
admire them because the silver and
gold in them *are so valuable.* If you take
those metals, you'll fall into a deadly trap
because He abhors these idols! 26You
must not bring these horrible things into
your house. If you do, you'll be doomed
to destruction, just as they are. You
should be totally horrified and disgusted
by these idols—they are doomed to
destruction!

8 **Moses:** You must obey very carefully
all of the law, which I'm command-
ing you today. If you do, you'll live
and thrive, and you'll go in and take pos-
session of the land He promised to your
ancestors. 2Remember how the Eternal,
your True God, led you through the wil-
derness these past 40 years. He did this
to humble you, to test you, to uncover
your motivations, to see if you would
obey His commands. 3He humbled you
by making you hungry *when there was no
food in the desert.* Then He fed you with
manna, a food you and your ancestors
had never heard of. He did this because
He wanted you to understand that what
makes you truly alive is not the bread
you eat but following every word that
comes from the mouth of the Eternal
One.* 4Your clothes didn't wear out, and
your feet didn't swell throughout your 40
years *of wandering.* 5I want you to know
in your hearts that the Eternal your God
has been training you just as a parent
trains a child. 6So obey His commands!
Live as He has instructed, and fear Him.
7The Eternal your God is bringing you
into a good land, a land with torrents of
rushing water, with springs and under-
ground streams flowing out into the
valleys and hills. 8It's a land of wheat and
barley, of vines and fig trees and pome-
granates, a land of oil-rich olive *trees* and
date honey. 9In that land, you'll always
have plenty to eat—you won't lack any-
thing! There's iron in the rocks, and you
can dig copper from the hills. 10You'll eat
and be satisfied, and then you'll humbly
thank the Eternal your God for the good
land He's given you.

11But *then* be very careful! Don't for-
get the Eternal your God and disobey
the commands and decrees and rules
I'm giving you today. 12When your stom-
achs are full, when you've built comfort-
able houses to live in, 13when you have
large herds and flocks, when you possess
plenty of silver and gold, and when you
have more things than you imagined
possible; 14then don't become proud and
puffed up and forget Him. He brought
you out of the land of Egypt where you
were slaves; 15and He led you through
that awful, vast wilderness with its poi-
sonous snakes and scorpions, through
that desert where there was no water.
He made water come out of a hard rock;
16and He fed you in the wilderness with
manna, a food your ancestors had never
heard of. He did all this to humble you
and test you, but it was all intended for
your good in the end. 17If He hadn't, you
might have believed, "I've gotten all this
wealth by my own power and strength!"
18Remember the Eternal One your God.
He's the One who gives you the power to
get wealth, so He can keep the covenant

* 8:3 Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4

promises He made to your ancestors,
as He is doing now. 19I testify against
you today that if you do forget Him and
pursue other gods, if you worship them
and bow down to them; then you will
certainly be destroyed. 20Just like the
nations the Eternal is now destroying
ahead of you, you'll be destroyed your-
selves because you wouldn't listen to His
voice.

► Throughout the Bible, God challenges His people to make sure the poor and needy are well cared for. Grinding poverty and deprivation destroy the wholeness of life that God intends for all people. However, as Moses warns here, achieving prosperity can lead people to be complacent and self-sufficient and to forget that God has been the One who has provided for them.

Perhaps no warning is more urgently needed for God's people in our own wealthy and comfortable society. Prosperity can tempt us to forget about God and to act as if we can take care of everything through our own means. But with prosperity often comes poverty. These humbling, testing experiences are meant to build the qualities of gratitude and trust into our lives, and they keep us from forgetting God even when we do enjoy prosperity.

9 **Moses:** Listen to me, Israel! Today
you're going to cross the Jordan and
enter the land you'll take away from
nations that are bigger and stronger
than you. They live in huge cities that
have defense walls as high as the sky.
2They're big and tall, *giants* descended
from the Anakim. You know all about
them *from the 12 spies I sent into the
land*—you've heard the saying, "Who
can ever fight with the descendants of
Anak?" 3So I want you to know today
that it will be the Eternal your God who
will go across *the Jordan* ahead of you. A
blazing fire, He'll destroy those nations.
He'll subdue them so you can destroy
them quickly and take their place, as
He has promised you will. 4When the
Eternal your God has driven them out
ahead of you, then don't begin to believe
He gave you this land because you're so
good and righteous! It's just the oppo-
site; He is giving you their land because
those other nations are so bad! 5It's not
because you've conducted yourselves
so well or because you have such pure
hearts that you're going to take the land;
the Eternal your God is driving out those
other nations ahead of you because
they're so wicked. He's keeping His word,
the promise He made to your ancestors,
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6I'll say it
again: the Eternal One your God isn't
giving you this good land because you're
so good. You're stubborn, *obstinate* peo-
ple. 7Remember—don't forget—how you
kept infuriating Him in the wilderness.
From the day you came out of Egypt
until the day you arrived here, you've
been rebelling against Him.

8Even at Horeb, you infuriated Him.
The Eternal got so angry with you He
was ready to destroy you! 9When I went
up the mountain to receive the stone
tablets—the tablets of the covenant
He made with you—I stayed on the
mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. I
didn't eat or drink anything all that time,
*preparing myself to receive these holy
words.* 10-11At the end of those 40 days
and nights, the Eternal gave me those
two stone tablets of the covenant. On
them He'd engraved with His own finger
everything He told you on the day you
gathered at the mountain, *when He spoke
to you* from inside the fire. 12The Eternal
told me, "Get up, and go back down the
mountain as fast as you can! *While you've
been up here surrounded by My holiness,*
the people you led out of Egypt have
become corrupt! How quickly they've left
the path I commanded them to stay on.
They've *melted gold and* poured it into a
mold and made themselves an idol! 13I've
seen how stubborn *and obstinate* these
people are. 14Don't try to stop Me—I'm
going to destroy them! I'll wipe out every
last trace of them under the sky, and I'll
make a bigger and stronger nation out of
just you."

15The mountain was still blazing with
fire as I hurried back down it, carrying
the two covenant tablets in my hands.
16I saw *with my own eyes* how you had
sinned against the Eternal, your True
God: you'd cast an idol in the shape of a
young bull!

► This young bull is made in imitation of the Canaanite fertility gods. The bull is a prominent symbol of Baal. Creating this idol requires a long, intentional process of collecting enough precious metal for a statue, melting it down and purifying it, pouring it into a mold that also has to be designed and crafted, and making sure the statue cools evenly so that it doesn't break apart. (Perhaps the Israelites learned these crafts by observation or practice in Egypt.) This was no casual slip into an unintentional religious compromise. This is a deliberate embrace of a god other than the Lord, right at the moment when He is drawing up His covenant of love with Israel. They are as unfaithful to the Lord as a person who has an affair while on his honeymoon!

Moses: How quickly you left the path the Eternal commanded you to stay on. [17]Right before your eyes I took the two tablets, hurled them *onto the ground,* and smashed them to pieces. [18]*I went back up the mountain, and* for another 40 days and nights I prostrated myself before Him, *lying face down on the ground in grief and petition,* not eating or drinking anything *as before.* You had sinned so seriously—you did what the Eternal had just told you was wrong, and this made Him furious! [19]I was afraid* He was so violently angry with you that He'd destroy you, as He said He would. But one more time, the Eternal One listened to me, *and He spared you.* [20]I had to pray *particularly* for Aaron because the Eternal was furious with him *for making the idol*—He would have killed my brother! [21]I took the calf *idol* you made, that embodiment of your sin, and I burned it up. Then I crushed what was left, ground it into tiny pieces until it was as fine as dust, and threw the dust into the riverbed that rushes down the mountain.

[22]You *and your parents* were always making the Eternal furious! At Taberah, *you whined and complained;** at Massah, *you were sure the Lord was going to let you die of thirst;** at Kibroth-hattaavah, *you said you were sick of the food He provided!** [23]At Kadesh-barnea, *when you finally reached the promised land,** the Eternal sent you in: "Go and take possession of the land—I've given it to you!" But you defied this direct order from the Eternal, your True God! You didn't trust Him, and you didn't listen to His voice. [24]You've been rebelling against Him from the day I met you!

[25]That's why, *at Horeb,* I lay face down before the Eternal for 40 days and nights, *praying for you:* He said He was going to destroy you, *and I knew He had every reason to!* [26]I prayed to Him, "Eternal Lord, please don't destroy Your people! They're Your own possession: You liberated them *from another master*—You brought them out of Egypt with overwhelming power. [27]Remember Your *loyal* servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; please forget about how stubborn and wicked and sinful these people are. *Don't let their actions spoil Your greater plan.* [28]Otherwise, *the people back* in the land You brought us out of will be saying, "The Eternal couldn't really bring them into that land He promised them. He actually hated those people, and He brought them out into the desert in order to kill them off." [29]*Remember* they are Your people, Your own possession, the ones You brought out *of Egypt* Yourself with such overwhelming power!

10 **Moses:** Then the Eternal answered *my prayer*: "Cut out two stone tablets like the first ones, come back up the mountain to Me, and make a wooden chest. [2]I'll write on those tablets the same words that were on the first ones, the ones you smashed *into pieces,* and you can put the new tablets in the chest *you make*."

[3]So I made a chest of acacia wood and cut out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I went *back* up the mountain carrying the two tablets. [4]The Eternal engraved on them what He had engraved on the first ones: the Ten Directives the Eternal gave you on the day you gathered at the mountain *when He spoke to you* from inside the fire. He gave the *new* tablets to me, [5]and I came back down the mountain and put them in the chest I'd made, as the Eternal had commanded me. And they're still there today.

* 9:19 Hebrews 12:21 * 9:22 Numbers 11:1-3 * 9:22 Exodus 17:1-7 * 9:22 Numbers 11:31-35 * 9:23 Numbers 14–15

► When they make and worship the young bull idol, the people are breaking the first covenant at Horeb, the one the Lord makes with them when He speaks to them from inside the fire and gives them the Ten Directives. Moses signifies that this first covenant is null and void when he smashes the two stone tablets that are the official copies of the covenant terms. That covenant has been conditional on the people maintaining an exclusive allegiance to the Lord, and they have violated this essential requirement. Now, however, through the intercession of Moses, the people are accepted into a second, new covenant on the basis of His forgiveness and mercy. Its continuation is also conditional on their obedience, but its deepest foundation is a grace anticipating the new covenant God ultimately makes with us through Jesus.

6The children of Israel had been staying
by the wells that belong to the descendants of Jaakan. They moved from there
to Moserah. There, Aaron died and was
buried. His son, Eleazar, succeeded him
as *high* priest. 7The people then moved to
Gudgodah, and then to Jotbathah where
the land is watered by streams. 8There
the Eternal set apart the tribe of Levi
under Eleazar's new leadership to carry
the covenant chest of the Eternal One to
serve Him in His presence and to bless *the people* in His name, as they still do today.
9That's why *the tribe of* Levi doesn't have
any familial hereditary territory alongside
the other tribes: the Eternal Himself is
Levi's inheritance, just as the Eternal your
God told Levi He would be.

Moses: 10I stayed on the mountain just
as long as I had before, for 40 days
and nights. The Eternal listened to my
prayers once again and agreed not to
destroy you. 11He told me, "Stand up
again—*I've granted your request.* Now go
and lead the people the rest of the way,
so they can enter and take possession of
the land I promised their ancestors I'd
give them."

* 10:22 Genesis 46:27

12And now, Israel, what is the Eternal
your God asking of you? Only that you
fear Him, live as He wants you to, and
love Him; serve Him with every part of
you, heart and soul; 13and obey His commands and rules, which I'm giving you
today for your good.

14Think of it—everything already
belongs to the Eternal your God: the
sky and *His own dwelling place* beyond
the sky, the earth and everything on it.
15Nevertheless He devotedly loved your
ancestors; and out of all the peoples He
chose you, their descendants, to be His
own, as you still are today. 16Cut away
that hard covering around your heart,
and do not harden your neck *against me*,
17because the Eternal your God is the
God of gods and the Lord of lords, the
great and mighty and amazing God! He
doesn't favor *the powerful,* and He can't
be bribed.

The imagery of cutting the foreskin of one's heart and not hardening the neck are graphic depictions of how God desires internal devotion to reflect external obedience.

18He enforces His justice for *the powerless, such as* orphans and widows,
and He loves foreigners, making sure
they have food and clothing. 19You must
love those foreigners *living with you* in
the same way. Remember how you were
foreigners in the land of Egypt! 20So fear
the Eternal your God; serve Him, and
be devoted to Him. *Show your loyalty by*
swearing oaths *only* in His name. 21He's
the One you must praise—He's your God
who has done such great and amazing
things for you, as you've seen with your
own eyes. 22When your ancestors went
into Egypt, there were only 70 people in
their whole clan.* But He kept increasing your numbers, and now there are as
many of you as there are stars in the sky!

11 **Moses:** So love the Eternal
your God and always obey His
requirements, regulations, judgments, and commands. 2Now keep this
in mind: it was *you,* not your children,
who saw and experienced *firsthand* all
the lessons the Eternal your God taught
you. *You saw* how He demonstrated His
majesty and His overwhelming power.
3*You saw* the signs He performed in

Egypt* and everything He sent against Pharaoh the king and everyone in the country. 4*You saw* what He did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and its chariots, right when they were chasing you: He drowned them in the Red Sea!* The Eternal destroyed them all,* *and the Egyptian army still hasn't recovered.* 5*You saw* how He took care of you in the wilderness and brought you *safely* to this place. 6*But remember what happened when people rebelled against Him: you saw* what He did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab from the tribe of Reuben—how the earth opened up, right in our midst, and swallowed them, their families, their tents, and their livestock!*

7Therefore, as eyewitnesses of all the great things the Eternal did, 8carefully obey all the commands I'm giving you today. Then you'll be strong enough to go and take possession of the land you're about to enter, 9and you'll live long, *healthy* lives there. This is what the Eternal promised your ancestors: He'd give this land flowing with milk and honey to them and to their descendants. 10The land where you're going to live when you cross *the Jordan* isn't like the land of Egypt where you came from. When you sowed seeds there, you could water all of your land as if it were nothing more than a *small* vegetable garden, transporting the water yourselves. 11But in the land where you're going to live, the hills and valleys drink water right out of the sky! 12He takes care of this land; He's always looking after it, all throughout the year.

Eternal One: 13If you carefully obey My commands which I'm giving you today, and if you love Me and serve Me with your whole heart and soul, 14then I'll send rain on your land when it's needed, in the autumn and the spring. You'll have an *abundant* harvest of grain and wine and *olive* oil. 15I'll make grass grow in the fields for your cattle. You'll eat *all you need* and be totally satisfied.

Moses: 16But watch out! Don't be seduced, so that you turn away *from the Lord.* Don't *abandon Him to* worship other gods or bow down to them! 17If you do, the Eternal's fiery anger will result *in a deadly drought.* He won't let any rain fall from the sky, and the ground won't produce any crops. Then you won't last very long in the good land the Eternal One is giving you.

18-20So let what I'm saying sink deeply into your hearts and souls. Do whatever it takes *to remember what I'm telling you:* tie a reminder on your hand or put a reminder on your forehead *where you'll see it all the time,* and on the doorpost where you cross the threshold or on the *city* gate.

Teach these things to your children. Talk about them when you're sitting together in your home and when you're walking together down the road. Make them the last thing you talk about before you go to bed and the first thing you talk about the next morning. 21That way you and your children will be blessed with long life *and abundant crops* upon the ground the Eternal promised to your ancestors, for as long as there's a sky above the earth.

► Eventually people begin to take these instructions literally. They put abbreviated reminders of the law called *mezuzot*—scrolls of parchment inscribed with a prayer rolled into a decorative case—on their doorposts. They even wear *tefillin*—small leather boxes containing the same prayer—on their arms and foreheads with straps. Any discipline that reminds us effectively to live as God intends is helpful. But Moses' goal here is not to create new rituals. It is to encourage God's people to be intentional about learning and remembering God's ways.

Moses: 22If you carefully obey all these things I'm commanding you—if you really do love the Eternal your God and live as He wants you to and devote yourselves to Him—23then He will drive out all of these nations ahead of you. You'll conquer nations that are bigger and stronger than you are. 24Every place you walk will become yours: your territory will extend from the wilderness *in the south* to Lebanon *in the north,* and from the Euphrates River *in the east* to the *Mediterranean* Sea in the west. 25No one will be able to resist you. The Eternal

* 11:3 Exodus 7:8-21 * 11:4 Literally, Sea of Reeds * 11:4 Exodus 15:4 * 11:6 Numbers 16

your God will make everyone throughout the whole land you're going into terrified of you, just as He said He would.

[26]Look, you've got two choices: you can be blessed, or you can be cursed. [27]If you obey His commands, which I'm giving you today, you'll be blessed. [28]If you don't obey His commands—if you leave the path I'm showing you today so you can worship other gods who are foreign to you, then you'll be cursed.

► The ancient treaty form, which is similar to what is found in Deuteronomy, always includes blessings for keeping the agreement (covenant) and curses for breaking it. Calling these out is a crucial part of the process of adopting the covenant (chapters 27–28). Moses makes a preliminary mention of the blessings-and-curses ceremony.

It's not an absolute rule that those who obey God will directly receive blessings in this life, and that those who disobey will suffer immediate consequences as a result. However, this is still generally true. His people should obey simply because the Lord is entitled to their unswerving loyalty and devotion (not because of any promised rewards). God delights to reward obedience, and His people should embrace His generosity gratefully whenever they receive it.

Moses: [29]When the Eternal your God brings you into the land where you're going to live when you cross *the Jordan, half of you are going to* stand on Mount Gerizim and shout out the blessings *that will come to those who obey the Lord. The other half of you will stand* on Mount Ebal *on the other side of the valley* and shout the curses *that will fall on those who disobey Him.* [30]You'll find these two mountains on the other side of the Jordan *River,* as you head west of your current path, in the territory of the Canaanites who live in the arid *Jordan* Valley* around Gilgal, near the great trees at Moreh. [31]*I tell you this now because* you're just about to cross the Jordan into the land where you're going to live. The Eternal your God will give it to you; you'll take possession of it and settle there. [32]And *when you do,* you must be very careful to obey all the regulations and judgments I'm giving you today.

12 **Moses:** These are the regulations and judgments you must carefully obey in the land the Eternal, the God of your ancestors, is giving you to live in, for as long as you are alive. [2]Completely destroy all the places where the nations you're going to conquer worshiped their gods—on the mountain heights and hilltops, and under every leafy tree.

► Commanding heights are recognized as positions of power and advantage. They are also closer to the sky on mountains and hills, which are thought to be the home of the gods. Nations chose heights and hilltops as places of worship. Leafy trees are also a favored location because of the shelter and shade they provided in a hot climate, and because they reach all realms of creation—the underworld, the physical world, and the heavens. In the absence of trees, carved poles serve as portable tree shrines honoring the goddess Asherah.

Moses: [3]Tear down their altars, smash their monoliths, burn their sacred poles,* and shatter their idols! Wipe out every trace of the names of their *gods* in those places. [4]The Eternal your God doesn't want you to worship Him in the way these nations worshiped their gods, *setting up shrines and altars all over the land.* [5]He will choose a place within the territory of one of your tribes to be His home; He will put His name there. Go there *to worship Him.* [6]Whenever you have something to offer, take it there: burnt offerings and sacrifices, tithes, uplifted offerings, freewill gifts, payments to fulfill vows, and firstborn animals from your herds and flocks.

* 11:30 Hebrew, *Arabah* * 12:3 Hebrew, *Asherim*

7Eat your sacred meals there in His
presence, and celebrate with your whole
household how the Eternal your God
has blessed everything you've done.
8Right now we're letting everyone do as
he or she sees fit here *with unregulated*
sacrifices, 9because you aren't yet living
in peace on the land He is going to give
you. 10When you've crossed the Jordan
River and have settled in the land He is
giving you to live in and pass on to your
descendants, and you're living in safety
because He's defeated the enemies
all around you *and they're no longer a*
threat, 11then bring everything I com-
mand you to the place the Eternal, your
True God, will choose *as a sanctuary,* as
a place for His name. Bring your burnt
offerings and other sacrifices there;
bring your tithes, uplifted offerings, and
the special gifts you choose to dedicate
along with your vow to the Eternal.
12Celebrate in His presence with your
sons and daughters and with your male
and female slaves. And *be sure to invite*
any Levites who live in your town,
because their tribe won't have any prop-
erty as yours does. 13Be careful! Don't
offer burnt sacrifices just anywhere that
you find suitable. 14*Offer your burnt sac-*
rifices only in the place He will choose in
the territory of one of your tribes. And
that's the only place you should make
any of the burnt offerings and execute
everything else I'm telling you.

15However, *if you just want to have*
meat for a meal, if the Eternal your God
has blessed you and you can afford it,
you can do that in your own towns.
Slaughter the animals and eat them
there. *It's not a sacred meal, so* people
don't need to be ritually pure to eat it,
and it can be a gazelle or a deer. 16But
don't consume any of the blood; pour
it out on the ground like water *as you*
would for any slaughter or sacrifice. 17*And*
remember you still can't eat *any of the*
special offerings in your own towns:
tithes of grain, new wine, and *olive* oil;
firstborn animals from your herds and
flocks, any payments to fulfill vows, or
freewill gifts and uplifted offerings. 18Eat
these special offerings in His presence
in the place He chooses. Bring your
sons, your daughters, and your male and
female slaves, and *remember to invite* the
Levites who live in your town. Celebrate
together, in His presence, everything
you've been able to accomplish. 19(Don't
ever neglect the Levites! *Make sharing*
with them a part of your lifestyle the
whole time you're living in that land.)

20-21You see, the Eternal your God is
going to give you an extensive territory
as He's promised. You may be living at
some distance from the place where He
chooses to put His name. And there will
be times when you say *to yourself,* "I'm
going to have some meat—that's what
I'm craving!" Go right ahead—as often
as you wish. If you take from one of the
domesticated animals the Eternal has
given you from your herd or your flock
and eat it in your own town, I'm telling
you it's all right to do that. 22It's just like
eating a gazelle or a deer. People don't
need to be ritually pure to eat this meat.
23But discipline yourselves not to eat the
blood because the blood is the soul, and
you mustn't eat the soul along with the
meat. 24Don't eat the blood; pour it out
on the ground like water. 25If you don't
eat it, you'll be doing what the Eternal
considers right, and everything will go
well for you and your descendants.

26But bring anything that will be a
sacred *meal* and any sacrifice that will
be offered to pay a vow to the place He
will choose. 27There you will offer both
the meat and the blood of your burnt
sacrifices on His altar. You must pour
out the blood of your sacrifices on the
altar, but you will eat the meat. 28Be very
careful to obey all these words I'm telling
you. Then you'll be doing what the Eter-
nal your God considers good and right,
and everything will go well for you and
your descendants forever.

► The people are required to make certain offerings and are invited to make others. All of these offerings are to be handled with special care and not treated as ordinary food. Here Moses is warning specifically against pagan magical practice. It is believed by them that the life force, qualities, and powers of an animal can be taken over by consuming its blood, particularly as it flows from its body. The pagan nations look for power within the created order, and they try to tap into that power through fertility rites and other magical acts. All the blessings of life, fertility, and abundance are to be found in obedient relationship to

the Lord. They can't be obtained by trying to manipulate the forces of the natural world.

Moses: [29]When the Eternal your God has destroyed the nations whose land you're going to occupy, when you've displaced them and settled there, [30]then be very careful! Don't fall into a *deadly* trap by doing what those nations did, since they were destroyed when you came into their land! Don't try to find out about their gods. Don't ask, "How did these nations worship their gods? I'm going to do the same thing!" [31]Don't worship the Eternal your God the way those nations worshiped their gods! They did every horrible thing He hates. They even burned up their sons and daughters as sacrifices to those gods. [32]Be very careful to do everything I'm commanding you. Don't add anything to your worship, and don't take anything away from it.

13 **Moses:** [1-2]Suppose *someone who claims to be* a prophet, or to have inspired dreams, stands up and tells all of you that some unusual, *significant* sign or wonder is going to happen, and also says, "I'm here to let you know about some other gods you should be worshiping." What if the thing that person has predicted actually happens? [3]Don't listen to what that prophet or dreamer says! The Eternal your God is testing you to see whether you really do love Him completely, with your whole heart and soul. [4]Remain loyal to Him! Fear Him and obey His commands. Listen to His voice. Worship Him *alone*. Be fervently devoted to Him. [5]But as for that prophet or dreamer, put him to death! He's tried to turn you away from the Eternal your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and liberated you from slavery. He's tried to entice you off the path God commanded you to follow. Expel the evil from your community.

[6-7]What if someone close to you whispers secretly, "Let's go worship other gods"? It doesn't matter if it's your brother or half-brother, your own son or daughter, your beloved wife or closest friend. Whether they're gods of the people who live around you or gods of people who live far away—the gods of anyone on the face of the earth! You've never worshiped any of these gods before, and neither did your ancestors, *because you're in a covenant relationship with the Eternal.* [8-10]So don't listen to this person. Don't agree *to go worship other gods with him or her*. Anyone who entices you like this must be executed! Don't feel sorry for him, or have mercy on him, or try to hide what he's done. Stone him to death because he tried to entice you away from the Eternal, your True God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and rescued you from slavery. *As the witness to what he said, and as the person he tried to corrupt,* you must throw the first deadly stone, and then everyone else will join in. [11]All the rest of the Israelites will hear about this and be afraid, and none of them will dare to do such an evil thing again in your land.

► Stoning has been chosen as the method of execution in these cases for several likely reasons: (1) The person who advocates worshiping other gods is like a contagious disease in the midst of Israel. Stoning, killing from a distance, expresses a horror of even touching such a person, for fear of being infected; (2) Stoning is also a community method of execution. Each and every person in the community has to express one's own loyalty to the Lord and rejection of other gods by participating in this elimination of false worship; (3) Anyone who accuses a person falsely would incur bloodguilt when throwing the first stone of the execution. This would have been a deterrent against false testimony.

Moses: [12]You may hear a report in one of the cities the Eternal your God is giving you to live in: [13]"Some wicked people have abandoned our faith, and they've convinced everyone else in their own city to worship other gods we've never had anything to do with!" [14]*If you ever hear a report like this,* conduct a careful, thorough investigation. If you establish conclusively that the report is true, that such a horrible thing has been done within your nation, [15]then bring your swords and execute everyone who lives

in that city! Destroy it completely with everything in it—even the livestock. 16Pile all the city's goods in the middle of the public square, and then burn down the whole city and everything in it. This will be a burnt offering showing your complete loyalty to the Eternal your God. That city must never be rebuilt; let it remain a ruin forever. 17Don't take any of the goods for yourself because they have been banned; *destroy everything.* Then the Eternal will stop being so furiously angry. He'll show you mercy and compassion; and you'll have many descendants, just as He promised your ancestors, 18if you'll listen to the voice of the Eternal, your True God, obey all the commands I'm giving you today, and do what He decides is right.

14 **Moses:** You're the children of the Eternal, your True God, so don't cut yourselves or shave off the front of your hair to honor those who die. 2*Remember* you are people who have been set apart for Him; He has chosen you to be His own possession out of all the peoples on the earth.

3Don't eat anything that's forbidden. 4Here are some *examples of land* animals you can eat: oxen *from your herds*; sheep and goats *from your flocks*; 5deer, gazelles, roebucks, wild goats, ibexes, antelopes, and mountain sheep, *all from the wild.* 6*The rule is,* you can eat any of the animals that has a divided hoof (that is, a hoof separated into two sections) and chews cud. 7You can't eat an animal just because it chews cud or just because it has a divided hoof; *both things have to be true.* So, *for example,* the camel, the rabbit, and the rock badger are impure *and can't be eaten* because even though they chew cud, they don't have a divided hoof. 8The pig is also unclean *and can't be eaten* because even though it has a divided hoof, it doesn't chew cud. Don't eat the meat of any ritually unclean animals. Don't even touch their carcasses *when they die.*

9You can eat anything that lives in the water if it has fins and scales, 10but if it doesn't have fins and scales, then don't eat it; it's unclean to you.

11You can eat any clean bird. 12-18But here are *some examples of* birds you shouldn't eat: *birds that hunt and kill, such as* the eagle, the falcon, and *all kinds of* hawks; *birds that eat dead flesh, such as* the red kite and any other kind of kite, the vulture, the buzzard, and any kind of raven; *things that fly around in the night instead of during the day, such as* the horned owl, screech owl, little owl, great owl, white owl, and the bat; *birds that feed in the water, such as* the seagull, pelican, carrion vulture, cormorant, stork, and every kind of heron; *and birds that dig in the ground for their food, such as* the hoopoe. 19And don't eat anything that flies in swarms, *such as insects,* because they are unclean. 20But you can eat anything that flies if it is ritually clean.

21Don't eat any meat *from an animal* you find dead *of natural causes because its blood remains in the meat.* You may give it to the foreigners in your city, and they may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreign *merchant. But don't eat it yourself;* you are people who have been set apart for the Eternal your God. Don't boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

► Behind these dietary restrictions there's a moral ideal. The people are being told to set up their community life exactly as the Lord instructs, so that all the other nations will take notice and acknowledge Him (4:6). To do this, they must recognize their own special place in the world, stick to their own proper realms, and not deviate from the way they should live within it. This is another way the people are to express their exclusive loyalty to the Lord. In other words, the sacrificial food for God encompasses the daily food for the people. And the Israelites can only eat animals, birds, and insects that exemplify and support life and do not have characteristics and locomotive ability that blur them between these three habitations of land, sea, and sky.

Moses: 22Every year, when the seeds you've sown in your fields have grown *into crops,* make sure you set aside a tenth of the produce. 23Bring this tenth of the grain, oil, and new wine *from that year's crop,* as well as all firstborn animals from your herds and flocks, to the place the Eternal your God will choose as a place for His name, and

have a feast there in His presence. *If you do this each year,* you'll learn to fear the Eternal your God always. 24If the place where He chooses to put His name is far from where you live, and the distance is too great for you to carry a tenth *of that year's produce there*—particularly if He has blessed you—25then sell everything you would have carried and bring the money yourself to the place the Eternal your God will choose. 26*When you get there, you can still have a celebration.* Use some of the money to buy whatever you crave: cattle or sheep, wine or strong drink, or any other special thing you'd really like. You and your household can have a feast in His presence. 27Be sure to invite any Levites who live in your city. *Be especially generous to them* because they won't have any territory and property of their own to pass down to their children as you do.

28-29But at the end of every third year, keep a tenth of the year's produce in your own town instead and give it to the needy people *there*: the Levites—whose tribe won't have any territory and property of its own to pass down—the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows. Let them come and take as much as they want to eat *for as long as these supplies last.* If you do this, the Eternal your God will bless you in everything you do.

15 **Moses:** At the end of every seventh year, cancel all debts. 2This is how it will work: *anyone who has made a loan to someone else will just let the debtor keep whatever he's borrowed.* That is, if the loan was made to a fellow citizen, to another Israelite, the lender won't demand repayment because it has been announced that the Eternal is canceling all the debts of His servants. 3If you've made a loan to a foreigner, you can still demand repayment, but let your fellow Israelites keep whatever they've borrowed from you. 4-5However, *ideally,* there shouldn't be any poor people among you. If you listen attentively to the voice of the Eternal your God and carefully obey all the commands I'm giving you today, then the Eternal will bless you *with great prosperity* in the land He's giving you to live in and pass down within your family. 6Because the Eternal your God will bless you as He promised, you will lend to many nations, but you won't borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they won't rule over you.

7If, in one of the towns in the land the Eternal your God is giving you, a fellow Israelite does become poor, don't ignore him and limit your generosity *just because the debt will be forgiven.* 8Open your hand willingly, and generously lend as much as is needed at the time. 9Don't think like this: "It's almost the seventh year when debts are canceled. *If I lend anything to this other person now, I'll never get it back!*" *If you think this way,* you'll be hostile toward your neighbors and you won't give them anything. They'll cry out to the Eternal against you, and He'll consider what you've done a sin. 10So give generously to the person *in need.* Don't feel badly about this when you're doing it; because of your generosity, the Eternal your God will bless you in everything you do, in every project you begin. 11*Unfortunately,* there will always be poor people throughout the country. That's why I'm giving you this command: give generously to your fellow Israelite, to the poor and needy in the land.

12If a fellow Israelite, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you *as a slave,* only make that person serve you for six years. In the seventh year, set him free *from your service.* 13And don't send him away destitute! 14Provide generously: give sheep and goats, grain and wine. Give some of what the Eternal your God has blessed you with. 15Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and He liberated you *from another master so you could serve Him.* That's why I'm commanding you today to do this. 16-18Don't feel you've been cheated when you set your slave free. It would have cost you twice as much to hire someone to do the same work over those six years, and He will bless you in everything you do *because of your generosity.* But perhaps your slave will say to you *at the end of the six years,* "I don't want to be set free! I love you and your whole family. It's really good for me to be here with you." You can accept a slave like this into lifetime service. *Perform a special ceremony to mark his new status. Have the slave stand right next to the door of your house,* take an awl, and drive it through the slave's ear lobe into the door. *Then pull it out. This will make marks in the ear lobe and in the door that will symbolize the slave.* Either a male or a female slave can enter lifetime service this way with this physical mark.

19If the firstborn of any animal in your herd or flock is a male, set it apart

There are a number of celebrations found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but only three great feasts are part of the Mosaic law. They retell the story of their covenant relationship with the Lord and provide occasions to share generously with those in need. They give the people the opportunity to acknowledge publicly that He is the source of their abundance, so they won't be tempted to think they've prospered on their own and forget Him.

Each of the three great celebrations are reminders of the servitude in Egypt. Passover, followed by the week of unleavened bread, is a reminder of God redeeming His people from Egypt and falls within March or April each year. The Feast of Weeks, known as Pentecost to Christians, is 50 days after firstfruits or the beginning of the barley harvest and comes in May or June. They are told to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt. The last of the great celebrations, the Feast of Shelters, comes in September or October. It is a reminder of the provision of God when the nation lived in temporary shelters while wandering in the wilderness.

or consecrate it for the Eternal your God. Don't put the firstborn of any ox to work, and don't shear your firstborn sheep. *These animals already belong to the Eternal One, so their labor and products belong to Him too.* 20Bring them every year to the place the Eternal will choose, and make them part of the feast you and your household eat in the presence of the Eternal your God. 21But if the firstborn has some defect such as lameness or blindness—any serious problem—don't offer it as a sacrifice to Him. 22Instead eat it *as a regular meal* in your own city. *This is not a sacred meal,* so people don't need to be ritually pure to eat it. It will be like eating a gazelle or a deer. 23But don't eat its blood; pour it out on the ground like water.

16 **Moses:** During the month of Abib *at the beginning of spring,* celebrate Passover in honor of the Eternal, your True God. In that month, He brought you out of Egypt at night. 2Take an animal from your herd or flock, go to the place He will choose for His name, and offer a Passover sacrifice to the Eternal your God. 3Don't eat any leavened bread with it. Eat unleavened bread during the seven days *of this celebration* because "suffering bread" is what you made when you quickly left *your suffering in* Egypt. If you eat it *again each year,* you'll always remember the day you left Egypt. 4For these seven days, no one in the whole country should have any yeast. And none of the meat from the sacrifice you offer on the first night *of the celebration* should be left over on the next day. 5Don't offer the Passover sacrifice in any of the *other* cities the Eternal your God is giving you. 6*Even if it's some distance, make the journey to the place* He will choose for His name. Offer the Passover sacrifice in that place, in the evening, at sunset—the time when you left Egypt. 7Cook it, and eat it in the place He chooses. In the morning, you can return to your tents, 8but you must still only eat unleavened bread for the next six days. On the seventh day, *the last day of the celebration,* soberly gather together to worship Him. Don't do any work on that day.

9-10*Another celebration* the Eternal your God wants you to have is the Feast of Weeks. Hold this celebration seven weeks after you first begin to cut *and harvest* the barley in your fields. Each of you will choose something to contribute out of what He has blessed you with. 11Go to the place He chooses for His name; and have a celebration there in His presence with your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your city. 12Remember you were slaves in Egypt, and obey these regulations carefully.

13*Later in the year,* at the end of the harvest after you've finished threshing all your grain and making all your wine, celebrate the Feast of Shelters for seven days.

The Israelites are to make temporary shelters and live in them for a week to remember how they lived in temporary shelters when they left Egypt.

14Celebrate with your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your city. 15Celebrate for seven days in honor of the Eternal your God, in the place the Eternal will choose. The Eternal your God will bless you with abundant produce; He will bless everything you do, and you'll have a lot to celebrate! 16Three times each year, every male *Israelite* must appear before Him in the place He chooses for the Feast of Unleavened Bread *(Passover),* for the Feast of Weeks *(Pentecost),* and for the Feast of Shelters *(Tabernacles).* Don't come empty-handed! 17Decide what amount you want to contribute *voluntarily* out of what He has blessed you with, and bring that as a gift.

► This next group of laws describes the rights and responsibilities of community leaders in Israel: the judges who will settle disputes, a king who may be chosen to rule the nation, the Levites who will serve at the central sanctuary, and the prophets who will bring the Lord's word to the people. All of these offices create a balance of power in Israel.

Moses: 18In each of the cities the Eternal your God is giving you, appoint tribal judges and representatives who will decide cases for the people honestly and fairly.

(to these future judges) 19Don't bend the rules for anyone. Don't favor *the rich and powerful,* and never take a bribe! A bribe makes people who would decide cases wisely overlook injustice, and it makes people who would be honest give false testimony. 20Justice! Justice! That's what you're after. Then you'll keep living in the land He is giving you.

21When you build an altar to the Eternal your God, don't ever put any kind of sacred wooden pole* next to it, 22and don't ever set up a monolith or stone pillar. He hates these things!

17 **Moses:** Don't sacrifice an ox or a sheep to the Eternal your God if it has any defect or problem. He would be deeply offended by such an offering!

2What if, in one of the towns the Eternal your God is giving you, a man or a woman does what He considers wrong and breaks His covenant 3by going and worshiping other gods, bowing down to them or the sun or moon or stars (which I've never commanded you to do)? 4*If you discover this,* if someone tells you about it, or if you hear about it; then conduct a careful investigation. If you establish conclusively that the report is true, that such a horrible thing has been done within Israel, 5then bring the man or woman who has done this evil thing out to the gates of your town, and stone that man or woman to death. 6But for someone to be executed on a charge *such as this,* there must be testimony from *at least* two or three witnesses. No one is to be executed on the testimony of just one witness. 7The witnesses must throw the first deadly *stones,* and then everyone else must join in. Expel the wicked from your own community.*

8If one person in your town brings a complaint against another to be judged *at the city gate,* and it's just too difficult for you to decide *what a fair resolution would be—if you can't determine* whether a killing was premeditated, or *if you can't decide* who in a dispute makes the best argument, or *if you can't tell* whether someone was injured accidentally or intentionally—then adjourn your proceedings and go to the place the Eternal your God will choose. 9Bring your case to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is serving at the time, and they will give you a verdict. 10You must carry out their verdict exactly as they stated it because it was delivered in the place the Eternal chose, *and it has His authority behind it.* 11Follow each word of the law as they interpret it for you; do everything they've told you to do, as they've explained it, without deviating from it at all. 12If anyone is so arrogant that he won't listen to the priest who serves right there in the presence of the Eternal your God or to the judge *of the tribunal,* that person must be executed to expel this kind of wickedness from Israel. 13Everyone will hear about it, and no one will dare to be so arrogant, for they will be afraid.

* 16:21 Hebrew, *Asherah* * 17:7 1 Corinthians 5:13

► Having a king is part of God's plan for Israel. This king is supposed to be someone who depends faithfully on the Lord, not on wealth or power, and who would study God's laws and follow them. A king like that will be a blessing to everyone in the country. But when the people ask for this king around 1000 B.C., their motives are wrong. They want to depend on this king instead of on God (1 Samuel 8:7). In the years that follow, many ungodly kings bring trouble to the nation and oppress the people. Their political maneuvering and policies of appeasement even lead them to set up altars to foreign gods. The people are ultimately punished for deserting the Lord by being taken into exile away from the promised land.

Moses: 14Once you've gotten into the land the Eternal your God is giving you, and you've conquered it and settled there, you may say *to yourselves,* "Let's appoint a king to rule our country, just as all the nations around us have!" 15*If you do have a king, remember* you must enthrone the king He chooses. It must be a fellow Israelite whom you enthrone; you must not enthrone a foreigner who is not a fellow Israelite. 16*Although an Israelite,* he must not *try to build a strong army by* collecting large herds of horses for his *cavalry troops and a chariot corps.* The king must certainly not send people back to Egypt to get large herds of horses, because the Lord has commanded you, "Don't ever go back that way again!" 17This king must not have many wives. *If he takes foreign wives in marriage alliances,* they could turn his heart away *from the Lord and lead him to worship foreign gods.* And the king must not accumulate great quantities of silver and gold for himself.

18As soon as this king takes the royal throne, he must write out a copy of this law for himself on a scroll with the Levitical priests looking on. 19He must keep this copy with him and read it every day, so that he will learn to fear the Eternal his God and to obey everything in the law and *remember all* these regulations very carefully *in order to do them.* 20That way he won't think he's privileged and oppress *and exploit* his fellow Israelites. He won't deviate at all from what the Eternal has commanded, and he and his descendants will rule over Israel in a long dynasty.

18 **Moses:** The Levitical priests and the whole tribe of Levi will not have any inherited property within Israel. They will be supported by the sacrifices and other offerings that are burnt and set aside for the Eternal. 2They won't have any share in the land, as the other Israelites do, but the Eternal Himself will be their share as He promised.

► This is a special arrangement between God and the Levites; He'll provide for them and give them their distinct identity so they can focus on serving Him instead of serving their families.

3Whenever someone sacrifices an ox or a sheep, the priests are entitled to these portions: one shank (a *thigh and* shoulder), the cheeks *(those tender delicacies),* and *the fourth compartment of* the stomach *so they can have rennet to make cheese curds.* 4You must also give the priests the first grain, wine, and *olive* oil you produce *each year,* and the first wool you shear from your sheep 5because the Eternal your God chose Levi and his descendants, out of all of your tribes, to stand *in His presence* and to serve in His name at all times.

6If a Levite who's living in one of your cities anywhere in Israel decides he really wants to go and live in the place the Eternal will choose, 7he must *be allowed to* serve in the name of the Eternal his God, like all of the other Levites who are already serving there in the Eternal's presence. 8He must be given an equal share *of the contributions* to eat, apart from anything he earns for *performing* priestly services.*

9When you've settled in the land the Eternal your God is giving you, don't imitate the horrible practices of the other nations. 10Don't ever burn any of your sons

* 18:8 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain; also translated "father's estate."

or daughters *alive as a sacrifice*! And don't ever get involved in any divining, such as predicting fortunes, interpreting omens, sorcery, [11]casting spells, or trying to contact ghosts, spirits, or the dead. [12]The Eternal is horrified when anyone does these things. It's because of these horrible practices that the Eternal your God is driving those nations out ahead of you. [13]You shall be complete in your obedience and devotion to Him.

► The pagan nations around them share the belief that absolute immanent power comes from within creation. They engage in many activities designed to tap into that power so that they can gain knowledge of the future or have influence over others. "Drawing lots" is often done by writing possibilities on pottery shards, putting them in a bag, and then drawing out an answer. Other ways of trying to predict the future or choose the best course include watching the shapes of clouds or listening for natural omens such as bird cries. It is commonly believed that spirits and the dead can also provide guidance and special information. Whatever specific practices are being described here, however, the general principle is once again that the people should trust the Lord, transcendent above creation, as their source of guidance and protection.

Moses: [14]The nations you're going to displace seek guidance from people who practice divination and predicting. But the Eternal your God doesn't want you to do that. [15]He will raise up from among your own people a prophet who will be like me.* Listen to him. [16]This is just what you asked Him for on the day you gathered at Mount Horeb: "Don't make me listen to the voice of the Eternal my God anymore! And don't make me look at that blazing fire! I'll die!"* [17]The Eternal told me, "They're right. [18]I'll send them another prophet like you from among their own people. I'll put My words in the mouth of this prophet who will tell them everything I command him to say. [19]I, Myself, will punish whoever doesn't listen to his words* when the prophet speaks in My name. [20]But a prophet who dares to say anything in My name that I haven't commanded, or who says anything in the name of another god, will die." [21]Now you may be wondering, "How will we recognize something He hasn't commanded a prophet to say?" [22]If a prophet speaks in the Eternal One's name, but the words turn out not to be true or the prediction doesn't happen, then He wasn't actually speaking. That prophet arrogantly spoke in the Lord's name, but he didn't really have a message from Him. And so you don't need to be afraid of what the prophet said.

► The next group of laws in Deuteronomy is concerned with making sure people in Israel treat one another honestly and fairly. Safeguards are to be put in place to protect the lives and property of the innocent and to make sure the guilty are caught and punished. These will include the cities of refuge, property markers, and the court system. Each law in this group seeks specifically to prevent people from abusing or manipulating one of these safeguards.

19 **Moses:** When the Eternal your God has destroyed the nations whose land He's going to give you, when you've driven them out and have settled in their cities and are living in their houses, [2-3]then designate three cities *of refuge* for yourselves in the land He is giving you to live in. Divide your territory into three parts, locate one city centrally in each part, and measure the roads to each of them. That way a person who kills someone *accidentally* can escape to one of these cities *and be safe from revenge.*

[4]This is the kind of person I'm talking about: someone who kills a friend unintentionally, when there was no grudge between them, [5]such as when two friends go into the forest together to chop wood, and one of them swings

* 18:15 Acts 7:37; 3:22 * 18:16 Deuteronomy 5:22-27 * 18:19 Acts 3:23

an ax to cut a tree, and the ax head slips off the handle, hits his friend, and kills him. A person such as he can flee to one of these cities and be safe from revenge. 6Otherwise, if the distance *to the nearest city of refuge* is too great, one of the relatives of the friend who was killed is going to *feel honor-bound to* avenge the dead man's blood, and he'll catch up with him and kill him while he's still furious *about his relative's death.* This wouldn't be right because the man slaughterer didn't deserve the death sentence. There was no grudge between these friends—*the death was accidental.* 7That's why I'm commanding you to designate these three cities for yourselves. 8-9Now if you carefully obey the command I'm giving you today, to love the Eternal your God and always do as He wishes, then He will expand your territory as He promised your ancestors; He'll give you all the land He told your ancestors He'd give them. If that happens, then designate three more cities for yourselves, besides the first three. 10That way no innocent blood will be shed in the land He is giving you to live in, and *as a nation* you won't have any bloodguilt *just because a city of refuge was too far away*.

11But someone who does hate another person, who ambushes and kills that person *can't escape revenge by* fleeing to one of these cities. 12The elders of his city must send *representatives* to bring the killer back and turn him over to the blood-avenger, *the relative of the murder victim* who will kill him. 13Don't show any pity! You must remove the stain of innocent blood from Israel, so that everything will go well for you.

14Don't *steal land from* your neighbor by moving the boundary marker your ancestors put in place. Each person's property is an inheritance from the Eternal, who's giving you this land to live in.

These potential "property disputes" are a divine reflection. When you steal land from another person, you're taking away what God has given—that's like stealing from the Lord Himself!

15The testimony of a single witness is not sufficient to convict a person of a crime or to find someone guilty of doing something wrong. Every charge must be confirmed by two or three witnesses.* 16If one person accuses another of some crime, *and you suspect it's being done* out of malice, 17bring the two people involved into the Eternal's presence *at the sanctuary*. Present their case to the priests and the judges who are serving *on the tribunal* at the time. 18The judges will conduct a careful investigation. If it turns out that the witness was lying and accused the other Israelite maliciously, 19-21then do to the witness exactly what he wanted done to the other person. Don't show any pity! If he wanted the other person killed, then kill him; if he wanted his eye *put out* or a tooth *knocked out* or a hand or foot *cut off,* then do that to him.* This will expel the wicked from your own community. Everyone else will hear what happens and be afraid *to do the same thing themselves,* so none of you will ever do such an evil thing to each other again.

20 **Moses:** *This is how you should act during wartime:* When you go to battle against your enemies, if you see their army is larger than yours and they have horses and chariots, don't be afraid of them! The Eternal your God is with you—the same God who *defeated Pharaoh and* brought you out of Egypt. 2As you are approaching the battlefield, your priest will come over to you and address you: 3"Listen, Israel! Today you're going to fight a battle against your enemies. Don't be intimidated by them! Don't be afraid! Don't run away! Don't let them terrify you! 4The Eternal, your True God, has come out here with you, and He'll fight for you against your enemies and save you." 5Then the officials will say to the people *who are eligible for a deferment,* "Has anyone just built a new house but hasn't begun to use it yet? Go back to your house, because if you died in this battle, someone else would dedicate it. 6Has anyone planted a vineyard but hasn't enjoyed its fruit yet? Go back to your house, because if you died in this battle, someone else would be the first to enjoy its fruit. 7Has anyone become engaged to a woman but hasn't consummated the marriage? Go back to your house, because if you died in this battle, someone else would take her." 8They'll continue, "Is anyone here afraid or

* 19:15 2 Corinthians 13:1 * 19:19-21 Matthew 5:38

Israelite teachers and scribes are fond of organizing material using mnemonic devices. If two writings share a key word, phrase, or idea, it is considered clever and attractive to put them next to one another. This principle is applied often as the first law in Deuteronomy 21:1 begins by using some Hebrew words similar to those at the end of the last law in the previous group. Even though the second law in 21:10 is really about marriage, it begins, "When you go to battle against your enemies," transitioning from the warfare laws. The third law follows because it starts by talking about marriage, even though it's really about the inheritance rights of sons. And the next law also talks about sons—except that they're so disobedient, they need to be executed. So the final law in the group is about executions. These language techniques are intended to help the Israelites memorize the laws.

intimidated? You can go back home too! We don't want you to make everyone else as scared as you are!" 9When the officials have finished speaking to the troops, they'll appoint commanders to lead each section of the army.

10When you first approach a city you're going to fight against, shout out, "Peace!" 11If they shout back, "Peace!" and open *their gates* to you, then *you must let them surrender*. Make everyone in the city your slaves, and put them to work for you. 12But if the city doesn't surrender, if it resists you instead, then lay siege to it. 13When the Eternal your God enables you to capture the city, kill all the men who are left in it with your swords. 14But you can take the women, children, livestock, all the other goods in the city, and all of its spoils as your plunder for your use. The Eternal your God has given you these spoils from your enemies.

15This is what you're to do with cities that are a great distance from you that don't belong to the nations living here. 16But when you conquer one of the cities the Eternal, your True God, is giving you to live in and pass on to your children, don't spare anything that breathes! 17*If it's a city that belongs to* the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, or the Jebusites, then completely destroy the inhabitants as He has commanded you. 18If you don't, they'll teach you to do all the horrible things they do for their gods, and you'll sin against Him.

19When you're fighting against a city, and it hasn't fallen to you even after a long siege, don't chop down all the trees around it. You can eat the fruit *and nuts* they produce, so don't cut them down. Are these trees humans who are resisting your siege? *Of course not!* 20Only cut down the trees you know don't produce any food. You can use them to build siege machines against the city you're fighting with until it falls.

21 **Moses:** If a murder victim is found lying *on the ground* in the open field, anywhere in the territory the Eternal your God is giving you to live in, and no one knows who the killer was, *then perform a special ceremony to remove the bloodguilt from your land*. 5Send for the priests, the descendants of Levi, the ones the Eternal your God chose to serve Him and to bless His name, because they're the ones who settle disputes and handle cases of injury like this.* 2Have your elders and judges measure the distance from the body to the nearby cities. 3The elders of the city that's closest to the body *will have jurisdiction and offer a special sacrifice*. Have them take a heifer that has never been put to work pulling a yoke, 4bring it down by a flowing stream onto land where no crops have ever been planted or grown, and break its neck in that stream. 6Then *in the presence of the priests,* have those city elders wash their hands over the heifer's corpse and take an oath: 7"Our hands didn't shed this blood, and our eyes never saw who did. 8Eternal, please cover *the wickedness of* Your people Israel, the ones You delivered *from slavery*. Please don't consider your people Israel guilty of shedding innocent blood!" *If this ceremony is performed,* that city will be forgiven for the blood that was shed near it. 9You will remove the bloodguilt from your nation because you've done what the Eternal considers right.

* 21:5 Verse 5 has been moved forward to aid in comprehension.

► The Hebrew practice of *kipper* is when one party makes a gift to another in order to reestablish a good relationship between two parties and remove bloodguilt. The emphasis is not so much on the gift itself (although it should be a worthy one), but on the first party's desire for reconciliation. When the *kipper* is a sacrificial animal resolving an offense that would otherwise be settled according to the principle of "a life for a life," the death of the animal is a substitution for what should have been the death of the murderer. This situation helps Christians understand what the sacrificial system provides for Israel before the Lord and what Jesus does for us on the cross. His death is a substitutionary sacrifice, but it is also a *kipper,* a gift that reestablishes our relationship with God.

Moses: 10When you go to battle against your enemies and the Eternal, your True God, enables you to defeat them and take them captive, 11you may see a beautiful woman among the captives and be attracted to her and want to marry her. 12Bring her back to your house, and then have her shave her head and cut her nails 13and exchange her *old* clothes she was wearing when she was captured *for new ones.* Let her stay in your house and mourn for her father and mother for a month. Only after that may you, *as her husband,* have sexual relations with her. She will be your *fully legal* wife and you her husband. 14If you are ever displeased with her *and divorce her,* you must *give her freedom and* send her anywhere she wants to go. You're not allowed to sell her into slavery, and you can't turn her into your own slave because you humiliated her.

15Suppose a man has two wives, and he *favors one over the other,* loving one and not loving the other. If they've both borne him sons, but the firstborn doesn't belong to his favorite wife, 16-17he can't designate the eldest son of his favorite wife as the firstborn instead. When he divides his property and gives his sons their inheritances, he must recognize his true firstborn, the eldest son of the other wife, and give him a double portion of all his property *as is customary for all men.* That son was the first one created by the man's generative power, so the rights of the firstborn belong to him.

18If anyone has a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey his father and mother, who won't even listen to them when they discipline him, 19his parents may bring him to the city gate *and formally accuse him in court,* 20telling the city elders *what wicked things he has done. For example,* "This is our son. He's stubborn and rebellious! He won't obey us. He's a glutton and a drunk!" 21Then all the people of the city will stone him to death. You must expel the wicked from your own community.* Everyone else in Israel will hear about it and fear *the consequences of such rebellion.*

22If someone does something so wicked that it's punishable by death, and if you execute that person and then hang the body on a pole, 23don't leave the body up there overnight. Bury it that same day because everyone who hangs is cursed by God.* Otherwise you will defile the ground the Eternal your God is giving you to live on.

► The next group of laws deals generally with the theme of property: what to do with livestock (whether it's yours or someone else's), what kind of clothes to make and wear, how to build a house, how to grow crops. But this theme is defined so broadly to embrace all these laws that they are likely also gathered together by the same mnemonic principle as the previous group.

22 **Moses:** If you see your neighbor's ox or sheep wandering away, don't ignore it. Bring the animal back to its owner. 2If the owner lives far from you, or if you don't know whose animal it is, bring it back to your house and take care of it until the owner comes looking for it, and then return it to the Israelite. 3Do the same thing with

* 21:21 1 Corinthians 5:13 * 21:23 Galatians 3:13

a donkey or a garment or anything else a neighbor might lose. If you find it, don't ignore it; *take care of it until the owner comes looking for it.* 4If you see your neighbor's donkey or ox has fallen down in the roadway, don't ignore it. Help that person get the animal back on its feet.

5A woman must not wear men's clothing, and men must not put on women's garments. The Eternal your God is horrified when anyone does this.

6If you come across a bird's nest by the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and there are baby chicks or eggs in the nest and the mother bird is keeping them warm, don't take the mother with them. 7You must let the mother go, but you may take the chicks *or eggs* for yourself. If you do this, *God will bless you;* everything will go well with you, and you'll live a long time.

8When you build a new house, make sure you put a low wall around the edge of the roof so that no one will fall off *and be killed.* That way there will be no bloodguilt on your house *as a result of your negligence.*

► Whether it be home construction, dietary practices and food preparation, or farming and livestock, Israelite customs should reflect the correct order and division of humans, animals, and plants. Further, all practice should encourage life, and not death.

Moses: 9Don't plant your vineyard with two kinds of seed. If you do, everything that grows there will not be pure, both what grows from the seeds and what grows on the vines. 10Don't plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. 11Don't wear any material made of both wool and linen.

12Make tassels for the four corners of the cloak you wear, *as a reminder of God's instructions.*

► The laws in the next group all address cases where sexual relations may have taken place outside of lawful marriage. This is considered not just immoral but also a threat to a foundational institution of Israelite society—the family. Sexual indiscretion is therefore punished with execution, in order to remove the threat from the midst of the community. In a context where a rival pagan value system exerts a constant push away from the pattern of life God outlined, such bold consequences are necessary to keep the nation on track while forming this new type of society.

Moses: 13What if a man marries a woman and has sexual relations with her, but he ends up hating her, 14falsely accuses her of shameful things, and slanders her publicly, saying, "I married this woman, but then I discovered she wasn't a virgin"? 15If this happens, the girl's father and mother can *clear her name by* providing evidence of her virginity to the elders *in a legal proceeding* at the city gate. 16The girl's father may tell the elders, "I gave my daughter to this man as his wife. But now he dislikes her 17and has falsely accused her, telling me, 'I found out your daughter wasn't a virgin!' But here is the evidence of my daughter's virginity." If the parents can provide the evidence by spreading out the cloth for the elders to see, 18the city elders must punish the husband. *He is to be beaten* 19and then fined two and a half pounds of silver, *twice the amount of the bride price he paid before the marriage,* which will be given to the girl's father because this man publicly slandered one of Israel's virgins. He can't ever divorce her after this; he has to keep her as his wife. 20But if the charge is true, and the girl wasn't a virgin, 21then bring her to the door of her father's house. There the people of her city will stone her to death because she did something no Israelite should ever do: she was a fornicator while she was living in her father's house! Expel the wicked from your own community.*

22If it's discovered that a man has been having sexual relations with a married woman, both the man and the woman must be put to death. Expel the wicked from Israel this way.

* 22:21 1 Corinthians 5:13

[23]What if a man meets a girl who's a virgin but who's engaged to someone else, and he has sexual relations with her? If this happens in the city, [24]bring them both out to the gate of that city *where the public will* stone them to death: the girl, because she was in the city and could have cried for help but didn't, *meaning she consented;* and the man, because he violated another man's wife. Expel the wicked from your community this way. [25]But if this happens out in the country—if a man finds an engaged girl out there and overpowers and rapes her—then only the man must die. [26-27]But don't do anything to the girl; she did nothing wrong and doesn't deserve to die. When this man came after her, she cried for help, but no one was there to respond. She's *as innocent* as the victim of a sudden murderous attack—*there was nothing she could do*.

[28]If a man meets a girl who's a virgin and who isn't engaged to someone else, and he forces himself on her, when what he's done is discovered, [29]he must pay 20 ounces of silver to her father as a bride price, and she will become his wife. He can't ever divorce her after this because he's dishonored her.

By marrying her, the rapist ensures she will be cared for during her lifetime because no other man would marry a woman who isn't a virgin—even under such circumstances.

[30]A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was once married to his father. He must respect the privacy and dignity of his father's intimate relations *with his wife*.

► The next group of laws describes certain people who may not come into the holy place to worship the Lord. This is the defining right of a member in good standing of the community, so the people described here are, in effect, being excluded from community membership itself. The reasons for exclusion reflect Deuteronomy's ongoing concerns: rejecting pagan practices, upholding lawful marriage, maintaining wholeness and purity, and showing compassion to those in need.

23 **Moses:** No emasculated man, either by crushing or severing his male organs, may come and worship the Eternal. [2]No one born from an illegal *or incestuous* union may come and worship the Eternal. This prohibition stays in effect for 10 generations. [3]No Ammonite or Moabite may *join the Israelite community and* come and worship the Eternal. This prohibition stays in effect for 10 generations. [4]This is because they wouldn't give you any food or water when you came out of Egypt and because they hired someone to curse you instead—Balaam (Beor's son) from Pethor in *northwest* Mesopotamia.* [5]But the Eternal your God wouldn't listen to Balaam, and He turned his curse into a blessing for you because the Eternal your God loves you. [6]Don't ever make peace with them, and don't align with them, for as long as you live.

► These ordinances seem unduly harsh, but two ideas are at play. First, Lot's sexual relations with his daughters bring forth the Ammonite and Moabite peoples, so this command is a commentary reflecting on that event. Second, these restrictions are only temporary. God requires a ritually pure and completely devoted people (both internal and external) in order to bring forth the "messianic seed of woman." One day the physically maimed and social outcasts will be fully integrated into the people of God. Although Isaiah 56:3-5 models this expectation, Jesus makes it a reality.

Moses: [7]Don't be hostile toward the Edomites because they're related to you. And don't be hostile toward the Egyptians because you were once foreign residents in their land. [8]The great-grandchildren of an Edomite or Egyptian may *join the Israelite community and* come and worship the Eternal.

* 23:4 Hebrew, *Aram Naharaim*

The law in verses 9-14 is loosely connected with those in the preceding group by the theme of someone being excluded from a community that is defined by the Eternal One's presence. In this case, however, both the exclusion and the community are temporary.

The concern for "decency" in this law doesn't relate to moral or immoral acts, but rather to personal bodily functions that should be kept private and discrete. Otherwise, they expose too much of the person to community view. They're described literally as a form of "nakedness." In this context, being "unclean" means needing to deal with a private matter before being able to reengage the community.

An essential principle in the Old Testament is that what is unclean must never come into contact with what is holy. The Eternal One's presence is supremely holy, thus the concern for decency in the camp where the Eternal One travels with the army.

[9]When you go to fight your enemies, maintain strict standards of moral and ritual decency in your camp. [10]If a man becomes ritually impure because of a nocturnal emission, he can't remain in the camp. He has to stay outside *that day*. [11]But when evening comes, once he's washed himself in water, he may come back into the camp at sunset *which begins the new day*. [12]Designate an area outside the camp as a latrine. [13]When you go there to relieve yourself, bring the spade you carry with your equipment and turn the soil to cover your excrement. [14]Treat your camp as a sacred place because the Eternal your God will be walking around in it. He travels with your army to bring you victory and defeat your enemies. If He saw something indecent, He'd leave the camp.

[15]Don't send back any slaves who escape from their masters and come to you. [16]Let them live with you in any of your cities, anywhere they choose, wherever seems good to them. And don't take advantage of them!

[17]Neither the women nor the men of Israel shall become cult prostitutes. [18]The Eternal, your True God, will not accept income from male or female prostitution in payment of a vow in His house. Both kinds *of cult prostitution* are horrifying to Him! [19]You may not charge interest to a fellow Israelite who borrows money or food or anything else you could charge interest for. [20]You may charge foreigners interest, but you may not charge interest to your fellow Israelites. If you follow these instructions, the Eternal your God will bless you in everything you do in the land where you're going to live when you cross *the Jordan*.

[21]When you make a vow to the Eternal, your True God, pay it promptly. He will be looking for you to fulfill your promise; and if you don't, it will be a sin. [22]It isn't a sin to make a vow in the first place. [23]But whatever you do say, you must fulfill completely: you made a vow of your own free will to the Eternal your God, and you must keep your word.

[24]When you're passing through another Israelite's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you want there, but don't carry any away in a container. [25]When you're passing through another Israelite's field, you may pluck the grain with your hand *and eat it,* but you're not allowed to bring a sickle to cut down the grain *and carry it away*.

24 **Moses:** Suppose a man marries a woman but then isn't happy with her because he discovers she is *sexually* indecent,* and he writes a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her away from his house. [2]Suppose she leaves his house and becomes another man's wife, [3]and that second man also isn't happy with her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her away; or suppose that second man who married her dies. [4]*In either case,* the first man who divorced her isn't allowed to take her back as his wife because the intimacy of the second marriage defiled her *for her first husband*. The Eternal would be horrified if anyone did this. It

* 24:1 Literally, a naked thing

would bring sin on the land the Eternal your God is giving you to live in and pass down *to your children.*

5When a man first gets married, he's free from military service and any other civic duty for one year. He and his wife may spend that year happily together in their home.

6A creditor is not allowed to take a pair of millstones for grinding grain, or to take even a single millstone *(which would leave the other one useless)* as security for a debt.

How can debtors stay alive if they can't prepare food? When a person's debt is due, God has instructions for Israelite life and ethic, and He always considers both parties.

7If someone is caught kidnapping and enslaving other Israelites or selling them *into slavery,* the penalty is death. Expel the wicked from your own community.*

8Do everything you can to prevent an outbreak of any infectious skin disease. I've commanded the Levitical priests what to do in these cases. Follow all of their instructions very carefully! 9Remember what the Eternal your God did to Miriam as you were on your way out of Egypt.*

► As the Israelites are traveling through the wilderness, the prophetess Miriam, Moses' sister, is struck with an infectious skin disease for questioning her brother's authority as the Lord's representative (Numbers 12:1-15). Moses prays for her, and she is healed after a week. The allusion to this event seems intended to stress that God has complete power over diseases that cause impurity—both to strike people and to heal them—and that the Israelites therefore need to respect the authority of the Lord's representatives, the priests, as they treat cases.

Moses: 10If you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, don't go into his house to collect the security. 11Wait outside, and let him bring it out to you. 12If the borrower is poor *and gives a cloak as security,* don't keep it overnight. 13Give the cloak back at sunset so he can sleep in it *and stay warm.* He'll bless you, and the Eternal your God will recognize your good deed.

14Don't exploit the poor and needy people whom you hire to work for you, whether they're fellow Israelites or some of the foreigners who live in your cities. 15Pay them on the same day they work for you, before the sun goes down, because they're poor and they're really counting on the money. If you don't, they'll cry out to the Eternal, and He'll find you guilty of wicked actions.

16Don't put parents to death for anything their children have done, and don't put children to death for anything their parents have done. People are only to be executed for their own crimes.

17Don't deny justice to someone *just because he or she is defenseless,* such as a foreigner or an orphan, and don't take a widow's garment as security for a debt. 18Remember you were *helpless* slaves in Egypt, and the Eternal your God rescued you from there. That's why I'm commanding you to do this *and protect defenseless people yourselves.*

19When you're harvesting your field, if you forget a sheaf, don't go back *out into the field* to get it. Let the foreigners, orphans, and widows take it. If you do this, the Eternal your God will bless everything you do. 20When you beat your olive tree *to knock the olives onto the ground where you can harvest them,* don't shake each branch again *and again* to strip the tree clean. Leave some for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. 21When you cut the grapes off your vines, don't go around a second time *and get all the ones you missed.* Leave them for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. 22Remember you, too, were *destitute* slaves in Egypt. That's why I'm commanding you to do this *and provide for the needy people around you.*

Gleaning is a right given by God to pick up anything left in the fields at harvest time, and this is a special gift for those with real need.

25 **Moses:** If two people have a dispute and bring it to court, the judges there will decide the

* 24:7 1 Corinthians 5:13 * 24:9 Numbers 12:10

case and declare which one is innocent and which one is guilty. 2If the judges decide the guilty party should be punished with a beating, the judge will make him lie down and be beaten in front of the judge with the number of strokes appropriate to the evil offense—3but it can never be more than 40. This limit is to prevent excessive beatings, which would be publicly degrading.

4Don't muzzle the ox while it is treading out your grain.*

5When *two* brothers are living together, *sharing family property that hasn't been divided,* if one of them dies *leaving a widow* without sons, his widow must not be married to a man outside the family. The brother should marry his sister-in-law and try to have children with her in his brother's name.*

► The widow and any children she has by her second husband, by custom, lose their share in his property. When a widow and her children become the family of her brother-in-law, this is a Levirate marriage.

Moses: 6Her firstborn son will be named after the brother who died, so that the first husband's name will not disappear from Israel *and that son will receive his share of the family inheritance.* 7If a man doesn't want to marry his brother's widow, she should go to the elders at the city gate and make a *formal* complaint: "My husband died, and his brother refuses to keep his name alive in Israel. He won't marry me and give me children!" 8The elders of his city will send for him and try to persuade him. He may resist and say, "I don't want to marry her!" 9In that case, the widow will come up to him, with the elders looking on, and pull one of his sandals off his foot, spit in his face, and then say, "If a man won't make sure his brother's family line continues, he deserves this *kind of disgrace* for not continuing his brother's house!" 10*From then on,* throughout Israel, his family will be known as "the house with the missing sandal," *and they'll all be disgraced.*

11If two Israelites are fighting, and one man's wife comes to help her husband because he's getting beaten, if she grabs the other man by the genitals, *she has disrespected his source of procreative power.* 12Cut her hand off; don't show any pity!

13Don't keep two different weighing stones in your bag, a heavy one *for when you want to weigh out full value* and a light one *for when you want to try to cheat someone.* 14Don't keep two different measuring containers in your house, a large one *for when you want to measure out full value* and a small one *for when you want to try to cheat someone.* 15Your weighing stone must be a full and fair weight, and your measuring container must be a full and fair size. That way you will live a long time on the ground the Eternal your God is giving to you, 16because the Eternal your God is horrified by anyone who is so unjust as to cheat other people in weights or measures.

17Remember what the Amalekites did to you as you were coming out of Egypt? 18They found you on the road when you were all worn out, and they attacked those who had fallen behind *and were isolated and defenseless.* They showed no fear of God. 19*When you're in a position to punish them for this,* when all of your other enemies are defeated *and you're living peacefully* in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you to live in, then wipe out every trace of the Amalekites under the sky. Don't forget!

► The Old Testament places a very high value on plans being brought to fruition. "Futility curses," in which plans fail to reach fruition, are among the worst imagined in the ancient world. To prevent futility from happening, men are exempt from military service if they have not yet married their fiancées, if they have not enjoyed the fruit of a vineyard they have planted, or if they have not lived in a house they have built. Plans reaching fruition are cause for formal celebration and public acknowledgment of the Lord's help. The fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob takes tangible form in the first crops from the

* 25:4 1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Timothy 5:18 * 25:5 Mark 12:19

new land, and this fulfillment calls for a ceremony of celebration and acknowledgment by each Israelite.

26 **Moses:** When you go into the land the Eternal your God is giving you to live in, when you've taken possession of it and are living there, 2then take some of the very first produce you harvest from the land He is giving you, put it in a basket, and go to the place He will choose for His name. 3Go to the priest who is serving at the time and say, "The Eternal promised our ancestors He'd give us this land, and I'm here today to acknowledge to the Eternal, my True God—I've officially settled in!" 4Then the priest will take the basket from you and set it in front of the altar of the Eternal your God. 5You will then testify in the presence of Him, "I'm descended from an Aramean nomad. *The Lord watched over him everywhere he went.* When he and his family moved to Egypt, there were only a few of them. But as they lived there as foreigners, they grew into a large, great, and powerful nation. 6The Egyptians mistreated us and oppressed us. They *made us their slaves and* worked us mercilessly. 7Then we cried out to the Eternal, the God of our ancestors, and He heard us. He saw that we were oppressed and exploited and mistreated. 8He delivered us with overwhelming power, totally terrifying the Egyptians by testing them *with plagues* and showing He was the true God by doing amazing things to them. 9He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. 10And now I've brought the very first produce from the ground that You, the Eternal, have given to me." Then present the basket to the Eternal your God, and bow down before Him, 11and celebrate all the good things He has given to you and your household. Be sure to invite the Levites and the foreigners who live in your town to the feast.

12When you've gathered a tenth of your produce *at the end of* the third year, the year for *local* tithing, give it to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows who live in your town. Let them come and take as much as they want to eat *for as long as these supplies last.* 13And then pray this prayer to the Eternal, your True God: "I haven't kept this sacred tithe for myself in my own house. I've given it to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows, just as You commanded me. I haven't broken or forgotten any of Your commands. 14I haven't eaten any of it while in mourning. I didn't bring any of it *here* while I was ritually impure, and I haven't offered any of it to the dead. I've listened to the voice of the Eternal, my God. I've done everything You commanded me to do. 15Look down from heaven, from the holy place where You live, and bless Your people Israel and this land flowing with milk and honey, this ground You've given us just as You promised our ancestors."

16Today the Eternal your God commands you to follow all these regulations and decrees. Obey them carefully *and devotedly* with your whole heart and soul. 17You've declared today that the Eternal will be your God, that you'll live as He wants you to, that you'll obey His regulations, commands and decrees, and that you'll listen to His voice. 18And today the Eternal has declared that you are His people—His own special possession, just as He said—and He's acknowledged your promise to keep all His commands. 19He's declared that He'll lift you up high above all the other nations He's made. You'll be praised, renowned, and honored. You also will be a people who are set apart for the Eternal your God, just as He said.

► This major section of the book closes with a declaration that a covenant has now officially been made between the Lord and the current generation in Israel. Now the covenant has to be ratified and enforced.

Ancient treaties that great kings made with their subjects included a "document clause" that specified what each party would do with its own copy of the treaty. These copies were kept in prominent places, typically in the temples of the gods the kings worshiped. In the case of the covenant between God and Israel, the stone tablets are to stay inside the Lord's covenant chest at Israel's central place of worship. In addition, Moses specifies that a copy of the entire treaty must be written on giant stones and

put on top of a mountain in the middle of Israel's new territory.

27 **Moses** *(commanding the people, with Israel's elders supporting him)*: Obey all the commands I'm giving you today, *and listen to the elders when they help you enact them.* 2When you cross the Jordan into the land the Eternal your God is giving you, set up some giant stones and whitewash them with lime. 3Write each word of this law on them when you cross *the Jordan* to enter the land He is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey that the Eternal, God of your ancestors, promised you. 4When you cross the Jordan, you will set up these stones on Mount Ebal and whitewash them with lime just as I've commanded you this day. 5Build an altar there to Him with stones that iron has never struck; 6with stones you find whole, build an altar to Him. Offer burnt offerings on the altar to Him. 7Then sacrifice peace offerings and have a celebration feast in His presence. 8*And remember,* write a complete copy of the law on the large stones. Make it clearly legible.

► Ancient treaties included a list of blessings and curses. Ordinarily each party would call upon their own gods and ask for particular blessings for keeping the treaty or for particular curses if they broke it. In this treaty, however, the blessings and curses are spoken only to the people of Israel. It's not necessary to pronounce any blessing or curses on the Lord because there's no danger He'll forget or break any of His agreements!

Moses *(to all of Israel, with the Levitical priests supporting him)*: 9Keep silent, and listen, Israel! Today you've become the Eternal's very own people, and He's become your God; 10so listen to the voice of the Eternal your God and obey the commands and regulations I'm giving you today.

11That day Moses charged the people.

Moses: 12When you cross the Jordan *River and settle in the land, hold a ceremony to ratify this covenant with the Lord. The tribes of* Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin will stand on *the slope of* Mount Gerizim to bless the people, 13and *the tribes of* Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali will stand on Mount Ebal, representing the curse *that will fall on anyone who breaks the covenant.* 14The Levites will shout in a loud voice, so that every Israelite can hear them *and respond to the curses.*

Levites: 15A curse on anyone who carves or casts an idol, something so horrifying to the Eternal, and secretly worships what human craftsmen have made!

People: Let it be so!*

Levites: 16A curse on anyone who treats his father or mother with contempt!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 17A curse on anyone who *steals his neighbor's land by* moving a boundary marker!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 18A curse on anyone who leads a blind person down the wrong road!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 19A curse on anyone who deprives a foreigner, orphan, or widow of justice!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 20A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his father's wife, who violates the sanctity of his father's intimate relations!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 21A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with an animal!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 22A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his sister—his father's daughter or his mother's daughter!

* 27:15 Literally, Amen

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 23A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his wife's mother!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 24A curse on anyone who murders his neighbor when no one else is watching!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 25A curse on anyone who causes the death of the innocent just for a bribe!

People: Let it be so!

Levites: 26A curse on anyone who doesn't live by and do all that is written in the law!*

People: Let it be so!

It is a fearful thing to promise God obedience and break that promise.

28 **Moses:** If you listen closely to the voice of the Eternal your God and carefully obey all the commands I'm giving you today, He'll lift you up high above every other nation on earth. 2All of the following blessings will be yours—in fact, they'll chase after you—if you'll listen to what He tells you.

► Moses now recites the blessings that will come to the people if they keep their covenant with the Lord and the curses they'll experience if they don't. By making these a part of the treaty itself, Moses is calling on God to use them to enforce the covenant.

The blessings are listed first. This reflects God's primary intention toward us: to bless and not to curse. When the Lord reveals His glory and character to Moses (Exodus 34:6-7), He declares at length that He's a God of love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness, and only then adds that He will never allow injustice.

Moses: 3You'll be blessed in the city and
blessed in the fields.
4You'll be blessed with children and
crops and cattle.
Your herds will multiply, and your
flocks will increase.
5Your basket will be blessed; *it will be full*
at harvest time,
and your kneading bowl *will be*
blessed; you'll always have plenty
of bread.
6You'll be blessed when you go out *of*
your home
and blessed when you return *to*
your home.

7When your enemies attack you, the Eternal will defeat them for you. They'll come against you from one direction, but *scatter and* flee *chaotically* from you in seven *different* directions. 8He will bless your barns, *and they'll be full of grain;* He'll bless everything you do. You'll be blessed throughout the land He is giving you. 9The Eternal will make you a nation that belongs to Him in a special way, just as He promised He would, if you'll obey the commands of the Eternal your God and live as He wants you to. 10Every other nation on earth will see the Eternal has called you by His own name, so they'll be in awe of you.

11The Eternal will give you more than enough of every good thing—children, cattle, and crops—as you live on the ground He promised your ancestors He'd give you. 12He will open up the reservoirs of water in the sky and make the rainy seasons come each year, so that everything you do will be blessed. *Your produce will be so abundant that* you'll lend to many nations, but you won't have to borrow from any. 13He will make you the head, not the tail; you'll always be on top and never on the bottom—if you'll just listen to the commands I'm giving you today from the Eternal your God, and obey them carefully. 14*All these blessings will be yours* if you don't deviate *at all,* neither to the right nor to the left, from any of the things I'm commanding you today, if you don't go and worship other gods!

► Moses must now invoke the curses that will come upon the people if they break their covenant with the Lord and

* 27:26 Galatians 3:10

worship other gods. He begins with a series of general curses that reverse the general blessings that have just been promised for obedience and faithfulness. But the curses quickly become very specific, predicting that things like plague, disease, and war will devastate the land. These curses will eventually become very personal with skin diseases; they will also make a person ritually impure and thus unable to participate in the community's worship. As long as the diseases are present, even if they are incurable, those who suffer from them are banned from the temple. The punishment for choosing not to worship God, in other words, is ultimately not being able to worship God.

Moses: 15But if you won't listen to the
voice of the Eternal your God, if you
don't carefully obey the commands and
regulations I'm giving you today, then
you'll experience all of the following
curses—in fact, they'll come after you!

16You'll be cursed in the city and cursed
in the fields.
17Your baskets will be cursed, and *your
harvests will be small.*
Your kneading bowl *will be cursed,
and you'll always be short of food.*
18Your children and your crops will be
cursed.
Your herds will dwindle, and your
flocks will shrink.
19You'll be cursed when you return *to
your home* and cursed when you
go out *from your home.*

Eternal One: 20I'll oppose everything you
try to do! I'll send curses and panic and
setbacks until you're destroyed, sud-
denly and completely, because of the evil
things you did when you abandoned Me!

Moses: 21-22The Eternal will strike you
with plague—consumption and fever
and inflammation—in the land where
you're going to live, and it will never
leave until none of you are left alive
there. *He'll afflict your land* with heat
and drought; *He'll afflict your crops* with
blight and mildew. All of these things
will keep coming after you until you're
destroyed! 23The skies overhead will
be like a bronze *shield that no rain can
penetrate,* and the land beneath your
feet will be like iron *that no seeds can
sprout through.* 24Instead of rainstorms,
the Eternal will send dust storms down
on your land, and you'll be destroyed.
25He will hand you over to your enemies
already defeated. You'll attack them *in
an organized unit* from one direction,
but you'll *scatter and* flee from them
as scared individuals in seven *different*
directions. Every kingdom on earth will
tremble with fear when they hear what
happens to you. 26Your dead bodies *will
lie unburied in the open field.* The wild
birds and animals will eat them, and no
one will chase the scavengers away.
27The Eternal will afflict you with
*all kinds of incurable skin diseases, such
as* the boils *that were a plague* in Egypt;
you'll suffer tumors* and scurvy and itch,
but you'll never find relief. 35He will afflict
you with severe, incurable boils on your
knees and legs, and they'll spread *until
they cover your whole body,* from the soles
of your feet to the top of your head.*

28The Eternal will afflict you
with madness and blindness and
confusion.
29*As you try to figure out which way to go
in life,*
you'll be groping around the way
a blind person gropes in the
darkness,
even in the middle of the day.
You'll never find your way, and you'll
never be prosperous.
You'll be exploited and robbed all
the time, and no one will rescue
you.
30You'll get engaged to a woman, but
another man will violate her.
You'll build a house but never live
in it.
You'll plant a vineyard but never
enjoy its fruit.
31Your ox will be slaughtered as you look
on *helplessly,* and others will
eat it.
Your donkey will be taken away
from you and never returned.
Your sheep will be given to your
enemies, and no one will help
you get them back.

* 28:27 Literally, hemorrhoids * 28:35 Verse 35 has been moved forward to aid in comprehension.

32Your sons and your daughters will
be given to foreigners *as slaves*. You'll
always be watching for their return, until
your eyes grow dim, but there will be
nothing you can do *to bring them back*.
33Foreigners will eat up all your crops
and take everything else you've worked
for. You'll be oppressed and abused con-
stantly. 34You'll be driven mad by what
you see! 36The Eternal will send all of
you, including your chosen king, *into
exile,* to a country you've never heard
of, not even from your ancestors. There
you'll worship other gods made of wood
and stone. 37Whenever the people who
live in the places where the Eternal
has sent you want to scare someone or
insult someone or teach a lesson, they'll
say that what happened to you is going
to happen to them. *Your name will be
synonymous with disaster!*

38You'll sow many seeds, but you'll
harvest only a few because locusts will
devour them *before they produce*. 39You'll
plant vineyards and tend them, but
you won't drink any wine or collect any
grapes because worms will eat them.
40You'll have olive trees throughout your
territory, but you won't anoint yourself
with oil because *the trees will be diseased
and* the olives will drop off *before they
ripen*. 41You'll still have children, but they
won't stay with you; they'll be taken into
captivity. 42Your orchards and crops will
be infested with *buzzing* locusts. 43The
foreigners who live in your country will
rise higher and higher above you, while
you sink lower and lower *in every aspect
of life*. 44They will lend to you, but you
won't lend to them; they'll be the head,
and you'll be the tail. 45You'll experience
all of these curses—they'll chase after
you and overtake you and destroy you—
because you did not listen to *the voice of*
the Eternal and obey the commands and
regulations He gave you. 46These curses
will *test you and* leave you in awe of His
signs and wonders against you and your
descendants forever.

► This list of futility curses is followed by a grisly description of the horrors of foreign invasion and siege. The people, unfortunately, will experience these very terrors when Assyria invades the Northern Kingdom of Israel, conquering it in 722 B.C. and exiling the population, and when Babylon invades the Southern Kingdom of Judah, destroying Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and carrying the people off into exile.

Moses: 47Because you didn't serve the
Eternal your God in joy and gladness
when you had an abundance of every-
thing, 48you'll serve the enemies the
Eternal sends against you, in hunger and
thirst and nakedness and destitution.
He'll put an iron yoke on your neck until
He's destroyed you.

49The Eternal will bring a nation from
far away, from the ends of the earth, and
it will swoop down on you like an eagle.
This will be a nation whose language
you don't understand, 50a ruthless nation
that doesn't respect the old or spare the
young. 51They'll eat up your young cattle
and crops until you have nothing left.
They won't leave you any grain or new
wine or oil, or young animals in your
herds or flocks. And that lack will kill
you. 52They'll lay siege to all of you and
all of your cities throughout the land
the Eternal your God is giving you, until
the high, fortifying walls you feel so safe
within have all been knocked down all
over your nation.

53These enemy sieges will cause you
so much hardship that you'll resort to
cannibalism! You'll eat the flesh of the
sons and daughters that the Eternal
your God has given you. 54Even the
gentlest, most sensitive man among you
will turn against his brother and his
beloved wife and the rest of his children
who haven't been exiled. 55He won't
even give them anything to eat from
the flesh of the children he's devour-
ing because the hardship of the enemy
siege will be so severe in every city
that he'll have nothing else to eat him-
self. 56Even the gentlest, most delicate
woman among you, who wouldn't even
let her foot touch the ground because
she's so refined, will turn against her
beloved husband and against her son
and daughter. 57*She'll feel no compassion*
toward any other children she bears and
no delicacy about the afterbirth when
it comes out. She'll eat her newborns
and the afterbirth in secret because
the hardship of the enemy siege will be
so severe in every city that she'll have
nothing else to eat.

58If you don't carefully obey every
word of this law that's written in this
book, if you don't fear your God's glori-
ous and awesome name, "Eternal One,"
59then He will strike you and your
descendants with extraordinary plagues
that will be widespread and long-lasting,
with serious, persistent illnesses. 60He'll
bring back all the Egyptian diseases you
were so afraid of *when you lived there,*
and you'll suffer from them continu-
ously. 61He will even afflict you with
diseases and plagues that aren't written
about in this book of the law until you're
destroyed. 62Only a few of you will be
left, even though there used to be as
many of you as there were stars in the
sky, because you wouldn't listen to the
voice of the Eternal your God. 63Even
though it used to give the Eternal great
pleasure to do good things for you and
to increase your numbers, He'll delight
in killing and destroying you *completely*.
You'll be torn from the land you're going
to possess, 64and He will scatter you
among all the nations, from one end
of the earth to the other. There you'll
worship other gods, made of wood and
stone, that you and your ancestors have
never worshiped before. 65Among those
nations you'll never be at rest, and you'll
never be able to settle down. He will
make your hearts tremble, your eyes fail
from crying, and your soul languish *from
despair*. 66Your life will hang by a thread;
you'll be terrified day and night, know-
ing you could die any minute. 67You'll
be so terrified, and you'll see such awful
things, that in the morning you'll say, "If
only evening would come, *and this day
would be over!*" And in the evening you'll
say, "If only morning would come, *and
this night would be over!*" 68The Eternal
will bring you back to Egypt in ships,
even though I told you you'd never go
back there again. You'll offer yourselves
to your enemies as male and female
slaves, but no one will buy you.

► The covenant treaty found in this book ends on a very bleak note. Unfortunately its dismal warnings are not heeded. The people of Israel are unfaithful to the Lord. They worship other gods; and as a result, their land is conquered and they are carried away into exile. However, the covenant God has made with their ancestors is unconditional. Even though the people have broken the specific covenant He has made with them at Mount Horeb, forfeiting the blessings it promised, the Lord is still bound to His covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants forever. And so He enters into a new covenant with them, to replace the one that has been broken.

29 These are the terms of the cov-
enant the Eternal commanded
Moses to make with the people
of Israel in the land of Moab, in addition
to the covenant He made with them at
Horeb.

Moses *(summoning all of Israel)*: 2You saw
with your own eyes what the Eternal did
in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all
his servants and his whole country. 3You
saw with your own eyes *how He tested
them with* the great plagues *He sent
against them* and the amazing signs and
wonders He did *to demonstrate His real-
ity and power*. 4But to this day, He hasn't
given you a mind that understands or
eyes that see or ears that hear.

► Spiritual insensitivity is its own punishment. It's not that the Lord doesn't want the people to be able to see and understand how His great works disclose His character and purposes, it's just that such insights are only available to those who will humbly acknowledge and obey Him in response. Spiritual perception is a special gift from God, and it isn't given to those who stubbornly resist. Instead, they are allowed to continue having eyes that don't see, ears that don't hear, and minds that don't understand.

Eternal One: 5I've led you through the
wilderness for 40 years. The clothes
on your back and the sandals on your
feet haven't worn out. 6You haven't had

bread to eat or wine or strong drink to consume, *but I've fed you each day with manna* so you'd know that I, the Eternal, am your God *who protects you and provides for you.*

Moses: 7When we arrived here *in the territory east of the Jordan,* Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan attacked us, but we defeated them in battle. 8We took their land and gave it to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half *of Joseph's children—the* tribe of the Manassites—as their families' perpetual land. 9If you carefully obey all the terms of this covenant, then you'll be successful in everything you do.

10You're all standing here today in the presence of the Eternal your God: your leaders, your tribes, your elders, and your representatives, all you men of Israel, 11with your children and wives, and even the foreigners who are living with you *and working for you*—who chop your wood and draw your water—12*you're all standing here* to take an oath and become part of the covenant He is making with you today. 13He'll establish you as His people; and He'll become your God, just as He told you He would, and just as He promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

14But I'm not making this covenant only with you who are here taking this oath; 15it's with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Eternal our God, and also with those who aren't with us here today.

16You know what life was like in the land of Egypt, and *you saw* how other nations lived when you traveled through their territories. 17You saw the detestable things they had with them, their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold. 18There could be a man or a woman among you, or even a whole clan or tribe, that might be willfully turning away from the Eternal this very day to go worship the gods of those nations! They'd be like a root that would bear bitter, poisonous fruit among you. 19Even when they hear the words of the *covenant* oath, they'll exult, "We can keep going our own way, and we'll be just fine!" *They will end up* destroying everything in the country. 20He will never forgive them; He'll be furious with jealousy, and they will be struck with all the curses written in this book. He will wipe away every trace of them under heaven. 21He'll single them out for misery from all the tribes of Israel and bring disaster on them according to all the covenant curses recorded in this book of the law.

22Future generations of your descendants and foreigners who come from distant countries will see how the Eternal has struck the land and sickened it, and they'll say, 23"This whole place is a burned-out wasteland of sulfur and salt! No one plants anything here because nothing grows here—not even grass! It's like what happened when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah,* Admah and Zeboiim, when He was so furious with those cities." 24People from the surrounding nations will say, "But why did the Eternal do this to this land? Why did He get so furiously angry?" 25And bystanders will answer, "Because they abandoned the covenant the Eternal, the God of their ancestors, made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. 26They went and worshiped other gods. They bowed down to gods they'd never known that He didn't allow them to worship. 27That's why He was furiously angry with that land and struck it with all the curses recorded in this book. 28He was so incredibly angry that He uprooted the people from the land in his wrath and tossed them away into other countries, where they still are today."

29Only the Eternal knows the secret things. But we and our descendants are always responsible for what has been revealed to us, and we need to obey every word of this law.

30 **Moses:** When everything I've described to you has happened, and you've experienced *first* the blessings *of obedience* and then the curses *for disobedience,* if you reflect on these blessings and curses while you're living in the nations where the Eternal your God has scattered you; 2and if you and your descendants return to Him completely, heart and soul, *and listen to His voice,* obeying everything I've commanded you this day, 3then He will have mercy on you and bring you back from captivity. He'll gather you from all the peoples you've been scattered among. 4-5Even if you've been sent to the ends of the heavens, He will gather you together and bring you

* 29:23 Genesis 19

back from there to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and it will be yours once again. You'll be a bigger and more prosperous nation than ever before. 6The Eternal your God will *cut away and* circumcise *the hardness around* your hearts and your descendants' hearts so that you'll love Him completely, heart and soul, and you'll live.

► Circumcision of the body is a physical sign of membership in the covenant God has made with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:9-14). When Moses says here that the people's hearts will be circumcised, that the hardness around them will be cut away, he means their thoughts, desires, and intentions will be brought into the covenant—that is, they will want to be faithful to their relationship with the Eternal One. (The same idea is expressed in 10:16, where Moses literally tells the people to "circumcise their hearts," meaning that they should commit to the covenant with the Eternal One not just outwardly but inwardly.) The prophets describe the new covenant in the same way: "a new heart and new spirit" (Ezekiel 36:26-28).

Moses: 7The Eternal your God will strike your enemies, those who hated you and came after you, with all these curses. 8But you'll listen once again to *the voice of* the Eternal, and you'll obey all the commands I'm giving you today. 9Then, in whatever you do, the Eternal your God, will give you more than enough of every good thing—children and cattle and crops—because the Eternal will once again delight to do you good as He delighted *to do good* to your ancestors. 10*All this will happen* if you'll return to the Eternal your God, heart and soul, and you'll listen to His voice and obey His commands and remember His regulations, which are written in this book of the law.

11After all, what I'm commanding you today isn't too difficult for you; it's not out of reach. 12It's not up in the sky, so you don't have to say, "Who will go up into heaven and get it for us and tell us what it is, so we can obey it?" 13It's not across the sea, so you don't have to say, "Who will go beyond the watery *abyss* and get it for us and tell us what it is, so we can obey it?" 14No, the words *you need to be faithful to the Eternal* are very close to you. They are in your mouth *(always talk about these laws, as I've commanded you)* and in your heart *(treasure them there)*.*

15Look, I've given you *two* choices today: you can have life with all the good things it brings, or death and all the bad things it brings. 16If you do what I've commanded you today and love the Eternal your God; if you live as He wants you to, if you obey His commands, regulations and judgments, then you'll live and have many descendants. He will bless you in the land where you're going to live. 17But if your heart turns away and you don't listen, if you go astray and you bow down to other gods and worship them, 18then today I assure you you'll be destroyed. You'll cross the Jordan *River* into the land that's going to belong to you, but you won't live there very long at all.

► Covenants between two people are typically witnessed by a third party. If one person doesn't live up to his obligations and tries to argue that it was not necessary, the other person can then appeal to the witness to confirm the original terms of the agreement. Moses calls on the sky and the land to be the witnesses here. They will always be around to testify about the covenant terms that were offered to the people and how they agreed to them.

The formal treaty and its supplement have now been drawn up and witnessed. The only business remaining is to establish how the treaty will be carried on once the people who originally made it are gone. The Lord chooses Joshua to succeed Moses, to lead Israel into the land and represent them in their relationship with Him.

* 30:14 Romans 10:6-8

Moses: [19]I'm calling on the heavens and the earth to be the witnesses against you. I gave you the choice today between life and death, between being blessed or being cursed. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live! [20]If you love the Eternal your God and listen to His voice and always remain loyal to Him, for He is your life, then you'll be able to live a long time in the land the Eternal promised to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

31 When Moses had finished *giving all the words of this whole covenant* to the people of Israel, [2]he spoke to them.

Moses: I'm now 120 years old. I'm not *physically* able to lead you anymore, and the Eternal has told me, "You're not going to cross the Jordan *River*." [3]*Instead,* it will be the Eternal your God who leads you *across the Jordan*. He'll clear out the nations who live there, and you'll take their place. *As my successor and the Eternal's representative,* Joshua will lead you across, just as He has said. [4]The Eternal will do to those nations just what He did to Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings, and their land when He destroyed them. [5]He will defeat them for you. Then you must do to them exactly what I've commanded you to do. [6]Be strong and brave, and don't tremble in fear of them, because the Eternal your God is going with you. He'll never fail you or abandon you!

[7]Then Moses spoke to Joshua, with all of Israel looking on.

Moses: Be strong and brave! You're going to lead these people into the land the Eternal promised their ancestors He'd give them. You'll give it to them, and they'll give it to their descendants. [8]And He will be leading you. He'll be with you, and He'll never fail you or abandon you. So don't be afraid!

[9]Then Moses wrote down *everything in* this law and gave it to the priests (the descendants of Levi who transported the Eternal's covenant chest) and to the elders of Israel. [10]He gave them these instructions:

Moses: At the end of every seven years, *as I've already told you,* you're going to cancel all debts. In that same year, during the Feast of Shelters, [11]when all the people of Israel come into the presence of the Eternal your God, at the place He'll choose, read this law aloud to them. [12]Assemble everyone—men, women, children, and any foreigners who are living in the cities with you—so they can listen and learn and fear Him and carefully obey every word of this law. [13]*If you do this every seven years,* their descendants, who otherwise wouldn't know these things, will hear *the law* and learn to fear Him, *and the nation will be faithful to Him* for as long as you live in the land you're going to take possession of when you cross the Jordan *River*.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: [14]It's almost time for you to die. Call Joshua and stand with him by the congregation tent, where I'll formally install him *and give him his instructions*.

So Moses and Joshua went and waited at the congregation tent. [15]The Eternal came and met them at the door of the tent, appearing in the form of a cloud pillar.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: [16]You're about *to leave this world* to lie down with your ancestors *in death. After you're gone,* these people are going to be unfaithful to Me. They're going to worship foreign gods, the gods of the land they're going into. They're going to abandon Me and break the covenant I made with them. [17]When they do, I'll be furious with them and abandon them. I won't look on them *when they pray. I won't protect them,* and they'll be eaten alive. They'll be in so much trouble and distress then that they'll say, "We must be in all this trouble because our God isn't with us anymore!" [18]*And they'll be right.* In those days, I won't look at them *when they pray* because they'll have done such an evil thing by turning to other gods. [19]So I want you to write down this song and teach it to the children of Israel. Teach them to sing it, so it can be a witness for Me against them. [20-21]I know what they're already inclined to do before I've even brought them into the land I promised them. I know that when I've brought them into the land I promised to give to their ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey, when they have had more than enough to eat and they've grown fat, they'll turn to other

gods and worship them. They'll reject Me and break My covenant. Then, when they're in so much trouble and distress, this song will testify against them since their descendants will still be singing it.

22So Moses wrote down this song that day, and he taught it to the children of Israel.

► The Lord commissions Moses to write a song that will serve as an enduring witness of His covenant with the people of Israel. It is to be passed down from generation to generation; and even if it cannot last quite as long as the sky and the land, so long as it does last it will speak in a way that they cannot. Of course, since the song is recorded in the Scriptures the people of God will always cherish it as they do all of His Word!

23Then the Eternal formally installed Joshua (Nun's son) and gave him instructions.

Eternal One: Be strong and brave, because you're going to lead the children of Israel into the land I promised them. I am going with you!

24Then Moses wrote down each word of this law in a book. When he finished, 25he gave instructions to the Levites who carried the Eternal's covenant chest.

Moses: 26Take this book of the law, and put it next to the covenant chest of the Eternal your God, so it will be there as a witness against you. 27I know how stubborn and rebellious you are. Even now, while I'm still alive and here with you, you've been rebelling against the Eternal. I can only imagine what you'll do when I'm dead! 28Bring all the tribes' elders and representatives here so they can listen to everything I must say, and so I can call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against them. 29I know that after I'm dead you'll become corrupt and stop doing what I've commanded. You'll have all kinds of trouble there because you'll have done what the Eternal sees as wrong. You'll make Him furious by your deeds, crafting idols *and worshiping them*!

30Then Moses presented this whole song, while everyone in Israel was listening.

32 **Moses:** Listen, O sky, so I may speak!
Pay attention, O earth, to what I say!
2Let my teaching fall on you like raindrops;
let what I say collect like the dew,
Like rain sprinkling the grass,
like showers on the green plants.
3I will proclaim the name of the Eternal;
I will utter greatness to our God.
4He's the Rock, and His work is perfect;
everything He does is right.
He's the God who can be trusted, who never does wrong
because He's righteous and upright.
5But a perverse and crooked generation has broken its word to Him.
They are not counted as His children—not with such deficiencies.
6Is this how you repay the Eternal,
you foolish, unwise people?
Isn't He your Father who produced you,
who made you and established you?
7Remember the days long ago;
consider the years of past generations.
Ask your father, and he'll explain it to you;
ask the elders, and they'll tell you:
8When God, the Most High in heaven gave all the nations their inherited territory,
when He divided the descendants of Adam *into nations,*
When He established the boundaries of the peoples,
as the number of the sons of God,
9Because the Eternal's territory is His people;
and Jacob is the territory of God's inheritance.
10The Eternal found Jacob out in the wilderness,
out in an empty, windswept desert wasteland.
He put His arms around him and took care of him;
He protected him as the apple of His eye.
11Just as an eagle stirs up its nest,
encouraging its young to fly,
and then hovers over them *in case they need help,*

And spreads its wings and catches
them *if they fall,*
and carries them *up high* on its
wings;
12So the Eternal guided Jacob *through the*
wilderness
without *the help of* any foreign god.
13He set him on the heights of the land
and fed him from the produce of
the fields.
He even fed him honey from the rocks
and oil from flinty stones,
14Butter from his cows and milk from his
flocks,
fattened young lambs, rams raised
in Bashan, and goats,
the *finest fatty kernels* of wheat,
and wine from the lifeblood of
grapes.
15But Jeshurun—*my upright ones of*
Israel—got fat and kicked
back—
yes, you were fat and bloated and
stuffed.
He abandoned the God who made him
and disdained the Rock of his
salvation.
16They made Him jealous by *worshiping*
foreign gods;
they infuriated Him with their
disgusting idols.
17They offered sacrifices to demons that
are not God;
they worshiped gods they hadn't
known,
New ones that had just appeared,
gods their ancestors had never
been acquainted with.
18You ignored the Rock who bore you
and forgot the God who gave birth
to you.

► Earlier Moses has described the Eternal One as Israel's "Father" (verse 6). Now he uses the image of a mother going into labor and giving birth to describe the Eternal One's tender affection and sacrificial love for the nation.

Moses: 19The Eternal saw this and
rejected them
because His sons and daughters
had made Him so angry.

Eternal One: 20I won't look at them *when*
they pray;
I'll just watch and see what
happens to them
Because they're a perverse generation,
children who are unfaithful.
21They've made Me jealous by
worshiping something that isn't
God,
and they've angered Me with their
idols!
So I'll make them jealous by favoring
those who aren't a people;
I'll infuriate them with a godless
nation.*
22My anger will start a fire that will burn
down to the land of the dead.
It will consume the land and all its
crops
and set the mountains ablaze, right
down to their foundations.
23I'll pile disasters on them
and use all My arrows against them.
24They'll be emaciated by famine
and consumed by fevers and
destroyed by bitter pestilence.
I'll attack them with the fangs of wild
animals
and the venom of snakes that crawl
in the dust.
25While the sword is killing their children
outside,
they'll be huddling in terror inside
their homes.
Everyone will be destroyed: young men
and women,
infants and *old* people with gray
hair.
26I thought I would smash them in pieces
until no one remembered they ever
existed,
27But I was afraid of how their enemies
would gloat,
how their opponents would get the
wrong impression and say,
"We conquered them by our own
power;
the Eternal didn't do all of this!"

Moses: 28They're a nation with no sense—
they have no understanding.
29If only they were wise and understood
this
and realized what was going to
happen to them!
30How could one *of their enemies* pursue
a thousand *of them,*
and two *of their enemies* make ten
thousand *of them* run away,

* 32:21 Romans 10:19

Unless their Rock had abandoned them,
unless the Eternal had handed them over?
31It's not because their rock is anything like our Rock—
even our enemies admit this!
32*No,* it's because their vine is *grafted* from the vines of Sodom,
from the terraces of Gomorrah:
It grows poisonous grapes in bitter clusters
33and makes wine that's snake venom and deadly cobra poison.

Eternal One: 34Haven't I been saving this judgment,
sealing it away in My storehouse?
35Revenge is Mine. I will settle all scores!*
Soon they'll stumble because the day of disaster is almost here,
And their doom is coming quickly!

Moses: 36The Eternal will judge His people*
and have mercy on His servants
When He sees they have no strength left
and they're all gone, both slave and free.
37Then He'll say *about Israel,* "Now where are their gods,
the rocks where they took shelter,
38*The gods* who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine they offered?
Let them get up and help you, *Israel!*
Let them protect you!"

Eternal One: 39Now do you see that I am the One,
and there is no other God besides Me?
I have power over life and death;
I wound, and I heal;
no one can resist My power!
40I'm lifting up My hand toward the sky *to take an oath,*
and I swear, "As I live forever,
41When I sharpen My flashing sword
and use it to bring about justice,
I'll give My enemies what they deserve
and pay back those who hate Me!
42I'll get My arrows drunk with blood,
the blood of the dead and the prisoners,
And My sword will feast on flesh,
on the heads with their uncut hair of the enemy leaders!"

Moses: 43You nations, celebrate with His *covenant* people*
because He's going to avenge the blood of His servants.
He'll give His enemies what they deserve
and atone for His land and His people.

44This was the song that Moses presented, together with Joshua* (Nun's son), while all the people were listening. 45After Moses had said all of these words, *everything recorded in this book,* to everyone in Israel, 46he spoke to them.

Moses: Every word I've said to you today *will be a witness against you, so* set it in your heart, *remember it well,* and teach it to your children, so they'll be careful to obey every word of this law. 47You can't afford to ignore even one word; your very life depends on it! It's how you'll be able to live a long time in the land on the other side of the Jordan that will be your territory.

48The Eternal spoke to Moses on that same day.

God gives Moses a peek at the blessing he missed because of his disobedience.

Eternal One: 49Climb to the top of Mount Nebo, one of the Abarim mountains here in the land of Moab across *the Jordan River* from Jericho, and look at the land of Canaan, which I'm giving to the people of Israel as their property. 50Just as Aaron died when he climbed Mount Hor and joined his ancestors *in death,* you'll die on top of the mountain you climb and join your ancestors *in death.* 51This is because you and Aaron disobeyed Me in front of all the Israelites at Meribah-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, *when you struck the rock instead of commanding it to give water.* You did not honor Me, your holy God, *as if you could ignore My instructions if you wanted to,* in front of all the Israelites!* 52So you can look at this land from a distance, but

* 32:35 Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30 * 32:36 Hebrews 10:30 * 32:43 Romans 15:10; other manuscripts add "and let all the *heavenly* messengers worship Him." * 32:44 Hebrew manuscripts read, "Hoshea." * 32:51 Numbers 27:14

you can't go into it, this land I'm giving to the Israelites.

33 Before he died, Moses, the man of God, blessed the people of Israel with this blessing.

► The Lord has "called Israel His own" in the way that cities and territories in the ancient world are named after those who have explored, settled, or conquered them. It is understood that the person whose name is attached to a place will have continuing interests there, such as preventing anyone else from taking the crops, oppressing the people, and so forth. The Lord's name is literally "over" the people of Israel, providing shelter and protection. Anyone who wants to harass them has to answer to Him, so His great reputation will keep them safe from marauders. If they are trusting and obedient, they will be protected from spiritual dangers and attacks by the power and reputation of the One who has called them by His own name.

Moses: 2The Eternal came from *Mount* Sinai:
He glowed like the dawn over *Mount* Seir;
He shone *like the sun* over Mount Paran;
He arose in the middle of His chosen ones, gathered in their tens of thousands.
The law was a flame in His right hand.*
3Truly He loves His people;
all Your chosen ones are in Your hand.
They gathered at Your feet and received Your words.
4Moses gave us a law to keep;
it will always belong to the people of Jacob.
5When all their leaders gathered and the Israelite tribes came together,
the Eternal became king of Jeshurun—
6Let Reuben live and not die,
and let not his people be few.

7Moses said this about Judah:

Moses: Listen, Eternal, to the voice of Judah,
and bring him back to his people *safely*.
He defends himself with his own hands;
help him against his enemies!

8About Levi he said,

Moses: Your Thummim and Urim belong to your loyal servant,
the man you tested at Massah and had a dispute with at Meribah about the water.
9*When the Levites carry out the law,*
they don't give special treatment to their fathers or mothers
Or favor their relatives or recognize their children.
They obey Your word and keep Your covenant.
10They teach Jacob Your rules;
they teach Israel Your law.
They set incense before You
and offer burnt sacrifices on Your altar.
11Bless Levi with strength, Eternal,
and accept the service he offers You.
Crush the loins of those who hate him and attack him,
so they'll never attack them again!

12About Benjamin he said,

Moses: The Eternal's beloved rests safely next to Him,
protected all through the day,
resting between His shoulders.

13About Joseph he said,

Moses: May his land be blessed by the Eternal
with the best the sky has to offer—*abundant rains*—
and with the dew and the waters that lie below the ground.
14*May it be blessed* with the best the sun can produce
and the best crops of each month,

* 33:2 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

15 With the best that grows on the ancient mountains
and the everlasting hills,
16 With the best the land has to offer when it's filled with good things,
And most of all may it be blessed with the favor of the One who appeared in the *burning* bush.
Let all these blessings rest on Joseph's head,
on the head of this prince among his brothers.
17 He's majestic, like a firstborn bull;
he has powerful horns, as does a wild ox.
With them he will gore the nations,
driving them away to the ends of the earth.
This is the power of Ephraim's ten thousands,
of Manasseh's thousands of troops.

18 About Zebulun *and Issachar* he said,

Moses: Rejoice, Zebulun, as you go out *to sea,*
and *rejoice,* Issachar, in your tents!
19 They call peoples to the mountain
where they offer right sacrifices;
Because they feast on the abundance of the sea,
and *they profit from* the hidden treasures of the sand.

20 About Gad he said,

Moses: Blessed is the one who expands Gad's territory!
He lives there like a lioness,
tearing at the arm and the top of the head.
21 He chose the best for himself;
a commander's portion was hidden for him there, *east of the Jordan.*
He came at the head of the army *to help the other tribes conquer their land.*
He carried out the righteousness of what the Eternal said was to happen,
What was right, and carried out His decrees with the rest of Israel.

22 About Dan he said,

Moses: Dan is a lion's cub,
leaping up from Bashan.

23 About Naphtali he said,

Moses: Naphtali, you're satisfied with favor and filled with the Eternal's blessing.
Take possession of the Sea *of Galilee* and *the land on* its *western and* southern shores.

24 About Asher he said,

Moses: Asher is the most blessed of *Israel's* sons;
may he be the favorite of his brothers!
May *the olive trees in his land produce so abundantly*
that he'll be wading in *olive* oil!
25 May the bolts of your gates be iron and bronze,
and may you have the strength you need for every day.

In Hebrew this expression, "There is no god like God," makes an extremely strong statement. God is one of a kind.

26 There is no god like the God of Jeshurun—
the God of the upright ones of Israel—
Who comes across the sky to rescue you,
riding on the clouds in His majesty.
27 The Eternal God is your shelter;
He holds you up in His everlasting arms.
He chased away your enemies ahead of you,
shouting *to you,* "Destroy *them*!"
28 Now Israel lives in safety;
Jacob's spring is isolated
In a land of grain and new wine
where dew falls from the sky.
29 How happy you are, Israel! Who is like you?
You're the people the Eternal has saved.
He's the shield that protects you
and the sword that brings you pride.
Your enemies will cringe *and surrender* before you,
and you'll stamp out their high places *of worship into the ground.*

34 Moses climbed up from the plains of Moab to *the top of* Mount Nebo, to the peak at *Mount* Pisgah *on the east side of the Jordan River* across from Jericho. The Eternal

showed him the whole land *that would be Israel's territory*: Gilead as far as Dan, 2all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all of Judah's territory to the *Mediterranean* Sea in the west, 3the southern desert,* and the basin in the valley of Jericho, the "city of palms," as far as Zoar.

Eternal One *(to Moses)*: 4This is the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I told them, "I'll give it to your descendants." I've let you see it, even though you won't be going into it.

God Himself buried Moses, with no grave and no monument that the Israelites could use to create another idol for worship.

5So Moses, the Eternal's servant, died there in the land of Moab, just as the Eternal had said. 6He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. 7Moses was 120 years old when he died, but his eyesight hadn't failed and his strength hadn't diminished. 8The children of Israel stayed in the plains of Moab and mourned for Moses for 30 days, until the grieving period was over.

9Now Joshua (Nun's son) was filled with a spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on this successor. The children of Israel obeyed Joshua, and they did what the Eternal had commanded Moses. 10Since then there's never been another prophet in Israel like Moses. The Eternal knew him face-to-face! 11No one has ever done anything like the amazing things the Eternal sent Moses to do in the land of Egypt to demonstrate His reality and power to Pharaoh and his servants and his whole country. 12And no one has shown such great power or done such terrifying things as everyone in Israel saw Moses do.

* 34:3 Hebrew, *Negev*

JOSHUA

Entering the promised land

By Joshua, who spied out the land

Some of the most important questions people ask themselves center on identity. Where did I come from? How did I get here? Who are my parents, grandparents, and ancestors? What do these things say about me?

For the Israelites these are important questions too; and some of their formative documents tell of how God chooses them, makes promises to them, and fulfills those promises. These accounts are still important for contemporary believers, even though we live centuries later in very different cultures. While we may understand God's promises and fulfillment in a different way today, we are encouraged to believe in God's faithfulness.

The Book of Joshua fits into the story of God's people in several important ways. It tells the final part of the story of the exodus from Egypt, which begins when Moses leads the people of Israel out of slavery and back to the land that God has promised the descendants of Abraham. It also tells the story of the conquest of the land when the people of Israel claim the land as their own. It then describes in (sometimes meticulous) detail how the land is apportioned to each tribe of Israel and how they begin to make their homes in it. Finally the book records the final message Joshua leaves his people, a message full of prophecy and wisdom.

It is unclear who wrote the Book of Joshua. Ancient Jewish tradition suggests that Joshua, the successor to Moses as the leader of Israel, was the author of much of the book. Later traditions imagine that other figures might have been the primary author of Joshua, while some have more recently suggested that the book is the product of several editors compiling stories at several different times. Ancient ideas of authorship were a lot more fluid than those we have now; and whether the book is the product of one person or several, it communicates God's purpose to us. This book, regardless of who wrote it, is Joshua's story.

The Book of Joshua divides into three major sections: first, in chapters 1–12, the people crossing over into the land of Canaan and its conquest; second, in chapters 13–22, the division of the land among the different tribes of Israel, sanctuary cities, and provision for the priestly tribe of Levi; third, in chapters 23–24, Joshua's final discourse and his death.

1 Moses served the Eternal One *faithfully until the end of his days*. After his death, the Eternal singled out Joshua, the son of Nun, who had walked at the right hand of Moses *during the wilderness wanderings*.

Eternal One *(to Joshua)*: 2Since My servant Moses is now dead, you and the Israelites must prepare to cross over the Jordan River to enter the land I have given you. 3I will give you every place you walk, wherever your feet touch, just as I promised Moses.* 4From the *southern* deserts to *the northern mountains in* Lebanon, from the great Euphrates River *in the east*—including all the land of the Hittites—to the great *Mediterranean* Sea in the west, all of it is yours. 5No one will be able to oppose you for as long as you live. I will be with you just as I was with Moses, and I will never fail or abandon you.

6So be strong and courageous, for you will lead this people as they acquire and then divide the land I promised to their ancestors. 7Always be strong and courageous, and always live by all of the law I gave to my servant Moses, never turning from it—even ever so slightly—so that you may succeed wherever you go. 8Let *the words from* the book of the law be always on your lips. Meditate on them day and night so that you may be careful to live by all that is written in it. If you do, as you make your way *through this world,* you will prosper and always find success.

9This is My command: be strong and courageous. Never be afraid or discouraged because *I am* your God, the Eternal One, *and I* will remain with you wherever you go.

► Joshua is following in the footsteps of the famous prophet, Moses, who led the people of Israel out of Egypt. It is a journey that will lead them where God wants them—in the lands He has long ago promised to the descendants of the patriarch Abraham. Although mighty people occupy the lands, God tells the Israelites that the land will be theirs, if they only believe. Joshua is reminded often enough of the wanderings in the desert following Moses. It's an intimidating thing to follow a legend, but the charge God gives Joshua also gives him what he needs to succeed: Be strong and courageous, and keep the words of God always in front of you. If you do those things, then you can't go wrong. And if you do those things, God says He will be with you.

10*When* Joshua *had heard God's commands, he* gathered the leaders of the people *of Israel* and gave them their instructions.

Joshua *(to all the leaders)*: 11Go through the camp and tell your people, "Gather whatever you need because in three days you will pass over the Jordan into the land the Eternal One, your God, has given you to possess. Soon it will be ours."

12Then Joshua spoke to *the leaders of* Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Joshua: 13Remember what Moses, the servant of the Eternal, told you: "The Eternal One, your God, is making a place for you to settle and will give you this land *as your own*."

14Your wives, your children, and your livestock will stay on this side of the Jordan in this land that Moses awarded you. But all of you who can fight must lead your brothers in battle formation over the Jordan and help them 15until the Eternal gives them rest *from their enemies,* as He has given rest to you. *Fight with them* until they, too, occupy the land your God, the Eternal One, is setting aside for them. Then you may *cross the Jordan again and* return to this land that Moses, His servant, has given you east of the Jordan and live here.

Leaders *(agreeing)*: 16We will do all you have commanded, and we will go wherever you send us. 17We will follow your orders just as we obeyed Moses in all he told us. May the Eternal One, your God, be with you as He was with Moses. 18Anybody who rebels against or disobeys your words—all you command—will be put to death. Always be strong and courageous!

* 1:3 Deuteronomy 11:24

► Joshua has the promise of God that the Israelites will succeed, and the people have taken to his leadership with enthusiasm. They have begun well, and their faith will keep them strong. But in the conquest story they cannot expect God to do everything. A prayer from the Christian and Jewish traditions reminds us: Pray as if everything depends upon God; work as if everything depends upon us. Throughout the story of God's people, the partnership between human beings' faith and God's power leads to God's purposes being fulfilled in human lives.

2 Then Joshua, the son of Nun, secretly sent two spies from Shittim *to the western side of the Jordan.*

Joshua: Go in, and see what you can find out about *the people in* that area. Pay special attention to *the city of* Jericho.

The men crossed the river, and when they entered *Jericho,* they stayed at the home of a prostitute named Rahab.

2-3*Somehow* word reached the king of Jericho that Israelite spies had slipped into the area *and might be visiting Rahab.* That night the king sent *soldiers* to Rahab's house with a message.

Messengers: *The king commands you to* turn over the Israelite men who are staying with you because they are here to spy on all the land *and its defenses.*

4But Rahab had already hidden the two spies *before she received the king's messengers.*

Rahab: It's true that two men have been to see me. But I didn't take the time to ask them where they came from. 5*All I know is that* when it was getting dark outside and the gate was about to close, they got up and left. I don't know where they went from here. If you hurry, you might still catch up to them.

6*She was lying,* because the two men lay where she had hidden them beneath the stalks of flax laid out on her roof.

7The soldiers ordered the gate opened long enough for them to pass through; then the gate was closed. They took the road that went straight toward the narrowest parts of the Jordan, *which would be the easiest place for the spies to cross.*

8But the two spies were still on Rahab's roof. She came up and found them awake.

Rahab: 9I know the Eternal has given your people this land. Your coming has paralyzed us all with fear. 10We have heard how the Eternal held back the Red Sea so you could escape from Egypt on dry land and how you completely destroyed the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og—*and their kingdoms*—on the far side of the Jordan. 11As soon as this news reached us, our hearts melted *like wax* and none of us had an ounce of courage left. The Eternal One, your God, is truly God of the heavens above and the earth below.

12Because I know all these things, *this is my request:* Since I have treated you kindly *and have protected you,* please promise me by the Eternal that you will do the same for my family. Give me some sign of good faith 13that *when you destroy this city* you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and their families from death.

Spies: 14*You had the power to turn us in, but you saved us.* Now we will do the same for you. If you will promise not to tell anyone what we were doing here, *then you have our word:* we will treat you with kindness and faithfulness when the Eternal One gives us the land.

15Since the rear wall of her house was actually part of the *great* city wall, she helped the men escape by simply lowering a rope for them from her window. 16*Before they climbed down,* she advised them to go into the mountains.

Rahab: That way you won't be where the soldiers expect you to be. If you'll hide there for three days, the pursuers should have returned here by then and you can go back safely.

Spies: 17We will keep the oath we have sworn to you, but 18only if you will follow these instructions: Gather all of your family here in this house, and tie this scarlet cord in the window where you let us down. 19If anyone goes out of the house and into the streets, then we

can't be responsible for what happens to them. *They will be killed,* and their blood will be on their hands, not on ours. We will be responsible if anything should happen to anyone you gather in here. 20But remember—*all of this depends on you keeping your word.* If you tell anyone our business, you will free us from our oath.

Rahab: 21Agreed.

The men climbed down and escaped *into the night,* and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

► The story of Rahab reminds us that throughout the history of Israel, unexpected people have stepped to the foreground to be used by God. Rahab is a woman in a male-centered world; and she is a prostitute, the kind of person we typically vilify. But if she doesn't rescue these men—and help them escape with the information they have gained—this first campaign in the land of Canaan will fail, and the larger outcome may be complicated—or worse. Her reward is life for herself and those she loves, which tells us that even in a war story like this one, God can be merciful.

22The spies climbed into the mountains, *just as Rahab had advised them,* and they stayed for three days. During that time Jericho's soldiers combed the countryside and watched the road *heading east* looking for them. Finally they went back *to the city.* 23So the two spies came down from their hiding place, crossed over *the Jordan,* and returned to Joshua (son of Nun), where they told him what had happened.

Spies: 24There is no doubt that the Eternal One has delivered all the land *and its citizens* into our hands. Everyone there is scared to death about our coming.

3 Early the next morning, with Joshua leading them, the Israelites *broke camp,* left Shittim, and traveled to *the eastern bank of* the Jordan to set up camp again before crossing the river. 2Three days later, the leaders went through the camp 3-4and gave the Israelites their *marching* orders.

They camped where Balaam had come to curse Israel and where the men of Israel had gone after the Moabite prostitutes (Numbers 22–25).

Leaders: *Tomorrow,* you will know it is time to go when you see the Levite priests carrying the covenant chest of the Eternal One, your God. Follow the chest so that you will know where you're supposed to go because you have not been this way before. But stay about half a mile away from it. Don't come any nearer than that *as you march.*

Joshua *(to the people)***:** 5Do all the ritual purifications and prepare yourselves because tomorrow the Eternal will show you wonders.

6Joshua told the priests *from the tribe of Levi* to pick up the covenant chest and to walk in front of the people, so the priests lifted the chest and carried it to the front of the procession.

Eternal One *(to Joshua)***:** 7Today I *will do wonders that* will begin to show the Israelites that you have My special favor, that I am with you just as I was with Moses *before you.* 8At your command, the priests will carry the covenant chest into the edge of the Jordan water and they are to stand there in the Jordan, waiting.

9So Joshua called the Israelites together.

Joshua: Come closer, and hear what your God, the Eternal, has to say: 10*Today* you will see a sign that the *one, true* living God is present among you, the God who will without doubt drive out all this land's inhabitants: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. 11The covenant chest of the Lord of all the earth will pass in front of you into the Jordan *River.* 12Now select twelve men, one from each tribe of Israel. 13When the priests who bear the covenant chest of the Eternal, who is Lord over all the earth, step into the river, then you will see the waters of the Jordan stop as if behind a wall.

14So the people set out from their tents to
cross the Jordan, with the priests carrying
the covenant chest before them. 15During
harvest time the Jordan is swollen, run-
ning over its banks; but when the priests
stepped into the river's edge, 16-17the
waters stopped, piling upstream at the city
of Adam, near Zarethan, while the water
flowing downstream toward the sea of
the Arabah, the Dead Sea, ran out. Then
the Israelites crossed *the Jordan* opposite
the city of Jericho, walking on dry land
*just as Moses had led their ancestors from
Egypt*. While the Israelites crossed on the
dry riverbed, the priests who carried the
covenant chest stood firmly in the middle
of the Jordan until the last Israelite had
crossed over.

4 When the last one had crossed the
Jordan, the Eternal One spoke to
Joshua.

Eternal One: 2Summon the twelve men
you chose from the people, one rep-
resenting each tribe, 3and tell them to
take twelve stones from the middle of
the Jordan riverbed where the priests
stand *with the covenant chest*. Tell them
to carry these stones *this day,* and when
the people make camp tonight, to lay
them down.

4Joshua *did just as He instructed and* sum-
moned the twelve men, who had been
chosen from the Israelites to represent the
twelve tribes, 5to give them instructions.

Joshua: Go back into the Jordan riverbed
to the covenant chest of the Eternal your
God, and each carry a stone upon your
shoulder, (twelve stones for the twelve
tribes of the Israelites) 6so that we may
build a memorial *of this day*. Someday
when your children ask you, "Why are
these stones piled up here?" 7you will
tell them how the waters of the Jordan
parted as the covenant chest of the
Eternal One crossed the river, and these
stones will fix that memory for the Isra-
elites forever.

► Memory is important in the Book of Joshua and in the stories that follow. When the people of Israel remember God's promises—and His goodness—good things happen. But when they forget, they turn to other things for meaning; they put their trust in other gods—money, power, position, and possessions. It's been a problem for the people of God up to the present day, so these attempts to remember can remind us about God's great works. It has always been true that when God's people take their eyes off Him, they forget the lessons of the past. We honor God through our worship, and we are reminded of significant lessons learned when we praise Him.

8The Israelites did as the Eternal com-
manded through Joshua. They carried
twelve stones from the riverbed *that day,*
one for each Israelite tribe, and laid them
down that night when they made their
camp. 9Joshua also set up twelve stones in
the middle of the Jordan where the priests
who had carried the covenant chest stood,
and the stones remain there to this day.

10The priests who carried the chest
stood in the Jordan until all the people
had hurried across, until all had been
accomplished that the Eternal and Moses
had commanded Joshua to tell the people.

11Only then, when all of the people
had passed, did the priests bearing the
chest of the Eternal cross over into the
presence of the people.

12-13*On the western side of the Jor-
dan* stood about 40,000 men ready for
battle, including fighters from the people
of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe
of Manasseh who had crossed onto the
plains of Jericho in the presence of the
Eternal, as they had been commanded
by Moses. 14That day the Eternal exalted
Joshua in the eyes of the people, and they
looked up to him (as they had looked up
to Moses before him) for the rest of his life.

15Then the Eternal One told Joshua,

Eternal One: 16Command the priests who
are carrying the covenant chest to come
out of the Jordan.

17Joshua gave the order.

18*As the people watched,* the priests
carried the chest of the Eternal up out
of the Jordan; and as soon as they had
stepped out of the riverbed, the river was
filled and overflowing, just as it had been
before.

19The Israelites crossed the Jordan
on the tenth day of the first month and
camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of
Jericho. 20This was where Joshua set up
the twelve stones from the Jordan river-
bed. 21He summoned the people of Israel.

Joshua: Someday your children will ask
you, "What do these stones mean?"
22And you will tell them, "Israel crossed
the Jordan here on dry ground." 23For
the Eternal One, your God, dried up the
waters of the Jordan until you crossed
over (just as He held back the Red Sea
for our parents until they crossed) 24so
that everyone on earth would know how
powerful the Eternal is and so that you
would reverence your God, the Eternal,
forever.

5 When the kings of the Amorites,
who lived *in the hills* west of the Jor-
dan, and the kings of the Canaanite
cities *on the plain* by the sea heard how
the Eternal had dried up the waters of the
Jordan so the Israelites could cross, they
were alarmed, and their courage failed at
the thought of the *advancing* Israelites.

2At that time, the Eternal One com-
manded Joshua to make flint knives and
reinstate the rite of circumcision for male
Israelites. 3So Joshua made flint knives *as
he was told to do,* and the Israelite males
were circumcised at Gibeath-haaraloth.*
4-5This is because all of the male Israelites
who had fled from Egypt and all their
soldiers *who had fought so bravely* had
been circumcised, but they had died on
the *long* journey. And those who had been
born during the journey had not yet been
circumcised.

► Circumcision—the ritual removal of a male's foreskin, usually in infancy—is one of the ways God tells His people to distinguish themselves from those around them. This rite is carried out at this point in the story to reconfirm the Israelites' identity as God's people and to prepare them for the greatest celebration that marks them as God's people—the Passover—which commemorates God bringing them safely out of slavery in Egypt.

6The Israelites had wandered in the
wilderness for 40 years, and because
they would not listen to the voice of the
Eternal, God promised that none of the
original community would live to enter
the land He promised to their ancestors, a
land flowing with milk and honey. 7It was
their children *and grandchildren* whom
He raised up *to receive that land* instead.
Joshua circumcised those sons *and
grandsons* now because it had not been
done previously. 8When they all had been
circumcised, they remained in their camp
until their wounds were healed.

9*It was here, where they had piled up
the stones, that* the Eternal spoke to Joshua.

Eternal One: On this day I have rolled
away from you the shame of Egypt.

And the place is called Gilgal, *which means
"circle of stones,"* even today.

10While the Israelites were encamped
at Gilgal on the desert plain *east* of Jericho,
they celebrated their *first* Passover on the
evening of the 14th of the month *in the
land the Lord had promised them*; 11and
the next day they ate some produce of the
land, roasted grain, and flatbread. 12*Begin-
ning after that Passover,* the Israelites were
no longer fed with manna, *as they were in
the desert*. From the day they ate from the
new land, the manna ceased. From then
on they ate *only* the crops of the land of
Canaan.

13Now when Joshua was traveling
near *the city of* Jericho, he saw a man
standing in front of him with a sword
drawn and ready.

Joshua *(stepping toward him)***:** Are you one
of us, or are you one of our enemies?

The Man: 14Neither; I am here now as
commander of the Eternal's army.

Joshua *(falling to the ground)***:** What is
your command for your servant, my
lord?

The Man: 15Take off your sandals, for you
are on holy ground.

So Joshua did.

6 The citizens of Jericho had bar-
ricaded themselves *behind its high
walls* because of the Israelite forces.
No one could get in or out.

* 5:3 Literally, hill of foreskins

Eternal One *(to Joshua)*: 2I have given
Jericho, its king, and all its soldiers into
your hands. 3Every day for the next six
days, you will march once around the
city *walls* with all your fighting force.
4Seven priests will go in front of the
covenant chest, each carrying a trumpet
made from a ram's horn. On the seventh
day, you will march around the city *walls*
seven times, and the priests will blow
their trumpets. 5When they play a long
final blast, then all the people will give a
mighty shout. The city walls will collapse
in front of you, and all the Israelites will
charge in *and take the city*.

6So Joshua, the son of Nun, summoned the priests and instructed them.

Joshua: Take up the chest and have seven
priests, each carrying a ram's horn trum-
pet, march in front of the covenant chest
of the Eternal.

7Then he gave orders to the people.

Joshua: March around the city with the
fighting men marching ahead of the
chest of the Eternal.

8-9So they all proceeded as Joshua had commanded them. The fighting men led the way; the seven priests marched after them, blowing their horns continually in front of the covenant chest of the Eternal, and the rear guard followed behind.

10Joshua gave the Israelites *very strict* instructions.

Joshua: Don't yell or shout. Don't let your
voice be heard until the day I tell you.
And then I want you to shout *with all
your might*.

11So they circled the city once, carrying the covenant chest of the Eternal, and that night they returned to their camp. 12The next morning, Joshua rose early, the priests carried the chest of the Eternal, 13-14and they all marched around the city *in exactly the same order as* they had the day before: the armed men, seven trumpeting priests, the chest of the Eternal, and the rear guard, all making one complete circuit *around the city with its great walls*. That night they returned to their camp, and the next four days proceeded just like the first two.

15But on the seventh day, they rose with the sun and the procession marched around the city walls seven times; that was the only day they made seven circuits around the city *walls*. 16After the seventh *and final* circuit, when the priests had raised a *mighty* noise on their trumpets, Joshua turned to the people.

Joshua: Shout! *Shout!* For the Eternal
One has given you the city! 17The city
and all who are in it will be destroyed
completely as an offering to Him, except
for the prostitute Rahab and those who
are with her in her house. Her life will
be spared as a reward for sheltering our
two spies.
18Be sure to stay away from these
things that He has devoted to com-
plete destruction so that you won't be
tempted to pick something up and carry
it away. *Anyone who disobeys God in this
matter* will bring destruction on all of us.
19Any silver or gold, any bronze
or iron vessels *should not be burned*;
instead, they should be set aside for the
Eternal's treasury.

20Then the people shouted, and the trumpets blasted. The noise of the voices and trumpets rose higher and higher, and the *thick* walls of Jericho collapsed, *just as God had promised. When the wall fell before them,* they rushed straight ahead and took the city, 21killing everyone—all the men and women and children, all the cattle and livestock—with their swords.

Joshua *(to the two spies)*: 22Go back to the
house of the prostitute, and bring her
out with all of those who have hidden
there so that you can keep your word.

23So they set off *through the destruction,* found Rahab's house, and brought her and all she had—father and mother, brothers *and sisters,* and all her relatives—*out of the fallen city* to a place outside the camp of Israel.

24So Jericho was destroyed completely, burned to the ground except for the precious metals and iron and bronze vessels that were put into the treasury of the Eternal's house. 25But Joshua spared the life of Rahab the prostitute, all her family, and all she had because she was faithful to the spies he had sent, and she lived among the Israelites from that day on.

26*When the city lay in smoke and ashes,* Joshua pronounced a curse.

Joshua: May the Eternal curse anyone who ever rebuilds this city, this Jericho! If he lays new foundations, it will be over the grave of his firstborn; if he raises new gates, it will be to contain the corpse of his youngest!

27The Eternal One had helped Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

► The destruction of the city—and the curse Joshua pronounces—are pretty harsh things. Today, of course, there are rules of war, and the international community would punish this kind of military action. But that wasn't the situation in Canaan. The Israelites are invaders in the land, badly outnumbered, and their victory and decisive actions send a message to all the other cities and towns: there's something different—and very dangerous—about these invaders. Moreover, it is essential to purify the land of polytheistic worship before Israel settles in the land with their worship of the Lord.

7 But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in one thing: they did not allow everything *from Jericho* to be destroyed, *as God had ordered.* Achan (the son of Carmi, grandson of Zabdi, and great-grandson of Zerah of the tribe of Judah) had carried some things away *from Jericho,* so the Eternal was angry at the Israelites.

2After Jericho fell, Joshua sent some men to Ai, *a town* near Beth-aven and east of Bethel, to spy out that region of the land. 3They returned to Joshua with a report.

Spies: You don't need to send all the people since there are so few defenders in Ai. An army of 2,000 to 3,000 men should be plenty.

4So Joshua sent about 3,000 soldiers to Ai; but they were easily repulsed by the defenders, 5who killed 36 of them and pursued them from the gate even to the descent toward Shebarim. When the Israelites heard their soldiers had been defeated, their courage melted away like water. 6Then Joshua and the elders of Israel tore their robes and fell to the dirt in front of the covenant chest of the Eternal, putting dust on their heads and remaining there until evening.

Joshua: 7Why, Eternal One, our Lord? Why have you brought us across the Jordan if only to let the Amorites destroy us? It would have been better for us to settle on the other side of the Jordan! 8Lord, how am I going to explain that our fighting men have had to run for their lives? 9The people of Canaan, all the inhabitants of this land, will hear that we have been defeated. They'll surround us and destroy us as a people forever, and then how will the world remember Your great name?

Eternal One: 10Get up. What are you doing in the dirt? 11*There's a simple explanation:* Israel has sinned. They have lied and have violated the covenant I gave them by stealing some of the property that should have been destroyed *along with the rest of Jericho* and by hiding it among their own belongings.

12That is why the Israelites can no longer resist their enemies. They run from their foes because they are under a curse *and doomed to destruction.* I will not be with you *or fight for you* unless these things devoted to destruction are truly destroyed. 13Get up, and tell the people to purify themselves for tomorrow. Tell them that the Eternal One, the God of Israel says, "There are items among you that were supposed to be destroyed *as I commanded.* You will not be able to resist your enemies unless you remove the banned items from among you."

14Then in the morning, the people will pass before you tribe by tribe, and *by drawing lots* you will know which tribe I pick. Then that tribe will come clan by clan, and the chosen clan will come family by family, until at last they come before you one by one *and I show you who is guilty.* 15With the person selected by lot, you will burn him and all his belongings, *including his family and his livestock,* with fire as a punishment for breaking the covenant with the Eternal and for bringing dishonor upon Israel.

► There's always an explanation in the Book of Joshua when the people of

Israel are defeated in their battles for the promised land, and that explanation is *not* that God has been unfaithful. It's the other way around: God tells the people of Israel to do something, and they don't. God allows their defeats so that they can see the error of their ways. He corrects His people and punishes them so that they may learn to do better.

16So Joshua arose early, and the Israelites passed before him, tribe by tribe. First the tribe of Judah was chosen *by lot.* 17From the clans of Judah, the clan of the Zerahites was chosen, and from that clan, the family of Zabdi. 18From that family, the Lord indicated that Achan (the son of Carmi, grandson of Zabdi, and great-grandson of Zerah from the tribe of Judah) *had taken the banned items.*

Joshua *(to Achan)***:** 19My son, I urge you now to show honor and thanksgiving to the Eternal One, the God of Israel, and confess. Tell me what you have done, and tell the truth.

Achan: 20It's true. I am the one who broke the commandment of the Eternal God of Israel. 21Among the spoils *of the city,* I found a beautiful Babylonian robe, 5 pounds of silver, and 20 ounces of gold. *When I saw them,* I wanted them and I took them. They are buried now in the ground inside my tent with the silver at the very bottom *of the hole.*

22Joshua sent men to Achan's tent, and there they found the valuables with the silver at the bottom *just as he had described.* 23They carried them back from the tent to Joshua, displayed them in front of the Israelites, and offered them to the Eternal. 24Then Joshua and all Israel led Achan, the son of Zerah, with the robe and silver and gold he had taken, with all his sons and daughters, with all his cattle and livestock, and with his tent and everything he possessed, to the valley of Achor.

Joshua: 25Why did you bring such trouble upon us? Well, now the Eternal is bringing trouble on you.

The people stoned Achan and his family and burned them *and all their belongings.* 26Afterward they erected a pile of stones over Achan that still stands today. *When all of this was done,* the Eternal put away His anger; so to this day that place is called the valley of Achor, *which means "trouble."*

8 **Eternal One** *(to Joshua)***:** Don't be afraid or discouraged. Take all of your fighters up to Ai. Watch; I will hand over the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land to you. 2You will do to Ai exactly as you did to Jericho and its king, except you may keep only the cattle and spoil for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city.

3So Joshua and all his fighting force got ready to depart for Ai, and he chose 30,000 of them and sent them out by night 4with instructions.

Joshua: I want you all to lie in wait behind the city in ambush. Stay close, and stay alert. 5I will bring the others up to the front of the city; and when they come out to fight us, we will run from them. 6Their forces will all come out *of the city* to chase us because they will think everything is happening the way it did the first time. But when we have lured them all out and away from the city, 7I want you to move in and take it, for the Eternal One, your God will give it to us. 8When you have taken the city, burn it. This is the word of the Eternal and my command.

9The ambush force made its way *into the hills* and took a position between Bethel and Ai, while Joshua and the remaining fighters spent the night in the camp. 10In the morning, Joshua rose early and roused the people, and he and the elders went on to Ai in front of the people. 11All the fighting men with him went up and moved in close to the city and set up camp in front and north of Ai, with a ravine between the camp and Ai. 12The other force, numbering about 5,000, remained hidden west of the city between Bethel and Ai. 13With his forces situated with men to the north and west of the city, Joshua camped in the valley that night.

14When the king of Ai arose the next morning and saw *the Israelites lined up against him,* he gathered his forces on the plain to bring the battle to Israel, not knowing that an ambush squad was hidden behind the city. 15*When the battle was*

joined, Joshua and the Israelites pretended they were defeated and once again were fleeing toward the wilderness. 16All of the men of Ai came out to pursue them and were drawn farther and farther away from the city. 17At last, not one man was left in Ai or Bethel, since all had gone out to pursue Israel, leaving the city open *and defenseless.*

Eternal One *(to Joshua)***:** 18Raise your javelin toward Ai, for now I will give it into your hands.

Joshua raised his javelin toward the city; 19and as he did so, the forces he had hidden in ambush rushed into the city, seizing it and setting it on fire.

20-21The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke rising from their city into the sky; and when Joshua saw that his ambush had been successful, he turned the fleeing Israelites around to crush the *disheartened* men of Ai. There was nowhere for the men of the city to retreat. Before them, the Israelites turned to attack; 22behind them, the ambush force came out against them from the burning city. So they were surrounded on all sides by their attackers, who killed all of them, 23except for Ai's king, who was captured alive and carried to Joshua.

24When the last of Ai's men in the field and wilderness had been killed by the sword, the Israelites returned to Ai and killed everyone inside the city. 25Twelve thousand fell that day—men and women, all of the people of Ai, 26for Joshua did not lower his javelin until the destruction was complete. 27The people of Israel then took the livestock and the goods of the city for themselves, as the Eternal One had instructed Joshua to do. 28So Joshua burned Ai and made it a city of ruins, as it is to this day, 29and he executed the king of Ai by hanging. At sunset Joshua had them take down his body *for burial, as the law commands,* put it where once the city gate had stood, and heap over his body *a grave of* stones that still stands to this day.

30Then Joshua built an altar to the Eternal God of Israel on Mount Ebal. 31*He had it built* just as Moses, the Lord's servant, had commanded the Israelites and is recorded in the book of the law,* an altar of stones that had not been cut with iron tools. They offered sacrifices to the Eternal there—burnt offerings and peace offerings—32and with the Israelites gathered, Joshua had the law of Moses engraved on the stones. 33Israel, the elders, the officers, and the judges gathered around the covenant chest of the Eternal, which was carried by the Levite priests, *a gathering Moses had commanded,* including Israelites and sojourners. *They lined the valley,* half in front of Mount Ebal and half in front of Mount Gerizim, as Moses, servant of the Eternal One, had commanded *before he died,* so that the people could be blessed. 34-35Joshua read out all the words of the law, blessings and curses alike. Every word written, every word that Moses had commanded, Joshua read to the men, women, and children of Israel, and to the sojourners residing among them.

► It's important to remember who you are and what you're fighting for. By gathering everyone and reading the law of Moses to them, Joshua unites the people of Israel in their shared past, present, and future and orients them toward God in their new land.

9 Now when the kings of the land who were beyond the Jordan in the highlands and along the coast of the Mediterranean—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—heard what had happened, 2they unified to oppose Joshua and Israel.

3But the people of Gibeon, *who were Hivites, had a different idea* when they heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai. 4*Knowing that Joshua might turn his attention to them next,* they decided to use their wits, *not their military might.* They formed *a delegation to serve as* envoys and gathered the most worn-out sacks for their donkeys and worn-out, patched-up wineskins they could find. 5They took some ragged sandals and patched them. They dressed in threadbare clothes—*all so it would look as though they had come from far away.* Even the food they carried was dry and moldy, *as though it had been carried a long distance.*

6These envoys went to Gilgal to meet with Joshua and the men of Israel.

* 8:31 Exodus 20:25

Gibeonite Envoys *(to Joshua and the men of Israel)*: We have traveled from a far country and beg you to make a treaty *of peace* with us.

Israelites: 7How can we make a treaty with you? How do we know you aren't from around here?

► The words from the Lord in Deuteronomy are very clear: Do not make a covenant or show favor with anyone in the land. This instruction, of course, is broken many times by Israel (Deuteronomy 7:2).

Gibeonite Envoys *(to Joshua)*: 8We are your servants.

Joshua: Who are you? Where do you come from?

Gibeonite Envoys: 9Your servants have made the journey from a distant country because *even there* the name of the Eternal One your God is in the air. We have heard of what He did for you in Egypt 10and what He did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan (King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan who lived in Ashtaroth). 11So our elders *gathered us together* and directed us to take provisions for a *long* journey so we could tell you we are your servants. Please, *we beg you,* make a treaty with us.

12Look. Here *is all that remains of* our bread. It was *fresh,* warm *from the oven,* when we set out, but now it is nothing but mold and crumbs. 13And these patched-up wineskins were new and full when we left home. And our clothes, our sandals are worn—you can see that we have traveled a very long way.

14The leaders did not consult the Eternal. They broke bread with the messengers, 15and Joshua offered them a treaty of peace, with the leaders of Israel swearing an oath to bind it.

16Three days after they had sworn peace with these *deceptive* messengers, they discovered the visitors were *Gibeonites from the land of Canaan,* their neighbors, who, in fact, were living in part of the land *God had promised the Israelites.* 17So the Israelites went to their cities: Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim on the third day, 18but they did not attack them. *Even though they had been tricked into making a treaty,* an oath made in the name of the Eternal was sacred. The people of Israel grumbled and complained against their leaders, 19but they replied to the entire congregation.

Leaders: *Look,* we have sworn an oath in the name of the Eternal God of Israel, and we must not touch them. 20If we *attack them now and* break our word, *God's* anger will fall on us. Let them live *and serve us.*

21So the leaders kept their promise to the Gibeonites who became servants of the entire congregation, cutting their wood and drawing their water.

22Joshua summoned the Gibeonite leaders.

Joshua *(to the Gibeonite leaders)*: Why did you lie to us? Why did you claim to be from far away when really you lived right here among us? 23Your lie comes with a curse. *You will live, but* you will always be our slaves, carrying our water and chopping wood for the sanctuary of my True God *from now on.*

Gibeonite Leaders *(to Joshua)*: 24We knew for a fact that the Eternal One, your True God, had told His servant Moses that He would give you all of this land and that you would destroy all of the people in it. We were so afraid of you that this seemed the best thing to do. 25But now we are in your hands. Do to us what seems fair and just to you, *and we will accept it.*

26So Joshua spared the Gibeonites from the people of Israel and *certain* death 27but made them servants of the people *of Israel,* chopping their wood and carrying their water, serving the Eternal's sanctuary from that time on, in whatever place he chose as he directed them.

10 When Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua had totally destroyed the kings and cities of Jericho and Ai, and *when he discovered* that the Israelites had made a treaty with the people of Gibeon and were living alongside Israel, 2he was greatly

alarmed. The city of Gibeon was large, *almost* like a royal city, much larger than Ai and with many trained warriors. 3-5So Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, dispatched messages to King Hoham of Hebron, to King Piram of Jarmuth, to King Japhia of Lachish, and to King Debir of Eglon.

Adoni-zedek *(to the Amorite kings)*: Let us band together and destroy Gibeon, for they have become allies *to these invaders,* Joshua and the Israelites.

So these five kings of the Amorites gathered their forces and came down upon the city of Gibeon *like a mighty wave.* 6The Gibeonites, *seeing the camps of these five armies,* sent a message to Joshua in the Israelite camp at Gilgal.

Gibeonites *(pleading with Joshua)*: *Please* don't abandon your servants. The five kings of the Amorites who live in the hill country have come down to attack us. Come quickly to help us.

7So Joshua *honored the oath they had sworn, and he* gathered up all of his fighting forces, all the mighty warriors, and went up from Gilgal *toward Gibeon.*

Eternal One *(to Joshua)*: 8Don't be afraid of the Amorites. *Like Jericho and Ai,* I am delivering these armies into your hands. None of them will be able to stand against you.

9Joshua surprised them, having marched his men all night from Gilgal, 10and the Eternal caused fear and confusion among the Amorite armies at the *sudden* sight of Israel among them. He slaughtered the Amorites at Gibeon *like cattle,* chasing and killing them all the way up Beth-horon, and striking them down as far away as Azekah and Makkedah. 11As they fled *for their lives* down the far slope of Beth-horon, He hurled huge and deadly hailstones upon them from heaven, as far as Azekah. More Amorites were killed by *God's* hailstones than by the people of Israel *on that day.*

12On the day of the Eternal's great slaughter, Joshua consulted with the Eternal One; and then, in front of all the people of Israel, he commanded *the sun and the moon.*

Joshua: Sun, stand still over Gibeon,
and Moon, *remain* over the valley
of Aijalon.

Gibeon is in the east and Aijalon is in the west, so this is a favorable celestial omen for Israel and an unfavorable omen for the Amorite coalition.

13The sun stood still *in the heavens*; and the moon did likewise, *so that the battle could continue* until the Israelites had destroyed their enemies, just as it was written in the scroll of Jashar. The sun stalled in the sky for almost an entire day before it set. 14There has never been another day like this before or since, when the Eternal so answered a person's prayer, for the Eternal fought for *the people of* Israel.

► God proves that He is greater than any of the local gods—that He is above all other gods—by these cosmic miracles. While today, of course, we know that the earth orbits the sun, not vice versa, the story is clear enough: only an all-powerful God can halt the sun and moon in their courses.

15Joshua and the Israelites later returned to the camp at Gilgal, 16but the kings slipped away *at the height of the battle* and hid in a cave at Makkedah. 17Someone told Joshua they had been found hiding there.

Joshua: 18-19Seal up the mouth of the cave with large stones, and leave men to guard them while we pursue the other forces and attack them from behind. Don't let them reach their towns because the Eternal One, your True God, has given you victory over them.

20When Joshua and the Israelites had killed all those who did not escape back into the fortified cities, 21they all returned safely to camp with Joshua at Makkedah, and no one dared to speak a negative word about the Israelites.

Joshua: 22Open up the cave and bring the five kings before me.

23They brought forth the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon 24and led them in front of Joshua and the Israelites.

Joshua *(to those who had led the warriors)*: Come here. Place your feet upon the necks of these kings.

So the leaders did.

Joshua: 25There's nothing to be afraid of here. Be strong and courageous because the Eternal will do to all our enemies what He has done to these kings.

26Joshua had the kings executed and hung on five trees; and they hung until sunset 27when Joshua commanded they be taken down, *as God's law requires.* Their bodies were thrown into the cave where they had hidden, and the cave was sealed as a tomb by piling stones across the mouth. Their remains lie there to this very day.

28Also on that day Joshua defeated Makkedah and its king, destroying it completely, killing everyone in it and the king, as he had done in Jericho.

29Next Joshua led his forces from Makkedah against Libnah, 30and the Eternal gave the town and its king into their hands. They took no prisoners. They killed everyone *in the town* and destroyed it and the king, as they did to the king of Jericho.

31From there Joshua and the Israelites passed on to Lachish and besieged it, 32and on the second day the Eternal gave Lachish to them. They destroyed it and killed everyone in it, as they had just done to Libnah. 33When King Horam of Gezer came up to help Lachish, Joshua turned the army against him and his people and destroyed them, leaving no survivors.

34Passing from Lachish, Joshua and the people attacked Eglon, 35and it fell to them on the first day. They killed everyone with the sword and destroyed it completely, as they had Lachish.

36Then Joshua went up with all the forces of Israel from Eglon against Hebron, 37and it fell to them—its king, all of its villages, and all of its people. Joshua killed everyone with the sword and destroyed it as he had destroyed Eglon. 38Lastly Joshua, with all of Israel, attacked Debir 39and took its king, its villages, and all of its people. The Israelites killed them with the sword and destroyed them all. Joshua left no one alive. He did to Debir and its king just as he had done to Hebron and to Libnah and its king.

40So this is how Joshua *and the Israelites* defeated every area they had encountered: the hill country, the wilderness of the Negev, the coastlands, and the foothills with all the people and all their kings, leaving no one alive, as the Eternal God of Israel had commanded. 41Joshua won victories from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza and through all the country of Goshen as far as Gibeon. 42Joshua was able to capture *and defeat* all these people and all their kings for *one simple reason*: the Eternal God of Israel fought for Israel.

43Then Joshua returned to Gilgal to camp with all the Israelites.

11 When King Jabin of Hazor heard *what Israel had done to the central and southern cities of Canaan,* he sent messengers to King Jobab of Madon, the king of Shimron, the king of Achshaph, 2and the kings who were in the northern hill country, in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west; 3to the Canaanites in the east and the west; the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country; the Hivites in the foothills of Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpeh, *and to all those who could still fight the invaders.* 4They banded together and came out to fight—so many warriors that you could no more count them than you could count the grains of sand on a beach—and *leading them was* a vast number of horses and chariots. 5All of these kings pooled their forces, and they camped together by the waters of Merom, ready to make war on Israel.

Eternal One *(to Joshua)*: 6Don't be afraid of them. By this time tomorrow, I will have given all of them as dead bodies into your hands. You will disable their horses and burn their chariots.

7So Joshua's army came upon them suddenly where they camped beside the waters of Merom and attacked them, 8and the Eternal delivered this *vast* army to Israel. They pursued the retreating soldiers as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and to the east as far as the valley of Mizpeh until no one was left to fight. 9And Joshua cut the hamstrings of all their horses and burned all the chariots, as the Eternal had commanded.

10Then Joshua turned against Hazor, which had been the leader of all these armies, and destroyed their king 11and every *living, moving,* breathing creature within, and burned the city. 12Joshua moved through each of these cities destroying their armies and putting them

all to the sword, including their king, and utterly destroying them as Moses, the servant of the Eternal, had commanded.
13But Hazor was the only city Joshua burned to the ground of the cities built up on hills. 14The Israelites looted all of these towns, taking the goods and the livestock as their own but killing all of the inhabitants with the sword, leaving none alive.
15The Eternal had commanded His servant, Moses, and Moses had commanded Joshua; so Joshua did everything he had been told until nothing the Eternal had commanded Moses was left undone.

16So Joshua took all of that land: the hill country, the Negev, and the land of Goshen. *He conquered* the lowland regions, the Arabah, and *central* hill country with its foothills, 17-18from Mount Halak, near Seir, to Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. Wherever he went *in that land*—and it was a long war—he captured their kings and defeated them and executed them. 19The only people who were not destroyed in battle were the Gibeonites (Hivites) who had made peace with the Israelites. 20The Eternal boosted the courage of Israel's enemies so they would come out and oppose Israel as nations receiving no favor but only to be utterly destroyed, just as the Eternal had commanded Moses.

21Finally Joshua went to war with the Anakim and wiped them from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hills of Judah *in the south,* and from the hills of Israel *further north.* Joshua's army utterly destroyed them, *their kings, their armies,* and their cities, 22until not one of the Anakim was left *alive* in the land of the Israelites. Only a few remained in *the Philistine coastal cities of* Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.

23So this is how Joshua took the whole land, just as the Eternal had commanded Moses *in the land beyond the Jordan*; Joshua allotted it as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel, and at last the land was quiet from wars.

► During the furious accounts of battle, it is hard to see how much has been accomplished. But now we pause to reflect on everything that God has made possible—how many kings, states, and cities the people of Israel have defeated with God's help.

We start with those who fell when Moses was leader, and then go on to all those who have fallen since Joshua has been given command.

12 Here begins *a catalog of the conquered,* a list of the kings of the land who met defeat against the Israelites, and an accounting of the land the Israelites gained, beginning with the eastern side of the Jordan, from the valley of the Arnon River, north to Mount Hermon, and all the Arabah eastward: 2King Sihon of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon and ruled from Aroer (which is on the edge of the Arnon Valley), to the middle of the valley as far *north* as the river Jabbok, the boundary of the Ammonites (including half of Gilead), 3and the Arabah to the Sea of Galilee* eastward, and in the direction of Beth-jeshimoth, to the Dead Sea,* and south to the foot of the slopes of *Mount* Pisgah; 4King Og of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaim *giants* who lived at Ashtaroth and at Edrei, 5and who ruled from Mount Hermon and Salecah *in the north* and over all Bashan to the boundary of the land of the Geshurites and the Maacathites and half of Gilead, *south* to the boundary of Sihon, king of Heshbon.

6It was Moses, the servant of the Eternal, who led the Israelites to defeat these kings; and Moses gave their land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh *that would settle east beyond the Jordan.*

7This is a catalog of the kings of the land whom Joshua and the Israelites defeated west of the Jordan, from *the north at* Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon to *the south at* Mount Halak in the wilderness of Seir. Joshua allotted their land to the tribes of Israel *as God directed*: 8in the hill country, in the *western* foothills, in the Arabah, on the slopes, in the wilderness, and in the Negev *(the southern desert),* and in all the land of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

9*These are the fallen kings,* one each: the king of Jericho; the king of Ai, which is next to Bethel; 10the king of Jerusalem; the king of Hebron; 11the king of Jarmuth; the king of Lachish; 12the king of Eglon; the king of Gezer; 13the king of Debir; the king of Geder; 14the king of Hormah; the king of Arad; 15the king of Libnah; the king of

* 12:3 Hebrew, *Chinneroth* * 12:3 Hebrew, *Arabah*

Adullam; [16]the king of Makkedah; the king of Bethel; [17]the king of Tappuah; the king of Hepher; [18]the king of Aphek; the king of Lasharon; [19]the king of Madon; the king of Hazor; [20]the king of Shimron-meron; the king of Achshaph; [21]the king of Taanach; the king of Megiddo; [22]the king of Kedesh; the king of Jokneam in Carmel; [23]the king of Dor in Naphath-dor; the king of Goiim in Gilgal; [24]and the king of Tirzah: 31 kings in all.

► This second section of the book (chapters 13–22), which details the parceling out of the land of Canaan, makes for slower reading, but it has a distinct literary purpose. It contains some of the elements we often find in ancient epics such as the catalog of the defeated kings and towns that give the scope of the conquest. The list also orients us in the larger story of the people of God, since later books of the Bible will set their action here. That means it's valuable for us to know where the tribes settle and what their lands are like.

13 Now the years passed and Joshua grew old; and *one day* the Eternal came to him.

Eternal One *(to Joshua)*: You have grown old and *there is still work to do, for* part of the land I have promised has yet to be conquered. [2]This still remains: all the *coastal* regions inhabited by the Philistines and the Geshurites [3](from the Shihor *tributary of the Nile,* east of Egypt, north to the boundary of Ekron, is Canaanite territory); the five capital cities of the Philistines are Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron, and the Avvites [4]remain in the south; all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah (which belongs to the Sidonians), as far as Aphek, and to the boundary of the Amorites, [5]and also the land of the Gebalites, and all of Lebanon east from Baal-gad, near Mount Hermon, to Lebo-hamath.*

[6-7]For the sake of the people of Israel, I will chase out all the inhabitants of the highlands from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, but allot the land among you. Divide the land among the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh as their inheritance, as I have commanded.

► The twelve tribes of Israel are spread out all across the countryside. Moses has already given some of them land on the east side of the Jordan River, as we read here; but the others are awaiting their land on the west side, in the land of Canaan. Eventually every tribe will have land allotted to them because that has been God's promise.

[8]The other half-tribe *of Manasseh* and the tribes of Reuben and Gad received their inheritance. Moses, the Eternal's servant, gave them land on the far side of the Jordan and toward the east, [9]from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Arnon Valley, with the town that is in the middle of the valley, and the plains from Medeba to Dibon; [10]and all the cities of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had reigned from Heshbon, as far as the border *regions* of the Ammonites; [11]and *the land of* Gilead, and the lands of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and all of Mount Hermon, and all of Bashan as far as Salecah; [12]in Bashan, this includes all the kingdom of Og who had reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (who was the last of the survivors of the giants). Moses conquered these kings and took over their lands, [13]although the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, which is why the people of Geshur and Maacath survive among the Israelites to this day.

[14]The tribe of Levi was the only tribe *of Israel* that was not given land then as its inheritance. To offer burnt offerings to the Eternal God of Israel was their inheritance, as He told them.

[15]Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the Reubenites, clan by clan. [16]Their territory comprised *the plateau from* Aroer, which is on the edge of the Arnon Valley, including the city in the middle of the valley, and the entire plain by Medeba; [17]Heshbon, and all its cities that are in the plains: Dibon, Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, [18]Jahaz, Kedemoth,

* 13:5 Hebrew, *Lebo-hamath*, the entrance to Hamath

and Mephaath; 19Kiriathaim, Sibmah, and Zereth-shahar on the mount of the valley; 20Beth-peor, the foothills of *Mount* Pisgah, and Beth-jeshimoth. 21*The tribe of Reuben received, then,* all these cities of the plain and all the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites who had reigned in Heshbon until Moses defeated him and the leaders of Midian (Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba) who were the princes of Sihon in the land. 22*Along with all of those they put to death,* the Israelites also executed Balaam, the son of Beor, who practiced divination *but blessed Israel by the command of the Eternal One.* 23The *western* border of *the land allotted to* the people of Reuben was the Jordan with its banks. This, then, was the land given to the people of Reuben, clan by clan, and all their cities and villages.

24Moses also gave an inheritance to the tribe of the Gadites according to their clans. 25Their territory comprised Jazer, and all the cities of the land of Gilead, and half the country of the Ammonites as far as Aroer, east of Rabbah; 26from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim as far as the border of Debir; 27and in the valley, Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon—all the rest of the kingdom of Sihon, king of Heshbon—the Jordan and its eastern banks, to the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. 28This, then, was the land given to the people of Gad, clan by clan, and all their cities and villages.

29Finally Moses gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh, again allotted clan by clan. 30Their territory started at Mahanaim and included all of Bashan and the whole kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, and all the settlements of Jair, which were in Bashan: 60 towns in all. 31Half of Gilead, Ashtaroth, and Edrei (the *royal* cities of Og, king in Bashan) were allotted to half of the people of Machir, son of Manasseh, *who would dwell east of the Jordan,* according to their clans.

32These were the inheritances Moses distributed on the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan River and east of Jericho. 33The *clans of the* tribe of Levi received no inheritance from Moses since the Eternal God of Israel was their inheritance as He promised them.

14 Here is an account of the land that the *other* people of Israel were given as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, as the priest Eleazar, Joshua (son of Nun), and the heads of the elders of the Israelite tribes distributed it to them. 2They determined the inheritance of the nine tribes and one half-tribe by lot, as the Eternal One had commanded them through Moses. 3(Remember Moses had already distributed land to the two tribes and the other half-tribe who lived beyond the Jordan, and he gave no *land as an* inheritance to the Levites. 4Since the descendants of Joseph consisted of two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, no share of land was given to the Levites but only towns to live in, with pasture for their property and livestock.)

5So the Israelites did as the Eternal commanded Moses and divided the land. 6Some members of *the tribe of* Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal, including Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite.

► This story introduces us to a character who is faithful to his mission even before the events in the Book of Joshua. Caleb and Joshua were part of the group of spies who were sent into Canaan to observe the natural resources and the defenses of the people, and only they reported honestly that the land was wonderful and that it could be occupied with God's help (Numbers 13–14). For Caleb's faithfulness, he is promised that he will have a place and be given a portion in the promised land.

Caleb *(to Joshua)***:** Remember what the Eternal said to Moses, the man of God, about you and me in Kadesh-barnea. 7I was 40 years old when Moses, the Eternal's servant, sent me out from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land *of Canaan.* I brought back an honest report. 8The others who were sent as spies only discouraged the people and melted their hearts, but I obeyed the Eternal One, my God, completely. 9At that time, Moses swore *an oath to me*: "Someday the land on which you have walked will be given to you and your children as an inheritance forever because you have been completely faithful to the Eternal One, my God."*

* 14:9 Deuteronomy 1:36

10So here I am. The Eternal has
spared my life these 45 years since He
spoke this to Moses while Israel was in
the wilderness. Here I am today, 85 years
old, 11still as strong today as I was when
Moses sent me *into this country,* able to
fight and able to work.
12So now I ask that you give me this
hill country the Eternal spoke about on
that day. You heard then how the Ana-
kim were there with great fortified cities,
and so they are still. Because the Eternal
goes with me, I will drive them out, just
as He has said.

13So Joshua blessed Caleb, son of Jephun-
neh, and gave him Hebron as an inheri-
tance. 14Hebron belongs to *the descendants
of* Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite,
even now because he obeyed the Eternal
God of Israel completely. 15(In ancient
times, Hebron was called Kiriath-arba
after Arba, who was the greatest of the
Anakim.) So that land was peaceful.

15 The territory allotted to the
tribe of the Judahites, clan
by clan, reached south to the
border of Edom, and even further south
into the wilderness of Zin. 2Their south-
ern border ran from the bay at the south
end of the Dead Sea *(the Salt Sea),* 3and
continued to the south of the ascent of
Akrabbim,* crossed *the wilderness of* Zin,
and went up south of Kadesh-barnea, past
Hezron, on up to Addar, and then turning
toward Karka, 4on to Azmon, then out by
the wadi of Egypt, and ending at the *Medi-
terranean* Sea. "This," *they were told,* "will
be your southern boundary."
5On the east the territory *of Judah*
was bounded by the Dead Sea up to where
the Jordan runs into it. Their boundary on
the north began at the bay at the mouth
of the Jordan, 6went up to Beth-hoglah,
passed north of Beth-arabah, and contin-
ued up to the stone of Bohan, Reuben's
descendant. 7From there the boundary
went to Debir from the valley of Achor,
and then northward, turning toward Gil-
gal across from the ascent of Adummim,
which is on the south side of the river val-
ley. From there the boundary passed along
to the waters of En-shemesh, and on to
En-rogel. 8Then the boundary went up the
valley of Ben-hinnom, just at the southern
slope of the Jebusite city, Jerusalem, and
then up to the top of the mountain west
of the Hinnom Valley at the northern
end of the valley of Rephaim. 9From the
mountaintop, the boundary extended to
the spring of Nephtoah, and from there
to the towns of Mount Ephron. Then the
boundary curved around to Baalah (that
is, Kiriath-jearim); 10and from there circled
west of Baalah to Mount Seir, passed along
to the northern slope of Mount Jearim
(that is, Chesalon), went down to Beth-
shemesh, passed through Timnah 11to
the northern flank of Ekron, then turned
toward Shikkeron, past Mount Baalah, and
out to Jabneel. The boundary ended at the
Mediterranean Sea.
12The western boundary, then, was
the Mediterranean coast, and this recounts
all the boundary of the land allotted to the
people of Judah and its clans.
13As the Eternal had commanded
him, Joshua gave Caleb, son of Jephunneh,
a share of land within the territory allot-
ted to the people of Judah—Kiriath-arba
(that is, Hebron; Arba was the father of
Anak). 14Caleb drove from that land the
three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and
Talmai. 15From there he went to battle
the inhabitants of Debir (formerly Kiriath-
sepher).

Caleb: 16Whoever attacks and captures
Kiriath-sepher will receive my daughter
Achsah as his wife.

Kiriath-sepher had originally been conquered by Joshua, but it was retaken by the Canaanites. Now Caleb must go back and attack the city once more.

17Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother,
captured it, so Caleb gave Othniel his
daughter Achsah in marriage. 18One day
she urged Othniel to ask her father for
a field. As she dismounted her donkey,
Caleb spoke to her.

Caleb: What do you wish?

Achsah: 19Here is what I would like as a
wedding gift: since you have given me
the desert of the Negev, give me also
some springs of water.

So Caleb gave her the upper and lower
springs.
20This, *then,* is the inheritance of the
tribe of the people of Judah, according to

* 15:3 Literally, scorpion

their clans. 21A list of the towns belonging to the tribe of the people of Judah, beginning in the far south near the boundary of Edom: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, 22Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, 23Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, 24Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, 25Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron (that is, Hazor), 26Amam, Shema, Moladah, 27Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet, 28Hazar-shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, 29Baalah, Iim, Ezem, 30Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, 31Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, 32Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon—in all, 29 cities with their surrounding villages.

33In the lowlands: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, 34Zanoah, En-gannim, Tappuah, Enam, 35Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, 36Shaaraim, Adithaim, Gederah, and Gederothaim—14 cities with their surrounding villages.

37Also Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal-gad, 38Dilean, Mizpeh, Joktheel, 39Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, 40Cabbon, Lahmas, Chitlish, 41Gederoth, Beth-dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah—16 cities with their surrounding villages.

42Libnah, Ether, Ashan, 43Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, 44Keilah, Achzib, and Mareshah—9 cities with their surrounding villages.

45Ekron with its towns and villages, 46from Ekron to the *Mediterranean* Sea, and everything near Ashdod, with its villages.

47Also Ashdod, its towns and its villages; Gaza, its towns and its villages; on to the wadi of Egypt, and then the Mediterranean with its coast.

48In the hill country: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, 49Dannah, Kiriath-sannah (that is, Debir), 50Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, 51Goshen, Holon, and Giloh—11 cities with their surrounding villages.

52Also Arab, Dumah, Eshan, 53Janum, Beth-tappuah, Aphekah, 54Humtah, Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), and Zior—9 cities with their surrounding villages.

55Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, 56Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, 57Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah—10 cities with their surrounding villages.

58Also Halhul, Beth-zur, Gedor, 59Maarath, Beth-anoth, and Eltekon—6 cities with their surrounding villages.

60Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim) and Rabbah—2 cities with their surrounding villages.

61In the desert: Beth-arabah, Middin, Secacah, 62Nibshan, the City of Salt, and Engedi—6 cities with their surrounding villages.

63But the people of Judah could not conquer the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still live alongside the people of Judah in Jerusalem today.

16 The inheritance of the people of Joseph was bounded *on the east* by the Jordan at the waters of Jericho, and into the desert, then rising from Jericho into the highlands of Bethel. 2From there it went to Luz, and along to Ataroth, the frontier of the land of the Archites, 3then *downward and* westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the border of lower Beth-horon, then on to Gezer, and it ended at the sea. 4So the people of Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim received their inheritance.

Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, only receive one land allotment between them. Later this will cause contention (17:14-18).

5The territory of the Ephraimites, clan by clan, was as follows: the eastern border of their inheritance was Ataroth-addar to upper Beth-horon, 6and the boundary went west at Michmethath on the north and turned east toward Taanath-shiloh, and passed along beyond it on the east to Janoah. 7Then it went down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah, touched Jericho, and ended at the Jordan. 8From Tappuah, the boundary ran west to the wadi of Kanah and ended at the sea. This was the land allotted to the tribe of the Ephraimites, clan by clan, 9along with the cities that were set apart for the people of Ephraim scattered within the inheritance of the people of Manasseh, all those cities and their surrounding villages. 10But the people *of Ephraim* did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, who have lived among the people of Ephraim to this day but are forced to serve them.

17 Land was allotted to the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn. Machir, the firstborn son of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, received Gilead and Bashan because he was a warrior. 2Then land was allotted to the rest of the people of Manasseh by clans: Abiezerites, Helekites, Asrielites, Shechemites, Hepherites, and Shemidaites (the male descendants of Manasseh, son of Joseph, by clans).

► Women don't make many appearances in Israel's story, mostly because women were not given a prominent role in ancient Middle Eastern cultures, but this episode is a startling example of equality and justice: although inheritance usually is passed from father to the oldest son, this family has only daughters. How will they pass down their land? Well the law of Moses, which has provided for so many things, also provides for this.

3Now Zelophehad, son of Hepher, grandson of Gilead, great-grandson of Machir, great-great-grandson of Manasseh, had no sons *to inherit,* only *five* daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 4These daughters came before Eleazar the priest, Joshua (son of Nun), and the leaders *of the people.*

Zelophehad's Daughters: *In the law,* the Eternal commanded Moses to give daughters an inheritance along with male relatives.

So, as the Eternal had commanded, he gave the daughters an inheritance alongside their uncles.

5So Manasseh was given 10 portions (in addition to the land of Gilead and Bashan on the far side of the Jordan) 6since the daughters of Manasseh also received an inheritance among their male relatives. The land of Gilead itself was given to Manasseh's other male descendants.

7The territory of Manasseh reached from Asher to Michmethath, which is east of Shechem; then the boundary went southward to the inhabitants of the spring of Tappuah. 8(The land of Tappuah belonged to *the tribe of* Manasseh, but the town itself on the boundary of Manasseh belonged to the people of Ephraim.) 9From there, the boundary went south to the wadi of Kanah. The towns to the south of the river among the towns of Manasseh also belonged to Ephraim. Then the boundary of Manasseh went along the north side of the wadi and ended at the sea.

10The south side was given to Ephraim, and the north to Manasseh with the sea forming the *western* boundary; the northern boundary was *the land allotted to* Asher, and the eastern was Issachar. 11Within *the territories of* Issachar and Asher, Manasseh possessed these cities: Beth-shean and its villages, Ibleam and its villages, the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, the inhabitants of En-dor and its villages, the inhabitants of Taanach and Megiddo and their villages, the three *towns* of the slopes.*

12But the descendants of Manasseh could not conquer those cities because the Canaanites stubbornly continued to live *among them* in that region. 13At last when the Israelites grew stronger, they made the Canaanites their servants, although they did not remove them completely.

14Then the descendants of Joseph came to Joshua and made demands of him.

Joseph's Descendants: Why are we only receiving one share, one portion to inherit, since we are numerous and the Eternal has always generously blessed us?

Joshua *(to Joseph's descendants)***:** 15If there are so many of you and the hill country of Ephraim is too crowded, then why don't you go up into the forests? Clear more land for yourselves and spread out where the Perizzites and the Rephaim live.

Joseph's Descendants: 16The hill country does not have enough room for us; and *what's more,* all the Canaanites who inhabit the plains in Beth-shean and its villages and in the valley of Jezreel have iron chariots *to use against us.*

Joshua *(to Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's descendants)***:** 17*All right;* it's true that there are many of you and that you are powerful. You should not have just one share. 18The hill country will be yours, and you can clear the forests and possess the land to its farthest borders. But you will have to defeat the Canaanites even with their iron chariots and powerful warriors.

18 The whole community of Israelites assembled at Shiloh and raised the congregation tent.

* 17:11 Another possible meaning for this difficult Hebrew text is "the third *in the list is* Napheth."

The region was fully under their control.
2But there were still seven tribes who had
not received their inheritance *of land.*

Joshua *(to the remaining Israelites)*: 3How
much more time do you intend to waste
before going to claim the land the Eter-
nal God of your ancestors is giving to
you? 4Pick three men from every tribe,
and I will send them into the land so
they can survey the regions in light of
your inheritances and bring me back
descriptions. 5They will divide the land
into seven sections, between the people
of Judah remaining in its territory in the
south and the people of Joseph in their
places in the north. 6After you divide the
land, return here with the seven descrip-
tions, and I will draw lots so that the
Eternal One, our True God, can choose
who will inherit what part of it.

7*Remember that* the Levites will not
receive a share in this apportioning since
their inheritance is the priesthood of the
Eternal. *The tribes of* Gad and Reuben
and the half-tribe of Manasseh have
already received their inheritance east of
the Jordan that Moses, the servant of the
Eternal, gave them.

► The tribe of Levi is the one exception to this process of allocating land because they have been set aside as priests in service to God. The other tribes will have to take care of Levi so that they may do the work God has given them to do for the entire people.

8So the chosen men prepared to go, and
Joshua repeated his instructions to them.

Joshua: Go into the land and survey it.
*Keep in mind that we need to divide it into
seven sections.* When you come back, we
will draw lots before the Eternal here in
Shiloh *to divide the land.*

9The men went out and passed through
the land, marking the cities, dividing it
into seven parts and recording their find-
ings on a scroll. Then they returned to
Joshua at Shiloh, 10and Joshua drew lots
in Shiloh in the presence of the Eternal to
divide the land among the remaining Isra-
elites, each getting a share.

11The land assigned by lot to the tribe
of the Benjaminites according to their
clans was between the people of Judah
in the south and the people of Joseph
in the north. 12On the north side their
boundary began at the Jordan: then the
boundary went up to the northern side
of Jericho, climbed westward through the
hill country, and ended at the wilderness
of Beth-aven. 13From there, the boundary
went southward in the direction of Luz;
near Luz (that is, Bethel) it went down
to Ataroth-addar, on the mountain to
the south of lower Beth-horon. 14From
this point, the western boundary turned
southward from the mountain oppo-
site Beth-horon to Kiriath-baal (that is,
Kiriath-jearim), a town belonging to the
people of Judah. This was the western
boundary *of their inheritance.*

15The southern boundary began on
the outskirts of Kiriath-jearim and from
there went west to the springs of Neph-
toah. 16Then the boundary went along
the border of the mountain overlooking
the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is at the
north end of the valley of Rephaim; and
it then went down the valley of Hinnom,
south of the slope of the Jebusites, and
further to En-rogel. 17Then it curved in a
northerly direction toward En-shemesh
and from there went on to Geliloth, which
is opposite the ascent of Adummim; then
down to the stone of Bohan, Reuben's son,
18and passing on to the north of the slope
of Arabah, it descended down to the Ara-
bah.* 19The boundary then went north of
the slope of Beth-hoglah and ended at the
northern bay of the Dead Sea where the
Jordan empties into the sea. This was
the southern border. 20On the eastern
side, the Jordan formed its boundary.

This, then, was the inheritance of the
people of Benjamin, clan by clan, bound-
ary by boundary. 21And the cities of the
tribe of the Benjaminites allocated to the
clans were: Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-
keziz, 22Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel,
23Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, 24Chephar-
ammoni, Ophni, and Geba—12 cities and
their surrounding villages. 25Also Gibeon,
Ramah, Beeroth, 26Mizpeh, Chephirah,
Mozah, 27Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, 28Zela,
Haeleph, the Jebusite city (Jerusalem),
Gibeah, and Kiriath—14 cities with
their surrounding villages. This was the

* 18:18 Hebrew manuscripts read "facing the Arabah."

inheritance of the people of Benjamin,
clan by clan.

19 The second allotment went
to the tribe of the Simeonites,
clan by clan, and its inheritance lay within the lands of the people of Judah. 2Simeon had for its inheritance Beersheba, Sheba, Moladah, 3Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, 4Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, 5Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah, 6Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhen—13 cities with their surrounding villages; 7also Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan—four towns with their surrounding villages; 8also all the villages surrounding these towns as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negev. This was the inheritance of the tribe of the Simeonites, clan by clan. 9The inheritance of the people of Simeon was taken from the people of Judah because the allotment of the people of Judah was too large for them. So the tribe of Simeon received an inheritance within Judah's inheritance.

Simeon receives no land allotment for himself. He is to be scattered within Judah's territory.

10The third lot fell to the people of Zebulun, clan by clan. The boundary of its inheritance stretched as far as Sarid, 11then it climbed up westward to Maralah and brushed Dabbesheth, then on to the wadi that is east of Jokneam. 12From Sarid it turned *in the other direction* eastward toward the sunrise to the frontier of Chisloth-tabor; and from there it went to Daberath, then up to Japhia. 13From there it went eastward to Gath-hepher, then Eth-kazin, and going on to Rimmon, it curved toward Neah. 14Then on the north, the boundary curved toward Hannathon and ended at the valley of Iphtahel 15with Kattah, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem—12 cities with their surrounding villages. 16This, then, was the land granted to the people of Zebulun, clan by clan: these cities with their surrounding villages.

17The fourth lot went to the people of Issachar, clan by clan. 18The territory that they inherited included Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem, 19Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, 20Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, 21Remeth, En-gannim, En-haddah, Beth-pazzez. 22The boundary extended up to Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth-shemesh, and ended at the Jordan—16 cities with their surrounding villages. 23This, then, was the land granted to the tribe of the Issacharites, clan by clan: these cities with their surrounding villages.

24The fifth lot was drawn for the tribe of the Asherites, clan by clan. 25The boundary of its inheritance included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph, 26Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal. It reached Carmel on the west and *the brook* Shihor-libnath, 27then it turned eastward toward Beth-dagon and brushed Zebulun and the valley of Iphtahel north to Beth-emek and Neiel; then it continued on north passing by Cabul *on the left,* 28to Ebron,* Rehob, Hammon, Kanah, as far as Sidon the Great. 29The border turned to Ramah and the fortified city of Tyre. Then it turned to Hosah and ended at the sea near the region of Achzib; 30also, Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob—22 cities with their surrounding villages. 31This, then, was the land allotted to the tribe of the Asherites, clan by clan: these cities and their surrounding villages.

32The sixth lot was drawn for the people of the Naphtalites, clan by clan; 33and its boundary ran from Heleph and the oak in Zaanannim, with Adami-nekeb and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum; it ended at the Jordan. 34The western boundary ran from Heleph to Aznoth-tabor and went from there to Hukkok, brushing the inheritance of Zebulun to the south, Asher on the west, and Judah on the east at the Jordan. 35The fortified cities were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth, 36Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, 37Kedesh, Edrei, En-hazor, 38Yiron, Migdal-el, Horem, Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh—19 cities *in all* with their surrounding villages. 39This, then, was the land granted to the tribe of the Naphtalites, clan by clan: these cities with their surrounding villages.

40The seventh lot fell to the tribe of the Danites, clan by clan; 41and the territory of its inheritance included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, 42Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, 43Elon, Timnah, Ekron, 44Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, 45Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, 46and Me-jarkon and Rakkon on the border opposite Joppa. 47The people of Dan had a difficult time subduing their allotted territory so they went up and attacked Leshem, and when they had captured it and killed its inhabitants, they settled there, renaming Leshem "Dan,"

* 19:28 Other manuscripts read "Abdon."

after their ancestor. 48This, then, was the land granted to the tribe of the Danites, clan by clan: these cities with their surrounding villages.

49When at last they had finished distributing the territories of the land as inheritances, the Israelites gave Joshua, son of Nun, a *special* inheritance among them. 50As the Eternal had commanded, they gave Joshua the town he had asked for, Timnath-serah in the highlands of Ephraim. So he built a city and settled there.

51These, then, are the inheritances that the priest Eleazar, Joshua (son of Nun), and the heads of the leaders of the Israelite tribes distributed by drawing lots at Shiloh. *All this was done* in the presence of the Eternal at the entrance of the congregation tent. And the division of the land was complete.

20 Then the Eternal One spoke to Joshua.

Eternal One: 2Tell the Israelites, "You must set apart cities of refuge, as I directed you through Moses, 3so that anyone who accidentally or unintentionally kills a person may flee there. These cities shall be set up as a refuge from anyone seeking blood revenge. 4If the slayer flees to one of these cities, he can stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain the case to the elders of that city; then the fugitive will be taken into the city and given a place, and he will live among them. 5If the person seeking to avenge in blood comes after him, the people of the city may not give up the slayer since the neighbor was killed by mistake and there was no premeditation or prior hatred. 6The slayer may remain in that city until there is a trial before the congregation. And when the high priest who currently holds the office dies, then the slayer may return home to the town from which he fled."

► God asks the people to set aside places of sanctuary. This is a violent time, and people often take justice into their own hands. But these cities of refuge are set aside as places where those who have accidentally killed someone might be safe from avenging relatives until a determination of guilt might be made.

7So they set apart *and consecrated* Kedesh in Galilee (in the hill country of Naphtali), Shechem (in the hill country of Ephraim), and Kiriath-arba (Hebron, in the hill country of Judah). 8Beyond the Jordan, east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer (in the desert plateau from the tribe of Reuben), Ramoth in Gilead (from the tribe of Gad), and Golan in Bashan (from the tribe of Manasseh). 9These, then, were the cities set aside to be sanctuaries for all the Israelites and for the foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who killed a person accidentally could flee there and not die at the hands of someone seeking blood revenge until there was a trial before the congregation.

21 It was at this time that the heads of the leaders of the Levites came before the priest Eleazar and Joshua, son of Nun, and the other leaders of the tribes of the Israelites 2at Shiloh in the land of Canaan.

Levite Leaders: The Eternal gave orders through Moses that we *of the tribe of Levi* be given towns to live in, along with pasturelands for our livestock and cattle.

The Kohathites are given land in the areas around what will be Jerusalem, where it will be convenient for them to later serve in the temple.

3So in obedience to the Eternal's command, the Israelites allotted to the Levites towns with their surrounding pasturelands, from out of their inheritances, 4and lots were drawn for the clans of the descendants of Kohath. To those Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest went 13 towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. 5The other descendants of Kohath were given 10 towns from the clans of the tribes of Ephraim and Dan and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 6The descendants of Gershon were allotted 13 towns from the clans of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the half-tribe of Manasseh that lived in Bashan. 7The descendants of Merari and their clans were granted 12 towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. 8This,

then, was the land granted by drawing lots for the Levites, by the other people of Israel as the Eternal had commanded through Moses—these towns with their surrounding pastures. 9From the tribes of the Judahites and the Simeonites came the following towns mentioned by name, 10which were granted to the descendants of Aaron, of the clans of the descendants of Kohath who were Levites, since they were chosen first: 11the city of Kiriath-arba (Arba was the father of Anak), that is Hebron, in the highlands of Judah, as well as the pasturelands around it. 12The fields and villages of the town had already been granted to Caleb, son of Jephunneh, for his inheritance.

13-16So to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for a slayer, and Libnah; Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon, Debir, Ain, Juttah, and Beth-shemesh, all *with their villages*—9 cities with their pastures given by these two tribes.

17-19These cities were given by the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth, and Almon, all with their villages—4 cities. So the cities granted to the descendants of Aaron—the priests—totaled 13, with their pastures *and their villages*.

20-22As for the remaining clans of the people of Kohath of the Levites, the cities allotted to them were given by the tribe of Ephraim: Shechem (the city of refuge in the highlands of Ephraim) Gezer, Kibzaim, and Beth-horon, all *with their villages*—4 cities with their pastures. 23-24Out of the tribe of Dan they were given Elteke, Gibbethon, Aijalon, and Gath-rimmon, all with their pasturelands—4 cities. 25And out of the half-tribe of Manasseh they received Taanach *with its villages* and Gath-rimmon *with its villages* and their pastures—2 cities. 26So the cities given to the clans of the rest of the Kohathites totaled 10, with their pasturelands.

27The Gershonites, another of the clans of the Levites, received from the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan (the city of refuge), with its *villages and* pastures, and Beeshterah with its *villages and* pastures—2 cities. 28-29From the tribe of Issachar they received Kishion, Daberath, Jarmuth, and En-gannim, all with their villages—4 cities.

30-31From the tribe of Asher came Mishal, Abdon, Helkath, and Rehob, all with their *villages and* pastures—4 cities. 32From the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee (the city of refuge), Hammoth-dor, and Kartan, all with *their villages and* their pastures—3 cities. 33In all, the cities granted to the clans of the Gershonites totaled 13, along with *their villages and* their pastures.

34-35The rest of the Levites—the clans of the Merarites—received from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah, and Nahalal, all with their *villages and* pastures—4 cities. 36-37From the tribe of Reuben they were given Bezer, Jahzah, Kedemoth, and Mephaath, all with *their villages and* their pastures—4 cities. 38-39From the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead (the city of refuge), Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer, all with *their villages and* their pastures—4 cities in all. 40So the cities of the Merarite clans, that is, the remaining clans of Levi, totaled 12. 41The Levites were granted 48 cities, each with *villages around them and* the pasturelands, within the holdings of the Israelites. 42So it was that they received these cities, *their villages,* and their pastures.

43That is how the Eternal gave to the people of Israel all the land He had promised to their ancestors; and when they had taken possession of the land, the Israelites settled upon it. 44So He gave them rest *from war* on every side as He had sworn to their ancestors; none of their enemies still stood against them, for the Eternal had delivered them all into their hands. 45Not a single one of all the good promises that He had made to the house of Israel went unfulfilled; all of them came to pass.

22 It was time for Joshua to discharge *the tribes whose land was east of the Jordan, and they came before him—the tribes of* Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Joshua: 2You have done all that Moses the servant of the Eternal commanded you to do, and you have done all that I asked of you. 3You did not abandon your people through all of the many days *we struggled,* down to this very day, and you have always been faithful to the charge that was laid upon you by the Eternal One, your True God.

4The Eternal One, your True God, has given rest now to all your people as He promised them. So now it is time for you to return to your tents and your possessions in the land on the far banks of the Jordan that Moses, the Eternal's servant, granted you. 5Be very careful *always* to

follow the commandments and teachings of Moses, the Eternal's servant: love the Eternal your God; walk in His pathways, keep His commandments, be faithful to Him, and serve Him with diligence and devotion.

6He gave them his blessing and sent them home to their tents, 7but since Moses had given to the half-tribe of Manasseh an inheritance in Bashan, *east of the Jordan,* and to the other half Joshua had given an inheritance alongside the other people west of the Jordan, he blessed them and sent them away.

Joshua: 8You will return now to your tents with great wealth, with herds of livestock *and cattle,* with silver and gold, bronze and iron, and piles of *fine* clothing. Be sure to divide these spoils of war among your relatives.

9So the people of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh departed from the other Israelites at Shiloh, in the land of Canaan, and returned to their homes *and families* in Gilead, which Moses had given them by order of the Eternal.

10When the people of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh came to the *western* bank of the Jordan, although still in the land of Canaan, they built an immense altar there by the river. 11When the other people of Israel heard that the people of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built a huge altar on the frontier of Canaan on the side of the Jordan given to them, *they feared the altar was going to be used to worship the gods of the land of Canaan.* 12So the Israelites all gathered at Shiloh and talked of going to war against the tribes *across the Jordan.* 13-14But first they appointed the priest Phinehas, son of Eleazar, to travel with 10 chiefs, one from each Israelite tribe and each clan *who were settled in the land of Canaan,* to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead.

15When they came to the people of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, Phinehas and the chiefs delivered the message.

Phinehas: 16We bring a message from all the Eternal's people *in Canaan. How dare you!* How can you commit this treachery against the True God of Israel by turning away from Him and building this altar to be used against Him? 17Didn't we learn our lessons about the sin of *sacrificing to false gods in* Peor? We have not yet cleansed ourselves *of the stain* or gotten over the plague that the Eternal sent among us because of it; 18and now, already, you're turning away from Him? *Listen to me:* If you rebel against Him today, He will punish the whole assembly of Israel tomorrow!

19If the problem is that there is no holy site in your country, then come over to us in the country where the Eternal's congregation tent is standing. Take an inheritance among us. Only don't rebel against Him or rebel against us by building an altar that isn't going to be used to sacrifice to the Eternal One, our True God. 20Don't you remember what happened when Achan, the son of Zerah, was unfaithful by *keeping* some of the spoil *at Jericho and trying to deceive God and Joshua*? His wrath fell upon the whole people, and he was not the only one who perished because of his sin!

21Then the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered *Phinehas and* the heads of the clans of Israel:

Leaders of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh: 22The Eternal One, God of gods! The Eternal One, God of gods! He knows *the truth,* and Israel should know, too. If it was out of rebellion against Him or faithlessness against Him, then devote us to destruction today! 23If we have built this altar to renounce our allegiance to Him, or to present burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, then may the Eternal Himself take vengeance on us!

24No, we were afraid that someday, *years from now,* your sons and daughters might say to our sons and daughters, "*Who are you?* What connection do you have with the Eternal God of Israel? 25Didn't He set the river Jordan between us, the Reubenites and the Gadites, as a boundary? You have no share in the Eternal One." So your sons and daughters might prevent ours from worshiping Him. 26-28And we thought, should that day ever come, we could point to this altar and say, "Look, this constructed altar dedicated to Him was not set up to sacrifice on, but to be a witness here *at the border* between us that we serve the same God so that your children will not accuse our children of following other gods."

29It was the farthest thing from our minds to build an altar so that we could turn away from the Eternal God or to present burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on anything but the altar that stands in front of His congregation tent, *the place of revelation.*

30When the priest Phinehas, and the leaders of the congregation and the heads of the clans of Israel who accompanied him, heard the reply from the people of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were satisfied.

Phinehas *(to the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh)***:** 31We know now that the Eternal is among us. Because you have not committed some treachery against Him, you have saved all of the Israelites from punishment at His hands.

32So Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and the leaders left the people of Reuben and Gad in the land of Gilead and returned to the assembly *at Shiloh* to tell them what they had heard. 33Their report pleased the Israelites, and they stopped talking about going to war or destroying the people of Reuben and Gad. 34The people of Reuben and Gad called the altar "Witness."

Tribes of Reuben and Gad: We have built this altar as a witness between us that the Eternal is the True God.

► In this final section of this book (chapters 23–24), Joshua's speeches recap the story of their exodus from Egypt, remind the Israelites (and us) that God has been faithful in keeping all His promises, and call the people of Israel to accountability and faithfulness. It is this last charge that they will fail to keep—and that failure will cause the people of Israel so much trouble in the generations to come.

23 After Israel *had taken possession of their inheritances and* the Eternal had given them peace for many years and when Joshua was very old, 2he summoned all of Israel, their judges and officers and leaders.

Joshua: I am an old man. 3You have seen everything the Eternal One, your True God, did to these nations for you; the Eternal One, your True God, fought for you. 4I have allotted as your tribes' inheritances the territories of those people who still remain, as well as all the nations I captured from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. 5The Eternal your God will push them out of their lands and out of your sight and you will live in their lands, just as He promised you. 6So be firm and unswerving, observing all that is written in the law of Moses without deviation. 7That will ensure that you don't start to blend in with the other nations around you or call upon their gods or worship them or serve them. 8Just hold tightly to the Eternal One, your True God, as you always have, 9for He has driven out great and powerful nations before you *like leaves in the wind,* and you know that no one has ever been able to stand against you. 10One of you can pursue a thousand because it is He who fights for you, just as He promised.

11So always be careful to love the Eternal One, your God. 12If you turn away *from Him and* toward those left of the *foreign* nations among you—if your women marry them and their women marry you—13you can be sure that the Eternal *will turn from you. He* won't remove the nations around you, but instead He will let them be a snare for you to be caught in, a wound in your sides, and thorns in your eyes until you perish from this good land that He has given you.

14The time has come for me to die and return to the earth. *But I want to leave you with these thoughts:* Think back and you will know without a doubt that not one single good thing that the Eternal One, your God, promised you has been left undone. Not a single one.

15But in the same way the Eternal One, your True God, has fulfilled all these blessings, you can be sure that *if you turn away from Him,* He will fulfill the curses until the Eternal has obliterated you from this good land He gave you. 16If you break the commandments that He has laid upon you and turn from Him to serve and worship other gods, then His anger will flare white-hot against you, and you will quickly be wiped from the face of this good land He has given you.

► The Book of Deuteronomy, which precedes Joshua, records Moses giving a similar farewell speech prior to his death. Moses reminded the people of Israel where they had come from and foretold many of the things that later came to pass when they entered into the promised land of Canaan. Joshua's speech does the same thing. He reminds the Israelites of their story, and he warns the people of Israel that if they turn from their faith in God they should expect curses instead of the blessings they have experienced.

24 So Joshua summoned all of the tribes of Israel together at Shechem, all the leaders, judges, officers, and elders, and they stood in the presence of the True God.

Joshua: 2The Eternal One, the True God of Israel has told me to give you this message: "Many years ago, your ancestors, Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the *Euphrates* River where they served other gods. 3But I took your father Abraham and led him over the river and into the land of Canaan, and I made his descendants numerous. I gave him Isaac, 4and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the highlands of Seir for a possession, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. 5*When the time came for them to be delivered,* I sent Moses and Aaron, I struck Egypt with plagues, and I brought you out of Egypt.

6When I brought you out of Egypt, your ancestors were closely pursued by soldiers in their chariots of war to the Red Sea itself. 7When they cried out to the Eternal, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians and brought the sea to cover and drown them, every one, in the sea. Your own eyes saw this. You lived in the desert for a long time, *wandering in the wilderness.* 8Finally I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the east side of the Jordan. They fought against you; but I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land. I destroyed them before you.

9When Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab, decided to attack Israel, he called on Balaam, the son of Beor, to curse you, 10but I would not listen to Balaam. All he could do was bless you. I delivered you out of his clutches.

11When you crossed over the Jordan *into the land of Canaan* and came to Jericho, the leaders* of Jericho fought against you. So did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I gave them all into your power.

12I sent hornets ahead of you to run off the two kings of the Amorites; it was not done by your bow or sword. 13I delivered to you fields you had not worked and towns you had not built, yet today you live in them. You eat the fruit of olive trees and of grape vineyards you did not even have to plant."

14So remember: fear the Eternal and serve Him sincerely and faithfully. Put away from you any gods your ancestors served across the *Euphrates* River or in Egypt, and serve only Him. 15If you decide that you're not willing to serve Him, then today is the day for you to choose whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors bowed to in the land beyond the great River, or the gods of the Amorites whose country you possess. But as for me and my family, we will serve the Eternal.

This people that complained in the wilderness now acknowledges that God alone gave them this land, and they pledge their faithfulness to Him.

People of Israel *(responding)***:** 16Nothing could be further from our minds than abandoning the Eternal to serve other gods. 17We know that the Eternal One our God rescued us and our ancestors from slavery in the land of Egypt. We remember that He performed all those great signs in front of us. He protected us from the people we passed as we traveled. 18*And we know that* He removed the Amorites and all the peoples who lived in Canaan. We, too, will serve the Eternal One, for He is our True God.

Joshua *(warning them)***:** 19If you think you will be able to serve the Eternal, you are wrong. He is a holy God and a jealous

* 24:11 Hebrew has "Baals of Jericho."

God; He will not tolerate your shortcomings and your sins. 20If you desert Him and worship these foreign gods, He will fall upon you and totally consume you, even though He has done all this great good for you.

People of Israel: 21All the same, we choose to serve the Eternal.

Joshua: 22All right, then. You are witnesses—against yourselves, *if it comes to that*—that you have made this choice to serve the Eternal.

Israel: We are witnesses to it.

Joshua *(repeating)*: 23Then you must put all other gods away from you and turn your hearts to the Eternal God of Israel.

Israel: 24We will serve the Eternal One, our God, and we will obey His voice.

25So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day at Shechem and gave them statutes and ordinances to obey. 26Joshua wrote the words in the scroll of the law, and he had a large stone set up underneath the oak tree near the Eternal's holy place.

Joshua *(to all the people)*: 27This stone will also be a witness to your vow. It has heard all the words the Eternal spoke to us, so it will be a witness if you turn your backs on your True God.

28So he sent the people away, back to the lands He had given them.

29After that, Joshua, the son of Nun, the Eternal's servant, died at the age of 110. 30They buried him in the land he had been given at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim to the north of Mount Gaash.

31And Israel served the Eternal *faithfully* for as long as Joshua lived, and then throughout the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had seen all the mighty things that the Eternal One did for Israel.

32The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had carried out of Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the land Jacob had bought from the descendants of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for 100 pieces of silver, and which had been passed on to the people of Joseph as an inheritance.

33*Eventually* Eleazar, the son of Aaron, died. They buried him at Gibeah, in the city his son Phinehas had been granted in the highlands of Ephraim.

JUDGES

The period after Joshua and before the kings of Israel

By Samuel or others

The Book of Judges tells the history of God's people after their arrival in the land God had promised their ancestors and of how they live in the period between the conquest of that land of Canaan and their turning away from God and toward earthly kings in search of order and safety. It also continues the Israelites' story of faithfulness—and faithlessness—since they have been freed from slavery in Egypt. Two great leaders, Moses and Joshua, have warned them that if they fall away from faithful worship of God, they will suffer for it; but as is often the case with human beings, a warning is not enough. They have to experience things for themselves.

Judges recounts the experience: On more than one occasion, the people of Israel fall away from the worship of their God, are punished for it, and then pray for deliverance. The deliverer is a divinely appointed judge, a combination of military general and civil leader, a redeemer or liberator. It's a cycle that is repeated many times in the Book of Judges, which finally ends in atrocity as we see how far the people fell in those days when "there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what seemed right to them" (21:25).

One of the most famous judges, Samuel, whose story is not told until the books of Samuel, is traditionally credited with recording the many stories that appear in Judges. This book is divided into three sections: the conquest and settlement of Canaan, the exploits of the judges, and a collection of stories. The juxtaposition of so many differing stories reflects the involvement of many storytellers and editors in this final version of Judges and the importance they all placed on every divinely inspired story—even those stories that are crude, gruesome, and heartbreaking.

Judges shows us an unromantic view of life, love, and faith—but one that seems completely realistic. We see people at both their best and their worst. It is the story of a society in slow descent, arrested sometimes by God's intervention through human agents, and it reads as cosmic truth. We are often guilty of exalting things other than God: our possessions, our relationships, our institutions, even our nation. The stories of the people of Israel remind us that we should place true faith in God alone, and that when we forget, the spiritual and real-life results may be devastating.

Modern readers wrestle with the violence in the Old Testament. In the wake of events like the holocaust, when the Jews were slaughtered by the millions, many do not see God as a protecting God or as a God of might.

But in Judges we learn about a God who fights for His chosen people or empowers champions to protect them. This was certainly the way the people of God in the time of Judges thought about God, as defender and protector, and the way people in the ancient Middle East understood faith, worship, and divinity. But the Lord is different from all the other gods. He is jealous, so when His people abandon Him, all that power is turned against them in the form of invading armies. The Israelites have need of judges who can lead them in their military exploits and who can keep them faithful to the mighty God of Israel.

1 After Joshua died, the people of Israel asked a question of the Eternal One.

Israelites: So now who will lead us in our wars against *the armies of* Canaan?

Eternal One *(to the leaders of Judah)*:
2 Judah will go *and fight*. See, I am giving the land into their hands.

3 The tribe of Judah enlisted support from the tribe of Simeon.

Tribe of Judah: If you will help us fight for the land we were given in Canaan, we will do the same for you.

The tribe of Simeon agreed to help them.
4-5 So Judah *and her ally* went up to fight against Adoni-bezek at *the town of* Bezek, and the Eternal gave them victory over the Canaanites and the Perizzites. They killed 10,000 of them at Bezek; 6 and although Adoni-bezek tried to escape, they caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes, *which rendered him useless for basically anything*.

Adoni-bezek: 7 *In my time,* I cut the thumbs and toes off 70 kings and left them to scramble for scraps under my table. And now God has done the same to me.

They carried him away to Jerusalem, where he died.

8 Then the people of Judah attacked Jerusalem; and when they had captured it, they killed many, burned the city, *and destroyed it.* 9 After that the people of Judah swept down upon the Canaanites remaining in the highlands and in the lowlands and in the southern desert. 10 Judah campaigned against the Canaanites of Hebron (formerly Kiriath-arba), where they defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, 11 and then they went out in battle against the people of Debir (formerly Kiriath-sepher). 12 *It was about this battle that Caleb had made a vow.*

Caleb: Whoever attacks and captures Kiriath-sepher will receive my daughter Achsah as his wife.

13 Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother, Kenaz, captured the city, so Caleb gave Othniel his daughter Achsah to marry. 14 When she came to Othniel, she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb approached her.

Caleb: What do you wish?

Achsah: 15 Here is what I would like as a *wedding* gift: since you have given me a place in the southern desert, also give me some springs of water.

And so Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

16 The people who descended from Moses' father-in-law, *Hobab* the Kenite, went with the people of Judah from the city of palm trees into the wilderness of Judah, and they settled there with the people, *the Amalekites,* in the southern desert near Arad.

17 Then Judah and Simeon defeated the Canaanites who lived in Zephath and destroyed them completely, so their city was renamed Hormah, *which means "destruction."* 18 Judah went on to take *the cities of* Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron and all the land surrounding them. 19 The Eternal was with Judah, and the tribe conquered all of the highlands. But those living in the plains had iron chariots, so Judah could not drive them out. 20 Caleb received the

land of Hebron, as Moses had promised *many years earlier,* and he drove out the three sons of Anak. 21The people of the tribe of Benjamin, however, did not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, and the Jebusites live alongside the Benjaminites in Jerusalem to this very day.

22-23The tribe of Joseph went up against Bethel (which was formerly known as Luz), and the Eternal supported them. They sent out spies 24who intercepted a man leaving the city.

Spies: Show us the way into the city, and we'll spare you.

25He showed them the way, and they destroyed the city with swords; but *as they had promised,* they let the man and his family go. 26This man went into the land of the Hittites, and there he established a city; he called it Luz, and that is still its name.

27-28The tribe of Manasseh failed to drive out the people who lived in the cities and surrounding villages of Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo. The Canaanites continued to live in those regions for they were determined to live there; but when the people of Israel grew strong, they made the Canaanites their slaves and did not completely drive them out.

29So it was with *the tribe of* Ephraim, who did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer but lived among them.

30Zebulun also did not drive out the people of Kitron or Nahalol, so these Canaanites lived among them and became their slaves.

31-32Asher failed to drive out the people of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob; instead, the tribe of Asher lived among the Canaanites who lived in the land.

33Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh or Beth-anath but lived among these Canaanites who lived in the land. They also became the slaves of Naphtali.

34The Amorites pushed the tribe of Dan *back* into the hills and did not allow them to dwell in the valley. 35The Amorites persisted in living on Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the tribe of Joseph overpowered them and forced them into labor. 36*In those days,* the border of the Amorites ran from the heights of Akrabbim to Sela and beyond.

2 The Eternal's messenger traveled from Gilgal to Bochim.

Messenger *(to the people of Israel)*: I rescued you out of the land of Egypt and brought you into this land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, "I will never break My covenant with you. 2As your part *of this bargain,* you shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You must tear down the altars *of their gods*." But you did not do as I commanded. Do you realize what you have done? 3Now I tell you, "I will not drive them out before you. The people of the land will irritate you, and their gods will ensnare you."

4When the Eternal's messenger spoke these words to Israel, the people wept bitterly. 5So they named that place Bochim, *which means "weeping,"* and there they sacrificed to Him.

6When Joshua sent the people away, each tribe of Israel went to gain possession of its territorial inheritance. 7The people served the Eternal as long as Joshua lived and through all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua—those who had seen all the great works that the Eternal had done for Israel.

8Joshua, son of Nun, the Eternal's servant, died at the age of 110 years 9and was buried within the borders of his inheritance at Timnath-heres in the hills of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. 10Now that whole generation, *the generation that had walked with Moses—the generation that saw the walls of Jericho fall—that generation* passed on, and another generation grew up after them, *a generation* that did not know the Eternal and had not seen the great works He had done for Israel. 11Consequently this new generation served *the gods of Canaan*—the Baals* *as they were called*—doing what the Eternal God considered evil. 12They abandoned the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors, who brought them *safely* out of Egypt. Instead, they began to serve the gods of their neighbors, *the Canaanites,* bowing low before their images, causing the Eternal to burn with anger.

13The Israelites abandoned *the worship of* the Eternal One and turned to serve Baal and *his consort the moon goddess,* Ashtaroth. 14So the Eternal's anger burned *hot* against them, and He caused

* 2:11 Literally, lords

them to be overcome by those around them, using their enemies to plunder them so that the Israelites could no longer stand against their enemies. 15Whenever they marched out *to battle,* the hand of the Eternal One was raised against them in evil, as He had warned and promised them, and they were in anguish.

16But the Eternal appointed judges *among them, leaders and liberators* who rescued the Israelites from their enemies who plundered them. 17Even then the people *of Israel* did not listen to their judges, but instead passionately pursued other gods and bowed down to them. How quickly they turned from the faithfulness exhibited by their ancestors in obeying the Eternal's commandments. This younger generation did not follow their ancestors' example.

18*Still,* whenever the Eternal appointed judges among the Israelites, He was with each one, saving the Israelites from their enemies as long as that leader lived, for He was moved to compassion by the groans of His people when they were persecuted and oppressed. 19But when the judge died, then the people would fall away *from their faithfulness,* and the next generation behaved even worse than their ancestors, pursuing and serving other gods, and bowing down before them. They would not change their bad habits but clung to them stubbornly.

20So the Eternal's anger burned *hot* against *the people of* Israel.

Eternal One: Since these people have violated the covenant I gave as a commandment to their ancestors and no longer listen to My voice, 21I will no longer drive out from their path any of the nations who still remained in this land when Joshua died. 22I will put My people to the test to see whether or not they will walk the faithful way of the Eternal as their ancestors did.

23So *God did as He promised.* He left those *pagan* nations *in the land of Canaan.* He did not drive them away immediately, nor did He give them into the hands of Joshua *and his armies.*

3 Here is a list of the nations that the Eternal left *in the land* to test those Israelites who had not gone to war in Canaan, 2so that those who had not experienced war personally might know it: 3the five Philistine capital cities, all the Canaanite *tribes,* the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon to the entrance of Lebo-hamath. 4They were intended to test the Israelites, to determine whether they would follow the commandments that the Eternal gave to their ancestors through Moses.

► After Joshua dies, the people of Israel are left without a leader. How will they know what to do? They are still surrounded by hostile peoples; there is still land to be fought for and won.

The people of God have some military success, but they are not able to drive out all the people of Canaan. They are forced to live among the pagans; and their ways, women, and gods become a temptation to the people of God. This situation is the catalyst for the next 1,000 years of Israel's cyclical unfaithfulness and repentance.

5The people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 6They took the pagans' daughters as wives, gave their own daughters to the pagans' sons *to marry,* and worshiped pagan gods. 7Israel committed what the Eternal considered evil: they forgot the Eternal, their True God, and instead worshiped the Baal and Asherah deities,* *the various local gods of the people of Canaan.*

8So the Eternal's anger burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim, a king of Mesopotamia. The Israelites toiled *like slaves* for Cushan-rishathaim for 8 years; 9but when they cried out to the Eternal, He raised up a liberator from among them—Othniel, the son of Kenaz, the younger brother of Caleb. 10The Spirit of the Eternal came upon Othniel, and he became a judge over Israel. *In God's power, he emancipated Israel* and went to war for them. The Eternal then delivered Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, to Othniel, and Othniel's army defeated him. 11Afterward this territory had peace for

* 3:7 Hebrew, *Baals* and the *Ashtaroth*

40 years. Then Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died.

12The people of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of the Eternal, so He gave Eglon, king of Moab, power against the Israelites because they did what He viewed as evil. 13Eglon allied with the Ammonites and the Amalekites; they went *to battle* against Israel and defeated them, and they captured the city of palm trees. 14The Israelites toiled for Eglon, king of Moab, for 18 years; 15but when the people of Israel cried to the Eternal *for relief,* He raised up a left-handed liberator from among them: Ehud, son of Gera the Benjaminite.

The Israelites sent Ehud to bring tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. 16*Before he set out,* Ehud made for himself a double-edged sword about 18 inches in length, and he fastened it onto his right thigh, hidden under his clothes.

17Ehud brought the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, who was a very fat man; 18and when he was done with the presentation of the tribute to the king, he sent away those who carried it. 19Ehud stopped on his homeward journey at the engraved idols near Gilgal and returned *to speak with Eglon.*

Ehud: I have a secret message for you, O king.

Eglon: Be silent.

Eglon sent his attendants away; 20and Ehud came in to the king, who sat alone in a cool, private, upstairs room *supported by beams.*

Ehud: I have here a message for you from the True God.

As the king got up from his throne, 21Ehud reached *beneath his robes* with his left hand, took the sword strapped to his right thigh, and thrust it *deep* into Eglon's belly, 22*so deep, in fact,* that the hilt followed the blade, and he did not remove the sword because the fat closed over the blade, and the contents of Eglon's intestines spilled out. 23So Ehud locked the doors of the roof area himself and exited through the porch. 24After he had escaped, *eventually* the servants came *to check on their master.* When they saw that the doors to the upstairs room were locked, they assumed Eglon was relieving himself in the upstairs chamber. 25They stood around waiting until their embarrassment grew too great. When Eglon didn't open the doors, at last, they opened the doors with the key, and there was their master, lying dead on the floor.

26Ehud took advantage of the delay. He passed the idols *of Gilgal* and escaped to Seirah. 27Reaching safety, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country *of the tribe* of Ephraim, and the Israelites followed him back down the mountain.

Ehud: 28Follow me, because the Eternal has given your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands.

So they followed him, and together they captured the crossings of the *river* Jordan into Moab, not allowing anyone to pass. 29At that time, they killed *an army of* 10,000 Moabites, all of them strong *and well-equipped* warriors. No one escaped.

30So Israel defeated Moab on that day, and this region experienced rest *from war* for 80 years. 31When Ehud was gone, Shamgar, the son of Anath, was also a liberator of Israel, killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad.

► God takes what is different about Ehud and makes it a strength. This is God's habit throughout the Old Testament—making unlikely heroes into agents of His deliverance from the enemies of Israel. Earlier God used Moses, an infant marked for death, to liberate His people from Egypt. Soon God will use two women, marginalized in a patriarchal society, to save Israel from Sisera. And much later, God will choose David, a young boy, to save Israel from the mighty Philistines. Time and again, God proves He can use anyone to accomplish His goals.

4 After Ehud died, the people returned to doing what the Eternal said was evil. 2So the Eternal made them subservient to Jabin, king of Canaan, who ruled from Hazor. Jabin's general was a man named Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

3The people of Israel cried out to the

Eternal *again for help*. Since Sisera had 900 iron chariots, he prevailed against and oppressed the Israelites for 20 years.

These iron chariots are an especially potent assault vehicle against the Israelites on the plains, but not as much in mountainous regions.

4At that time, Deborah the prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, served as judge over Israel. 5She used to sit beneath the palm tree of Deborah, situated in the hill country of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel, and the people would go up to her there to settle disputes. 6She *urgently* sent for Barak, the son of Abinoam, out of Kedesh-naphtali.

Deborah: The Eternal God of Israel commands you: "Go and get into position near Mount Tabor. Take 10,000 soldiers from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. 7I will draw out Sisera, Jabin's general, to meet you at the wadi Kishon with his chariots and his army, and I will deliver him to you."

Barak *(to Deborah)*: 8I will do this if you will go with me; but if you won't, then I won't go either.

Deborah: 9I will certainly go with you, but you should know from the beginning that this battle will not lead to your personal glory. The Eternal has decreed that *the mighty* Sisera will be defeated by a woman.

Then Deborah got up and accompanied Barak to Kedesh. 10Barak summoned *the tribes of* Naphtali and Zebulun, and they sent 10,000 men to follow him. With Deborah, they went to Kedesh.

11Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from all the other Kenites (the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses) and had camped far away, under the great tree at Zaanannim, near Kedesh.

12When Sisera *the general* heard that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up *in force* to Mount Tabor, 13he called out all 900 of his iron chariots, and all the soldiers who were with him from Harosheth-hagoyim to the wadi Kishon.

Deborah *(to Barak)*: 14Get up! For this is the day that the Eternal has given you victory over Sisera. In fact, He has already gone out ahead of you.

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 warriors following. 15As Barak *and his forces* watched, the Eternal threw Sisera and all his chariots and his entire army into a panic before them; all Sisera's army died by the sword. Sisera himself climbed down from his chariot and escaped on foot, 16while Barak *and his army* pursued Sisera's chariots and army all the way back to Harosheth-hagoyim. All of Sisera's warriors perished by the sword; not one of them was left *alive*.

17Sisera had fled to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, *and he must have thought himself safe at last,* since there was peace between Jabin, the king of Hazor, and Heber the Kenite.

18Jael went out to meet Sisera.

Jael: Come in, my lord, come in with me. There is nothing to be afraid of here.

So he came inside the tent with her, and she covered him with a rug *just in case some of Barak's soldiers came looking for him.*

Sisera: 19May I have a little water to drink?

He was very thirsty, so she opened a skin filled with milk and gave him a little, then covered him again.

Sisera: 20Stand *and wait* at the opening to the tent. If anybody comes and asks you, "Is anyone inside?" tell them "No."

21Sisera fell into a deep sleep, for he was weary. Jael, the wife of Heber, took a tent peg in one hand and a hammer in the other. She crept softly to his side. Then she drove the peg into his temple, down into the ground, and killed him.

22When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him.

Jael: Come inside, and I will show you the man you seek.

So he went into the tent with her, and there lay Sisera dead, with a tent peg driven through his head.

23On that day, God vanquished Jabin, king of Canaan, before the people of Israel; 24and the Israelites bore down harder and

harder on him until at last Jabin, king of Canaan, was destroyed.

► Known as the Song of Deborah, this victory song is one of the oldest passages in the Bible; it is beautiful and powerful, as well as filled with information. In addition to praising and chastising certain tribes for their role—or lack thereof—in battle, it also celebrates a victory God has given His people through the agency of two women: the judge Deborah and Jael, who, as Deborah prophesied (verse 9), brings final victory over the enemy general Sisera.

These cultures value masculine strength, aggression, and war-prowess; they don't value female ingenuity and courage. So for the first hearers of this story, the last people they expect to bring military victory are women. But once again, God takes ordinary people with their gifts, strengths, and weaknesses—and brings military victory through the unexpectedly strong hands of women.

5 Then, that same day, Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam, sang a song *in victory*:

[2]The leaders of Israel stood up,
and the people offered themselves willingly—
praise the Eternal One!
[3]Listen, all you kings, and pay attention, you rulers:
I, I will sing to the Eternal,
I will sing praise to Him, the True God of Israel!
[4]Eternal One, when You went out from Seir
and marched from the field of Edom,
The earth shook,
and the heavens poured;
yes, the clouds poured water.
[5]The mountains flowed *like water* before the Eternal, the God of Sinai;
they melted into a flood before the Eternal One, the True God of Israel.

[6]In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath,
and in the days of Jael, the main roads were empty *of caravans,*
and the travelers kept to back roads.
[7]But those from rural areas stayed away,
the destitute in Israel kept far off,*
Until I, Deborah, arose
to be a mother to Israel.
[8]They had chosen new gods,
so war came to their gates.
Was there a spear or shield to be found then
among the 40,000 of Israel?
[9]My heart is warmed by those in Israel called to command them,
who offered themselves willingly to the people.
Praise the Eternal One!

[10]Sing *this song,* those of you who now ride white donkeys
and sit on rich carpets,
you who travel along the road.
[11]All of you who now hear the sound of shepherds at the watering places,
proclaim the just victories of the Eternal,
the just triumphs of His destitute people in Israel,
As the people of the Eternal go down to the gates!

[12]Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
Wake up, wake up, and sing!
Get up, Barak! *Get up and* carry off your captives,
O son of Abinoam!
[13]Then down went a surviving people to those who were noble,
and the Eternal One marched to me with the mighty!
[14]People with roots in Ephraim went down against the Amalekites after you, O Benjamin,
with your people.
From Machir marched those commanders,
and from Zebulun went those carrying the staff of a scribe.
[15]The chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah;
Issachar was faithful to Barak,
And they rushed into the valley, close at his heels.
And the clans of Reuben wondered in their heart,

* 5:7 Meaning is unclear; this is a difficult text.

16"Why did you remain idle and aloof in the sheepfolds?
To hear whistling for the flocks?"
And the clans of Reuben wondered in their heart,
17"Why did those of Gilead remain beyond the Jordan?
Why did the people of Dan stay with their ships?
"Why did the people of Asher stay on the coast,
settling down where they landed?"
18But Zebulun did not fear death,
and Naphtali, too, *stared down death* on the heights *where the battle raged.*

19The kings came, they fought;
the kings of Canaan made war.
They fought at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo,
but they won no spoils of silver.
20The stars themselves fought *against them*;
from the heavens, the stars fought against Sisera.
21The raging waters of Kishon swept them away,
the rushing waters, the raging waters of Kishon.
March forward, my soul, march on with strength!

22The hooves of the horses beat loudly;
the galloping of the horses echoed.

23"A curse on Meroz!" said the messenger of the Eternal One;
"May its people be bitterly cursed,
Because they did not come to help the Eternal,
to stand with the Eternal against the mighty foes!"
24But Jael,
the wife of Heber, the Kenite—most blessed of women is she,
favored above all women who dwell in tents!
25Sisera asked for water, and she gave him milk;
she gave him curds in a dish fit for lords.
26And then she took a tent peg in her *left* hand
and a worker's hammer in her right,
And she struck Sisera.
She broke and battered his head;
she pierced his temple.
27At her feet he bowed, he fell,
he dropped silent.
At her feet he fell, he dropped,
and where he dropped, there he lay dead.
28The mother of Sisera waited for him,
watching through the lattice of the window.
"Why is his chariot so long in returning?" she wondered.
"Where are the hoofbeats of his horses?"
29Her wisest ladies *in waiting* have answers—
in fact, she herself thinks she knows the reason.
30"Aren't they still dividing the spoils of a successful battle?
A girl or two given to every man;
Spoils of beautiful dyed cloth for Sisera,
spoils of dyed cloth, beautifully embroidered.
Indeed two pieces of beautiful embroidered cloth for my neck."

31So may all Your enemies perish,
O Eternal One!
But may those who love You be like the sun,
rising and going forth with power!

After this victory, the people knew peace *from war* for 40 years.

6 When the people of Israel *again* did what the Eternal One considered evil, He made them serve the Midianites for seven years. 2The power of Midian prevailed over Israel so that the Israelites built for themselves hiding places in the mountains, in caves, and in safe strongholds. 3Whenever the Israelites planted seed, *the soldiers of* Midian, Amalek, and others from the east would rise up against them 4and destroy their farms and fields as far as Gaza *in the west,* leaving them nothing to eat and no livestock. 5They would come up with their tents and their livestock, as thick as *a cloud of* locusts. They and their camels were so numerous they could not be counted, and they left the land desolate behind them.

6So the people of Israel were impoverished because of the Midianites, and they cried out to the Eternal One *for help.* 7When the people of Israel cried to the Eternal for relief from the Midianites, 8He sent a prophet to them.

Prophet: Here are the words of the Eternal God of Israel: "I brought you out

from slavery in Egypt. 9I delivered you
from the Egyptians, from all who would
have oppressed you. I drove *the Canaan-*
ites out before you and delivered their
land into your care. 10But I said to you, 'I
am the Eternal One, your True God, and
you must not worship the gods of the
Amorites, those people in whose land
you settle.' And you have not listened
to Me."

► This unnamed messenger brings a familiar message, one we find coming from both well-known and unknown prophets in the Scriptures: "I am the Eternal God, and I have done many things for you. You swore to be My people, but you have turned away from Me and turned toward other gods."

God has brought the patriarch Abraham out of the east and initiated a relationship with him. Later the people of God make a covenant with Him, a sacred contract that both sides are expected to honor. When they are faithful to God and God's laws, the people of Israel prosper. Whenever the Israelites fall away from true belief and true practice, God withdraws His blessing from them. This messenger is simply reminding them of what they already know—as prophets sometimes must.

11Now in Ophrah, the Eternal's messenger
sat under an oak tree that belonged to
Joash the Abiezrite. Gideon, the son of
Joash, was beating out wheat in the wine-
press so that the Midianites could not see
what he was doing. 12The Eternal's mes-
senger appeared to Gideon.

Times are so bad that even when processing the wheat, one has to be quiet about it so that the Midianites do not notice and seize the food.

Messenger of the Eternal One: The Eternal One is with you, mighty warrior.

Gideon: 13Sir, if He is with us, then why
has all this misfortune come on us?
Where are all the miracles that our
ancestors told us about? They said,
"Didn't the Eternal deliver us out of
Egypt?" But now He has left us. He has
made us servants of the Midianites.

14The Eternal turned to Gideon and
addressed him.

Eternal One *(speaking through His messenger)*: Go out with your strength and
rescue Israel from the oppression of Mid-
ian. Do you understand that I am the
one sending you?

Gideon: 15But, Lord, how am I supposed
to deliver Israel? My family is the weak-
est in *the tribe of* Manasseh, and I am the
least of my family.

Eternal One: 16Go. I will be with you, and
you will totally destroy *the forces of* Mid-
ian as one man.

Gideon: 17If You do look on me with favor,
then give me a sign that I'm really hear-
ing from You. 18Wait here until I return
and bring out my offering and place it in
front of You.

Eternal One: I will stay here until you
return.

19So Gideon went into his house, cooked a
young goat, and made *cakes of* unleavened
bread from half a bushel of flour. He then
put the meat into a basket, poured the
broth into a pot, and brought the food out
to present it to Him under the oak.

Eternal One: 20Put the meat and the
unleavened bread on this rock, and pour
out the broth.

Gideon did as he was told. 21Then the
Eternal's messenger touched the meat and
bread with the tip of the staff he carried.
Fire raged out of the rock and consumed
the food, and the Eternal's messenger van-
ished from sight.

22Then Gideon realized that he had
been speaking to the Eternal's messenger.

Gideon: Have mercy on me, my Lord, the
Eternal, since I have seen Your messen-
ger face-to-face!

Eternal One *(speaking after the messenger had departed)*: 23Don't be afraid, *Gideon.*
Be at peace. You will not die.

Gideon expects sure death after conversing and looking on a divine manifestation of the Lord.

24Afterward Gideon built an altar to the Eternal there and called it "The Eternal One is Peace." It still stands at Ophrah in the land of the Abiezrites.

25That night, the Eternal spoke to Gideon.

Eternal One: Take your father's bull, the second bull, seven years old, and pull down your father's altar that has been consecrated to Baal. Then cut down the image of Asherah *made of wood* that is beside the altar. 26Then build correctly an altar to the Eternal One, your True God, on the top of this stronghold. *Build a fire* using the wood from the image; then take your father's bull and offer a burnt offering to Me.

27So Gideon took 10 of his servants and did as the Eternal had told him; but since he was worried about what his family and the people of the town might think, he did it at night *while they all slept.* 28Early the next morning, when the townspeople left their homes and saw the altar of Baal destroyed, the wooden image cut down, and the second bull offered on the new altar, 29they asked each other, "Who did this?"

After the investigation, it became clear that it was Gideon, the son of Joash, 30so they went to Joash's home and called for him.

People: Send out your son *Gideon.* He has torn down the *holy* altar of Baal and the Asherah image beside it, and he must die!

31Joash stood up as the *angry* crowd lined up against him.

Joash *(to the crowd)***:** Will you fight in place of Baal himself? Can you save him? Anyone daring to say such a thing will be put to death by morning! If Baal is indeed a god, then let him stand up for himself, because his is the altar that has been torn down.

32From that time on, Gideon was also called "Jerubbaal" ("Let Baal fight against him"), because he pulled down Baal's altar.

33At that time, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other people of the east had come together, crossed the Jordan, and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

34Then the Spirit of the Eternal touched Gideon; he sounded his trumpet, and the Abiezrites all gathered behind him. 35Gideon sent messengers to the members *of the tribe* of Manasseh and called them also to follow him. He also sent messengers to *the tribes of* Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they, too, gathered at his call.

36Then Gideon spoke to the True God.

Gideon: So that I can know if it's true that You plan to use me to rescue Israel, 37I am going to lay out a wool fleece on the threshing floor. *Tomorrow morning,* if it is wet with dew while the floor around it is dry, then I will know You are going to use me to deliver Israel, as You have told me.

38So the next morning, that was what he found. In fact, Gideon wrung enough water out of the fleece to fill a bowl, *while the floor around it remained dry. But Gideon still was not satisfied.*

Gideon *(to the True God)***:** 39Please don't be angry with me, and I will ask this one thing more. Please let me use the fleece again to prove *that You are with me.* But this time, *let me lay out* the fleece, and let it remain dry while all the floor around it is wet with dew.

40God did as he asked that night. *The next morning,* the fleece was completely dry, while all the floor around it was wet with dew. *Gideon knew that God was calling him to deliver Israel.*

7 So then Jerubbaal (Gideon) and all the troops with him rose early, and they camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of the Midianites was to their north, in the valley below the hill of Moreh.

Eternal One *(to Gideon)***:** 2You have too many warriors for Me to allow you to defeat the Midianites. As it is now, the people of Israel would *just deny Me the credit and* claim they had won the victory on their own. 3So go out and tell your army, "Any of you who are afraid and trembling are free to leave Mount Gilead."

After this announcement, 22,000 left, so Gideon reduced his army to 10,000.

Eternal One: 4You still have too many warriors. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you. When I say, "This one will fight for you," he will go with you; but when I say, "This one will not fight for you," then he will not go.

5So Gideon led his army down to the water.

Eternal One: All of those who lap water the way a dog drinks, put them to one side. All of those who go down on their knees to drink, put them on the other side.

6Three hundred of the men lapped up water by raising a hand to their mouths, and all the rest went down on their knees to drink.

Eternal One: 7I will use these 300 who lapped *from their hands* to deliver Israel and to give the Midianites into your hand. Send all the rest home.

8He kept jars and trumpets from the army and sent them back to their tents, but *distributed the jars and trumpets to* the 300 who stayed with him. The camp of Midian was in the valley below him.

9That very night, the Eternal spoke to Gideon.

Eternal One: Get up and attack the camp *of the Midianites* because I have given you victory over them. 10But if you should have any fear, take your servant Purah; scout out the camp, 11and listen to what they are saying, and afterward you will find you are strong enough to attack.

So Gideon and his servant Purah approached the outposts of the army's encampment. 12The Midianites and the Amalekites and other people of the east were as thick as locusts in the valley, and their camels were as numberless as the sands of the seashore.

13When Gideon arrived he overheard a man telling his neighbor about a dream he had.

Man: In my dream, a barley cake rolled into our camp. It came to the tent and hit it so hard the tent fell over. It turned over and collapsed.

Neighbor: 14That must symbolize the sword of Gideon, son of Joash the Israelite. Their God has given him victory over Midian and all its camp!

15When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He went back to the camp of Israel *and roused them.*

Gideon: Get up! The Eternal has given you victory over the army of Midian! *We strike now.*

16He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he gave them all trumpets and empty jars with torches placed inside of them.

Gideon: 17Watch me. Do what I do. When we come to the outskirts of their camp, do what you see me doing. 18When I and my company blow the trumpet, I want all of you to blow the trumpets all around the camp and to shout: "For the Eternal and for Gideon!"

19So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outskirts of the *Midianite* camp just after the middle watch had been posted. There they blew their trumpets and smashed the jars they had brought. 20All three companies *of men* blew their horns and shattered the jars *at about the same time*. They held the torches in their left hands, held the trumpets in their right, and together they shouted.

Men: A sword for the Eternal and for Gideon!

21They encircled the entire camp and *woke the Midianite force abruptly, so that* the Midianites cried out and fled. 22When the 300 trumpets sounded, the Eternal set the Midianites fighting against each other with their swords. The Midianites ran away *in panic* toward Beth-shittah, toward Zererah, to the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath. 23The men of Israel were summoned out of Naphtali and Asher and from all Manasseh, and they joined in the chase after the Midianite army.

24Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim.

Messengers: Come down now and fight against the Midianites, and seize the watering places from them as far as Beth-barah and to the Jordan *River*.

So the Ephraimites gathered, and they captured the watering places as far away

as Beth-barah and the Jordan. 25They also captured the two leaders of the Midianite army, Oreb and Zeeb; they executed Oreb at *the place we know today as* Oreb's Rock, and they executed Zeeb at Zeeb's Winepress as they chased after *the army of* Midian. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, *who was now* beyond the Jordan.

8 **Ephraimites** *(arguing angrily with Gideon)***:** Why did you treat us this way? Why didn't you tell us you were going to battle against the Midianites *so that we could join you*?

Gideon: 2*Really now,* what have I accomplished in comparison to you? Wouldn't you say that the gleanings left from Ephraim's grapes are better quality than the choicest of Abiezer's? 3God has given the Midianite captains Oreb and Zeeb into your hands, *and you have taken care of them.* What have I *and my 300 soldiers* done compared to that?

And they were calmed by this explanation.

4Gideon came to the Jordan, he and his 300 men, all of them tired *and hungry,* but they crossed to continue the chase. 5So he spoke to the people of Succoth.

Gideon: Please give some bread to my followers, for they are exhausted, and we are on the trail of the kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna.

Leaders of Succoth: 6Have you already chopped off the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna that we should go to the trouble of feeding your army?

Gideon: 7All right, then. When the Eternal has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and thistles.

8From Succoth, Gideon went up to Penuel and had the same conversation with them, asking for bread and being answered by the men of Penuel just as by the men of Succoth.

Gideon: 9When I return here victorious, I will tear down your tower!

10Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with an army of about 15,000 men, all that was left from the armies of the east, for they had lost 120,000 soldiers. 11Gideon approached them by the caravan trail east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked them when they least expected it. 12When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he followed and captured them, throwing their forces into complete disarray.

13When Gideon, son of Joash, returned from fighting by way of the Heres Pass, 14he captured and questioned a boy from Succoth and got from him the names of 77 leaders and elders of the town.

15Then Gideon came to Succoth.

Gideon: Look, here are Zebah and Zalmunna. Remember when you taunted me about them, saying, "Have you already chopped off the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna that we should worry about feeding your exhausted soldiers?"

16So he took the leaders of the city, and with the desert thorns and thistles, he flailed *the flesh of* the men of Succoth. 17He also shattered the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the town.

18Then Gideon approached the two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna.

Gideon: What can you tell me about the men you killed at Tabor?

Zebah and Zalmunna: They were just like you—like the sons of a king.

Gideon: 19They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Eternal lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you now.

20Gideon directed his firstborn son, Jether, to kill them, but Jether was afraid and couldn't draw his sword since he was only a boy.

Zebah and Zalmunna: 21Come and kill us yourself for a man is measured by his strength.

So Gideon executed them, and he took the crescents that had adorned the necks of their camels.

22Then the people of Israel spoke to Gideon.

People: Rule over us—you, your son, and then your grandson, for you have rescued us from the oppression of Midian.

Gideon *(refusing)***:** 23I will not rule over you, and neither will my son. The Eternal will reign over you.

[24]But I have a request to make. Each
of you, give me one of the earrings you
have taken as plunder.

(The enemy they defeated had gold earrings, as was the fashion of the Ishmaelites.)

People: [25]We will certainly do that.

So they spread a cloak, and each of the men threw in an earring he had taken as spoils of battle; [26]and the weight of the gold earrings was over 42 pounds of gold, which does not include the crescents, the ornaments, and the purple garments they had taken from the kings of Midian, and the collars they had taken from the necks of their camels.

[27]Gideon made it into a priestly vest, *sometimes used in seeking oracles,* and put it in his hometown of Ophrah. But the people of Israel made an idol of it, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family as well.

[28]This is how Midian was subdued by the people of Israel, and Midian never lifted up its head *to trouble them* again. During the time of Gideon, the land had 40 years of peace. [29]Jerubbaal *(Gideon),* son of Joash, went to live in his own home. [30]Gideon had 70 sons who were his own children, for he had many wives *and concubines,* [31]and his concubine in Shechem bore him a son whom he named Abimelech.

[32]Gideon, son of Joash, died after many years of life and was buried with his father Joash at Ophrah in the land of the Abiezrites.

► Gideon is one of the most powerful judges of Israel: he attacks and overthrows kings; he plunders their royal treasures; and after his great success against the land of Midian, the people of God actually want to make him their king. This desire is logical. Other peoples have kings to lead them into battle and to rule over them. Why not them? But this is not God's desire for His people, and Gideon knows that pain, destruction, and bloodshed follow when someone pursues the throne against God's will. Gideon tells them he will not rule them—and neither will his sons—so they can get that idea out of their heads. But the thirst for power leads to intrigue, and one of Gideon's sons plays on the people's continual desire for order at the hand of a king.

[33]As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites *turned away from the Lord, and they* began to prostitute themselves again to the Baals. They made Baal-berith their *chief* god. [34]The people of Israel did not remember the Eternal One, their True God, who had rescued them from the oppression of enemies on every side, [35]and they were not kind to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) despite all the good he had done for Israel.

9 Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, went to Shechem to the clan of his mother.

Abimelech *(to his mother's family)***:** [2]*Go,* and say this so that all the leaders of Shechem can hear you: "Is it better that 70 sons of Jerubbaal should be your rulers, or only one of them?" And remember that I share your own bone and flesh.

[3]So Abimelech's mother's kinsmen went out and repeated these words to the leaders of Shechem, and they were favorably disposed toward him because they said, "He is our brother." [4]They gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver out of the treasury of Baal-berith, and he used the money to hire some reckless and worthless men who followed him *and did his dirty work.*

[5]He went to his father's house in Ophrah and killed all 70 of his half-brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. (Only Jotham, the youngest, was left alive, because he hid.) [6]Then all the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo came together and crowned Abimelech king by the *great* oak tree at the pillar in Shechem.

[7]When Jotham was told *what had happened,* he climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim.

Jotham: Listen to me, all you who are the leaders in Shechem, so that God may listen to you.

[8]The trees once decided to go out
and anoint a king to rule them all.

They said to the olive tree,
"Reign over us."
9But the olive tree refused, saying,
"Should I stop producing the rich
oil used to honor both gods and
mortals so I can stand and sway
over the trees?"
10Then the trees went to the fig tree,
saying,
"You come and reign over us."
11But the fig tree refused, saying,
"Should I give up my sweetness *and*
stop producing my delicious fruit
so I can stand and sway over the
trees?"
12Then the trees said to the grapevine,
"You come and reign over us."
13But the vine *refused,* saying,
"Should I stop producing the wine
that cheers both gods and
mortals so I can stand and sway
over the trees?"
14At last the trees came to the *worthless*
thornbush, saying,
"You come and reign over us."
15And the thornbush said to the trees,
"If in good faith you want to anoint me
as your king,
then come and take refuge in
my shade *(of which there was*
precious little).
But if you haven't come in good faith,
then let fire come from my
brambles
and burn down the cedars of
Lebanon."

16Now if you have made this decision to crown Abimelech king in good faith, with sincerity, have acted honorably toward my father Jerubbaal and his family, and have treated him as his actions toward you deserve; 17you know how my father fought for you, risked his life for you, rescued you from the hand of the Midianites. 18But *now* here you are, rising up against my father's house, killing all of his sons, 70 of them, on one stone; and you have made Abimelech, the son of my father's slave woman, king over all the leaders of Shechem, simply because he is your kinsman. 19Well, *I say,* if you have acted honorably toward Jerubbaal and his family, then now may you take joy in Abimelech, and may he take joy in you.

20But if you have not *acted honorably,* then may fire come out of Abimelech and burn up the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo. May fire come from you and burn up Abimelech.

21When he had said these words, Jotham fled for his life to Beer, where he stayed because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech.

22Abimelech was king over Israel for three years. 23Then the one True God sent an evil spirit *to stir up dissension* between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. Consequently the leaders of Shechem acted with treachery against Abimelech; 24*and all of this happened* so that the brutal murder of Jerubbaal's 70 sons might be avenged and their bloodguilt laid upon their brother Abimelech, who had ordered their deaths, and on the leaders of Shechem who had lent their strength to his cause.

25*As a result of their new hatred for Abimelech,* the leaders of Shechem began to ambush travelers along the mountain roads, robbing everyone who passed by, and these robberies were reported to Abimelech.

26When Gaal, the son of Ebed, arrived in Shechem with his family, the leaders of Shechem trusted him. 27After they had been in the fields, gathered the grapes, and trampled them *for wine,* they celebrated a festival in the temple of their god. While they ate and drank, they insulted Abimelech.

Gaal: 28Who is this Abimelech, and who are we here in Shechem that we should serve him? Didn't the son of Jerubbaal and his deputy, Zebul, serve the men of Hamor, Shechem's father? Why then should we serve him? 29I wish this people were under my command! I would get rid of Abimelech. I would tell him, "Go ahead. Call out your army!"

30When Zebul, who governed the city, heard what Gaal, the son of Ebed, said, he was furious. 31Secretly he sent messengers to Abimelech.

Zebul's Message: Here's what's happening: Gaal, son of Ebed, and his family have come to Shechem, and they are igniting the city against you. 32You should go by night with your troops and lie in wait in the fields. 33Then in the morning, when the sun comes up, march on the city; and when Gaal and his forces come out to defend it, you can deal with them.

34Abimelech and his troops prepared to do just as Zebul suggested. Four companies

of men waited for morning. 35When Gaal, the son of Ebed, went outside, stood in the gate of the city, *and looked out,* Abimelech and his troops rose from their hiding places to attack.

Gaal *(seeing them)*: 36Look, Zebul, people are coming down from the mountaintops!

Zebul: It's just the shadows on the mountains. They must look like men to you.

Gaal: 37*No,* look! One company is coming right down the center, and another company is coming from the direction of the fortune-teller's tree!

Zebul: 38Where are your big words now? *Where is the loudmouth* who said, "Who is this Abimelech, that we should serve him?" Aren't these the men you insulted? Go on, fight them!

39So Gaal gathered the leaders of Shechem, and they fought against Abimelech's forces. 40Abimelech *overwhelmed Gaal and* chased him *and his men,* many of whom were wounded and fell along the way as they retreated, all the way to the gate. 41Abimelech remained in Arumah, and Zebul threw Gaal and his people out of Shechem.

42The next day the people of Shechem went out to work the fields. After hearing this news, Abimelech 43took his troops, divided them into three groups, and set an ambush in the fields.

When he saw the people emerge from Shechem, he ordered his troops to attack them. 44Abimelech and his men captured a forward position at the city gate, *cutting off any retreat.* Then the other two companies *of Abimelech's men* swept down on the people trapped in the fields and cut them down. 45Abimelech continued his attack all day long, until he had captured Shechem and killed everyone in it. Then he demolished the city and scattered salt over the place where it had once stood.

Abimelech here carries out a devastating act in antiquity that ensures the death of an agricultural area, both food and water sources, for subsequent generations.

46When those leaders inside the tower of Shechem heard this news, all of them entered into the stronghold of the temple of El-berith. 47Abimelech learned that all the leaders were in the tower, and 48he took his men up Mount Zalmon. There he took an ax, cut a bundle of firewood, and hoisted it atop his shoulders, ordering his men to quickly do the same. 49When they had all cut *and loaded* their wood, they followed Abimelech back to the stronghold, where they piled the wood against the walls and set fire to it, killing about 1,000 men and women inside the tower of Shechem.

50Next, Abimelech went on to Thebez. He laid siege to it, captured it, and 51discovered that in the city was a strong tower where the leaders and men and women of the city had locked themselves in to escape and had climbed onto the roof. 52So he stormed the tower, ready to burn this tower *as he had the other.* 53But *this time as he approached the entrance,* a woman dropped an upper millstone upon him, crushing his skull.

Abimelech *(to his armor-bearer)*: 54Take your sword and kill me. I won't have anyone say that I died like this—killed by a woman.

The young man killed Abimelech with the sword.

55When the people of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went back home.

56So God avenged the evil that Abimelech had committed against his father by murdering his 70 brothers, 57and the evil of the leaders of Shechem God brought back on their heads; everything happened just as Jotham, son of Jerubbaal, had prophesied when he cursed them all.

10 After Abimelech died, Tola (the son of Puah, son of Dodo), who was of the tribe of Issachar and who lived at Shamir in the highlands of Ephraim, rose to deliver Israel. 2He served as judge *and defender* of Israel for 23 years. When he died, he was buried at Shamir. 3After Tola died, Jair the Gileadite served as judge of Israel for 22 years. 4Jair had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys, and they had 30 towns, which are in the land of Gilead and are still called Havvoth-jair today. 5When Jair died, he was buried at Kamon.

6But again the people of Israel did what the Eternal considered to be evil right in front of Him. They worshiped the Baals and Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram

and Sidon, of Moab and Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. When they abandoned the Eternal and no longer worshiped Him, 7He became furious with them and placed them in servitude to the Philistines and Ammonites 8who crushed them and ruled over them for the next 18 years. They oppressed the Israelites east of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites, 9and the Ammonites crossed over the Jordan to attack the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim; therefore, Israel was desperate. 10Then the Israelites cried out to the Eternal.

Israelites: We have sinned against You because we have abandoned our True God and worshiped the Baals.

Eternal One: 11Haven't I delivered you *in the past* from *the armies of* the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, and the Philistines? 12Didn't I come through in your struggle against the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites? When they swept down on you *and over you,* didn't I hear your cries for help and rescue you? 13Yet you have abandoned Me to worship these other gods. That is why I am finished coming to your rescue. 14Why don't you go and cry for help to the gods you have chosen *instead of Me*? See if they will save you now in your time of trouble!

Israelites: 15We have sinned *against You.* Do to us as You think best, but please rescue us this one time more!

16They put away the foreign gods they had worshiped and returned to the Eternal, and He could not bear to witness their suffering any longer.

17The Ammonites had prepared for war and were camped in Gilead, so the people of Israel gathered troops and camped at Mizpah.

Gilead Commanders *(among themselves)***:** 18Whoever will lead the attack against the Ammonites will be the leader of all the people of Gilead!

11 Now Jephthah of Gilead was the son of a prostitute but a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead, 2but Gilead's wife bore other sons who grew up and drove Jephthah away because they did not want the son of another woman *other than Gilead's wife* to inherit anything from their father. 3So he ran away to the land of Tob, where he became the leader of a gang of bandits who followed him.

4-6When the Ammonites attacked Israel, the leaders of Gilead asked Jephthah to return from Tob to be their commander and lead them against the Ammonite invaders.

7Jephthah replied.

Jephthah: *Ha!* Aren't you the same people who hated me so much that you drove me from my father's house? And you come to me now and ask me for help?

8The leaders responded to Jephthah.

Leaders of Gilead: *You're right.* All the same we need your help. Come lead us against the Ammonites, and we will make you leader over *us and* all who live in Gilead.

9Jephthah asked the leaders of Gilead *a question.*

Jephthah: *Let me make sure I understand this*—if I come back with you to fight the Ammonites and the Eternal allows me to be victorious, you will really make me your leader?

Leaders of Gilead: 10May the Eternal be our witness. We will do as you say.

11So Jephthah returned with the leaders of Gilead; the people made him their leader and commander, and Jephthah repeated his words before the Eternal at Mizpah.

12Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites.

Jephthah's Message: What do you have against me? Why are you attacking my people in my land?

13This king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah's messengers.

King of the Ammonites: Israel, when it traveled out of Egypt, took away my land from the Arnon *River* to the Jabbok and *from the Jabbok* all the way to the Jordan. Give it back, and we will be at peace.

14Jephthah once again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites.

Jephthah's Message: 15Here is my response *to your claim*: Israel did not

take away the land of the Ammonites or the Moabites. 16When my people came up out of Egypt, Israel passed through the desert to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh. 17At that time, Israel sent a messenger to the king of Edom, asking for permission to travel through his country. But the king would not hear us. Israel also sent *a request* to the king of Moab, but he also refused. So Israel remained *where they were,* at Kadesh.

18Then they traveled through the wilderness, passing around the lands of Edom and Moab; and on the eastern edge of Moab, they camped on the far bank of the Arnon, well outside the border of Moab. 19Israel then sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, in Heshbon, asking, "Let us pass through your land to reach our own country." 20But Sihon, too, did not trust Israel. He gathered his armies at Jahaz and went to war with us. 21Then the Eternal One, the True God of Israel, gave us victory over Sihon and all his people, and we defeated them *utterly*. That's why Israel occupied the land of the Amorites, who had inhabited that territory, 22all of the Amorite land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, from the wilderness to the Jordan. 23The Eternal One, the True God of Israel, conquered the Amorites for the good of His people, Israel. Do you think you can replace them?

24Are you unsatisfied with what your god, Chemosh, has given you? We will possess what the Eternal One, our True God has given us. 25Are you a greater king than Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever have a conflict with Israel or go to war against us? 26For 300 years we have occupied Heshbon and its surrounding villages, Aroer and its villages, and all the towns along the Arnon. Why haven't you ever attempted to recover them until now?

27I have not done any wrong to you, but you have wronged me by going to war against me *and my people*. So let the Eternal, the Judge over us all, decide today who will triumph in this conflict between Israel and Ammon.

28The king of the Ammonites ignored the message Jephthah sent him.

29Then the Spirit of the Eternal descended on Jephthah, and he traveled through Gilead and Manasseh, through Mizpah of Gilead to confront the Ammonite army.

30Jephthah made a vow to the Eternal One.

Jephthah: If you will give me victory over the Ammonites, 31then I will make a burnt offering of the first thing that comes out of my door to meet me when I return in victory.

32Jephthah went to battle, and the Eternal gave him victory over the Ammonites. 33His army conquered 20 towns, from Aroer to near Minnith all the way to Abelkeramim, and Israel defeated Ammon decisively.

34But when Jephthah came home *in triumph* to Mizpah, who should rush out to meet him but his daughter, dancing and playing a tambourine? She was his only child; he had no other sons or daughters. 35When Jephthah saw her, he tore his clothes *in grief*.

Jephthah: O, my daughter, no! You have just made me miserable; you have brought me to my knees! I have made a vow to the Eternal, and I cannot break it.

Daughter: 36My father, the Eternal God has given you victory over your enemies the Ammonites. If you have made a vow to Him, then do what you have promised to do to me.

37But please give me two months to go and weep in the highlands with my friends, since I will never love a man *and raise a family*.

Jephthah: 38You may go.

She and her friends went away and wailed upon the mountains because she would never know the love of a man; 39then when two months had passed, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. Since she had never slept with a man, a custom arose in Israel 40that every year the young women in Israel would go out for four days to lament *the fate of* the daughter of Jephthah of Gilead.

► The judges are often people of great faith or great strength or great power who lead and direct. But like all of us, they are imperfect and sometimes make grave mistakes. Jephthah's name is now remembered mostly

because of the foolish vow he makes to sacrifice the first thing he sees when he returns from his great victory. Although this vow comes out of his unfaithfulness—Jephthah does not trust God to give him victory—Jephthah shows immense faithfulness in keeping his word despite the tragic consequence of losing his only child.

12 *Some time later,* the men of *the northern tribe of* Ephraim mustered their forces, crossed over to Zaphon, and confronted Jephthah.

Ephraimites: What do you mean, going to war with the Ammonites without asking us to fight with you? *You left us out of the battle just as Gideon did.* We'll burn your house down with you in it!

Jephthah: 2My people and I were in the middle of a great struggle with the Ammonites, *who had us in an iron grip.* But when I called for help, you didn't show up to deliver me out of their hand. 3So when I saw you weren't going to help, I took my fate in my own hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and the Eternal gave me the victory. So why are you here now to fight against me?

4Jephthah gathered the men of Gilead and went to war with Ephraim. The men of Gilead defeated them because the Ephraimites told them they were *rabble,* fugitives from *the tribes of* Ephraim and Manasseh, *renegades who had abandoned their tribes.*

5The men of Gilead captured the fords in the Jordan that led to Ephraim. Whenever a surviving Ephraimite asked to cross over, the men of Gilead would ask, "Are you from Ephraim?" If the man said no, 6they told him, "All right. Say 'Shibboleth.'" And if he said "Sibboleth," they took him and killed him, for he could not pronounce it correctly, *betraying that he was from Ephraim.* So there at the fords of the Jordan 42,000 Ephraimites were killed in those days.

► The dialect difference between the "sh" sound on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead and the "s" sound on the west side of the Jordan in Ephraim is noticeable to both tribes.

7Jephthah led Israel as judge for 6 years, and when Jephthah of Gilead died, he was buried in a town in Gilead.

8After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem rose as judge of Israel. 9He had 30 sons and 30 daughters. To marry his sons, he brought in 30 young women from outside the clan, and he gave his 30 daughters in marriage to outsiders. Ibzan judged Israel 7 years; 10and when he died, he was buried at Bethlehem.

11After Ibzan, Elon the Zebulunite was judge of Israel for 10 years. 12When Elon the Zebulunite died, he was buried at Aijalon, in the land of Zebulun.

13After Elon, Abdon, the son of Hillel the Pirathonite, was judge of Israel. 14-15He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons; they rode on 70 donkeys. Abdon, son of Hillel the Pirathonite, judged Israel 8 years; and when he died, he was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

13 Once again, though, the Israelites did evil according to the Eternal God, and He gave the Philistines power over them for 40 years. 2*During that time,* a man of Zorah named Manoah, from the tribe of Dan, was married to a wife who could bear him no children.

Messenger of the Eternal One *(appearing to Manoah's wife)***:** 3You are barren and have no children, but *all of that is about to change.* You will conceive and have a son. 4Be careful that you don't drink wine or any other spirits *(strong drink),* and don't eat anything that is ritually impure, 5for you are going to become pregnant and have a son. Don't ever use a razor on his head, because you will raise this boy as a Nazirite, dedicated to the True God from his conception, and he will be the one to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines.

Manoah's Wife *(to her husband)***:** 6A man of the True God visited me. He looked like a messenger of God, awe-inspiring. I didn't ask where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name, 7but he told me that I was going to become pregnant and bear a son. He told me not to drink

wine or other spirits or to eat anything ritually unclean because our boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart for God from the day he is conceived until the day he dies.

Manoah *(to the Lord)*: [8]Eternal One, please let the man of God whom you sent visit us again and teach us what to do with the boy You are giving us.

[9]The True God heard Manoah and sent His messenger to visit the woman *one day* while she was in the fields. Manoah was not with her, [10]so she ran to tell him.

Manoah's Wife: Look, the man who spoke to me the other day is here again!

[11]Manoah got up, followed his wife, and came to where the man was.

Manoah *(to the messenger)*: Are you the one who spoke to my wife *the other day*?

Messenger of the Eternal One: I am.

Manoah: [12]When your words come true, what rules should we apply to the boy? What is his mission in life?

Messenger of the Eternal One: [13]Your wife should do as I told her *on my first visit*. [14]She must not eat or drink of the vine, she must not drink any other strong drink, and she must not eat foods that are ritually impure. She must do all that I have commanded.

Manoah: [15]If you will wait, we would like to prepare a young goat for you *to eat*.

Messenger of the Eternal One: [16]Even if you try to detain me, I will not eat your food. If you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the Eternal.

Manoah had not realized that he was speaking to the Eternal's messenger. [17]That is why he asked the Eternal's messenger a question.

Manoah: What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words become truth?

Messenger of the Eternal One: [18]Why do you ask my name? It is incomprehensible, *beyond human understanding*.

[19]Manoah took the young goat, together with the offering of grain, and sacrificed it on a rock to the Eternal, to the wonder-working God. While Manoah and his wife watched [20]the flame going up toward heaven from the altar, the Eternal's messenger rose up to heaven in the flames, and Manoah and his wife put their faces to the ground. [21]When he did not reappear, Manoah realized that they had seen the Eternal's messenger.

Manoah *(to his wife)*: [22]We are most certainly going to die, for we have seen the True God!

Manoah's Wife: [23]If the Eternal had desired to kill us, then He would not have accepted the grain and burnt offerings from us or shown us these wonders or brought these announcements at this time.

[24]*In due time,* the woman did bear a son, and she named him Samson. The boy grew, the Eternal God blessed him, [25]and the Spirit of the Eternal One began to move in him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

14 Samson went down *from the hill country* to *the Philistine town of* Timnah, *on the coastal plain,* and he saw a Philistine woman there. [2]When he came home, he told his parents,

Samson: I saw this woman in Timnah *who captured my attention*. She's a Philistine, *but I want her for a wife. I beg you,* make the arrangements for her to be my wife.

Samson's Parents: [3]*What?* Isn't there a single woman among your tribe, among all of our people, *the people of Israel?* Do you have to take a wife from among the uncircumcised Philistines?

Samson *(to his father)*: *You have to* get her for me. She *is the one and* is pleasing in my eyes.

► The longer the Israelites are in Canaan, the more they find themselves drawn into the beliefs and practices of those around them. Samson, although he is a deliverer of his people and set aside by God, demonstrates the worst traits of his people. He

actually takes a wife from among the other people who are trying to conquer Canaan, the Philistines.

But in all of this, we are told, God is working out a purpose; Samson has the Spirit of God. Not only does God use imperfect human beings for His own designs, but God can use human weakness to achieve His goals. Samson's weakness, although it leads to his personal destruction, becomes God's strength and leads to great victories for Israel.

4Samson's parents did not know that this passion was planned by the Eternal, who was working out a way to move against the Philistines who ruled over Israel.

5Samson and his parents went down to the vineyards of Timnah. While they were traveling, a young lion roared at him. 6The Spirit of the Eternal moved upon Samson *in that instant,* and with his bare hands, he tore the lion apart as one might rend a small goat; but *since he was by himself when this happened,* he did not tell his parents what he had done. 7Afterward he continued on *to Timnah* and talked with the woman. Samson was quite taken with her *for she was very attractive.*

8So Samson returned later to marry her, and *on the journey,* he turned aside to see again the carcass of the lion *he had killed.* A swarm of bees was in the carcass, where they had made *their hive with* some honey. 9*Although he had been set aside as a Nazirite, and was not supposed to touch a corpse,* he scraped some honey out and went on, eating it from his hands. When he came to his parents, he gave some of it to them to eat, but he did not tell them where he had gotten it.

10His father went ahead to the *Philistine* woman, and Samson made a *wedding* feast *with food and drink,* as was the custom for young men *being married.* 11The Philistines *of the bridal party* invited 30 *men to serve as* companions for Samson *at the feast, since he had not brought any of his friends.*

Samson *(to the 30 young men)***:** 12I have a riddle for you. If you can solve it during the seven days we eat and drink here, I will give each of you a set of linen garments and a change of clothes. 13If you cannot solve it *in the seven days,* then you will have to give me 30 linen garments and 30 sets of clothes.

Thirty Men: Ask away. What is your riddle?

Samson: 14Out of the eater came
something to eat,
and out of the strong came
something sweet.

For three days the young men puzzled over Samson's riddle. 15On the fourth* day, they went to Samson's wife *and threatened her.*

Thirty Men: Trick your husband, *seduce him if necessary, whatever it takes* to find out the answer to this riddle, or we will burn down your father's house with you in it. Did you invite us to this party just to take away what is ours?

16Samson's wife *went to him and* wept in front of him.

Samson's Wife: You say you love me, but you don't. You asked my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer.

Samson: I haven't even told my parents the answer. Why should I tell you?

17She went on crying until the seventh day of the feast; and, at last, because she continued to bother him, he told her the answer. Then she reported it to the young men, 18so that before the sun went down on the last day of the feast, *they knew the answer.*

Thirty Men: What is sweeter than honey?
And what is stronger than a lion?

Samson: If you hadn't gone behind my back with my wife, you would never have found the answer to this riddle.

19The Spirit of the Eternal came upon Samson, and he immediately received great strength. He went down to *the Philistine town of* Ashkelon where he killed 30 men, took their possessions, and gave their garments in payment to the young men who had answered his riddle. Then, furious, he *left the feast and* went back up

* 14:15 Hebrew reads, "seventh."

to his father's house, [20]and Samson's wife was instead given to the companion who had been his best man.

15 Later, during the time of the wheat harvest, Samson tried to return to his wife, bringing with him a young goat.

Samson: I want to go in and be with my wife.

But his father-in-law refused.

Samson's Father-in-law: [2]*When you left us,* I thought you didn't want her anymore. So I gave her to your companion *from the feast*. Anyway her younger sister is much prettier than she is. Why don't you take her instead?

Samson: [3]This time no one will blame me when I hurt the Philistines.

[4]Samson went and caught 300 foxes. Tying them tail-to-tail, he put a torch between each pair of tails [5]so that when they were lit, the foxes ran into the fields of the Philistines *and burned everything up*. The grain standing in the fields burned, as well as the grain that had been gathered up along with the olive groves and the vineyards.

Philistines *(seeing the disaster)*: [6]Who did this?

Other Philistines: Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, because he gave Samson's wife away to his best man.

So the Philistines went and set their house afire, and Samson's wife and her father were burned alive.

Samson: [7]Is this how it's going to be? Then I won't stop until I have taken great revenge on you.

[8]So he fought them mercilessly and killed many of them. And then he went and hid out in a cave near the rock of Etam.

[9]A company of Philistines went up then and camped in Judah, where they made a raid against Lehi.

Men of Judah *(to the company of Philistines)*: [10]Why are you doing this?

Philistines: We've come up to capture Samson, to make him suffer the way he has made us suffer.

Then 3,000 men of Judah went to the rock of Etam to talk to Samson.

Men of Judah *(to Samson)*: [11]*Are you crazy?* The Philistines are our masters! *They have the upper hand.* Don't you know what you're doing to us?

Samson: I'm only paying them back for what they have done to me.

Men of Judah: [12]We've come to capture you and take you to the Philistines.

Samson: Will you swear not to kill me yourselves?

Men of Judah: [13]We agree not to kill you, but we will tie you up and hand you over to them.

So they tied him with two new ropes and led him away from *the cave near* the rock *of Etam*. [14]When the Philistines at Lehi saw them coming, they raised a mighty shout and ran to seize Samson. At that moment, the Spirit of the Eternal came upon Samson, and he immediately had great strength. He broke free of the ropes on his arms, as if they were no more than string burned with fire, and the bonds fell from his hands. [15]Grabbing up a fresh jawbone of a donkey, *he began fighting them. That day* he killed 1,000 Philistines.

Samson *(singing)*: [16]With the jawbone of a donkey,
I have piled them high.
With the jawbone of a donkey,
I have killed 1,000 men.

[17]When he finished his *triumphant* song, he threw away the jawbone, and he called that place Ramath-lehi, *"the high place of the jawbone."* [18]He was now very thirsty *from his exertion,* and he cried to the Eternal.

Samson: You have given this great victory into my hands. But am I going to die of thirst now and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised *Philistines*?

[19]Then God split open a place in the rock at Lehi so that water gushed out. When Samson drank, he found his strength returned and his spirit revived. So that

place was called En-hakkore, *"the spring of the one who called,"* and it is still in Lehi to this day.

20Samson judged *and delivered* Israel during the days of the Philistines for 20 years.

16 When Samson went to Gaza, he saw a prostitute there *who pleased him,* so he went in to be with her. 2Word went out to the men of Gaza that Samson had arrived. So they surrounded the house and waited quietly for him at the city gate, thinking, "When morning comes, we will strike him down." 3But Samson *fooled the men of Gaza: he* stayed with the prostitute only until midnight. Then he rose *from the bed,* took hold of the closed city gates, and pulled them, still barred, and the posts that held them, out of the ground. Then he hoisted them onto his shoulders and carried them up onto the hill in front of Hebron.

4After this he fell in love with Delilah, a woman from the valley of Sorek. 5The rulers of the Philistines came to her *with a plan.*

Philistine Rulers: If you can charm him into giving you the secret of his great strength so that we can overpower and capture him, each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver.

6Delilah *agreed. On one of their visits, she* questioned him.

Delilah *(to Samson)***:** What makes you so strong? How could anyone bind you and control you?

Samson: 7If you were to bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not dried yet, I would be weak and no different from any other man.

It seems as though Samson is toying with Delilah in his answer.

8The Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven fresh bowstrings. *As Samson slept,* she bound him with them. 9When the warriors had taken their places in the inner chamber, Delilah called out to him.

Delilah: *Wake up,* Samson! The Philistines are attacking!

But he snapped the bowstrings the way a thread snaps when it is touched by a flame *and fended off the attackers.* So the secret of his strength remained hidden.

Delilah *(to Samson)***:** 10You're making fun of me now. You haven't told me the truth. Please tell me: how could I bind you *and take away your strength*?

Samson: 11If you were to bind me with new ropes that have never been used, I would be weak and no different from any other man.

12Using new ropes Delilah bound Samson as he slept. When the warriors had taken their places in the inner chamber, Delilah called out to him.

Delilah: *Wake up,* Samson! The Philistines are attacking!

But he snapped the ropes like a thread *and fended off the attackers. So the secret of his strength remained hidden.*

Delilah *(to Samson)***:** 13You just go on making fun of me. You haven't told me the truth. *Please* tell me: how could I bind you *and take away your strength*?

Samson: If you were to weave my seven locks of hair into the loom's web and make it tight with a pin, I would be weak and no different from any other man.

14While he slept, Delilah wove his seven locks of hair into the loom's web and tightened it with the weaver's comb. *When the warriors had taken their places in the inner chamber,* Delilah called out,

Delilah: *Wake up,* Samson! The Philistines are attacking!

But Samson woke up and *easily* pulled out the comb from the loom and *his hair from* the web *and fended off the attackers. So the secret of his strength remained hidden.*

Delilah: 15How can you say you love me when *your actions prove* your heart is somewhere else? Three times now you've lied to me and haven't told me why you have such great strength.

16She continued to ask him, day after day, always nagging; *and finally* he was tired of it, so tired he couldn't stand to hear it any longer. 17Samson told her the truth.

Samson: I have been a Nazirite, set aside to God since I was in my mother's womb, and my hair has never been cut. If my head were shaved, my strength would vanish. I would be weak and no different from any other man.

18 Delilah at last saw that he was telling her the truth. She sent for the rulers of the Philistines and told them, "This time he has told me his whole secret." So the lords of the Philistines came, bringing the money *they had promised to pay her for betraying Samson.*

► Samson's bride and Delilah are both presented as unfaithful and deceitful, and Delilah's name has become synonymous with any wily and seductive woman who wants to ruin a man. Although these betrayals are part of God's purpose, some readers have used these particular stories to put down all women. It's good to remind ourselves that earlier in the Book of Judges God uses Deborah and Jael, brave and strong women, to achieve His purpose. The characters in the story of God's people—men and women alike—are sometimes good and sometimes evil. Even a Levite, someone set aside to the priesthood of God, can behave with selfishness and cowardice.

19 She helped Samson fall asleep in her lap and called in a man to shave off the seven locks of Samson's hair. Immediately his strength left him. 20 *This time* she called to him.

Delilah: *Wake up,* Samson! The Philistines are attacking!

His strength was gone. Samson woke up and thought he would shake himself free, as he had before, because he did not know that *the Spirit of* the Eternal had left him.

21 But this time the Philistines seized *and held* him. They put out his eyes. Then they took him to Gaza, where they bound him with bronze chains and put him to work grinding grain in the prison mill. 22 But while he was there, his hair began to grow back.

23 One day, the rulers of the Philistines gathered for a festival of sacrifice to their god Dagon to celebrate Dagon giving their *great* enemy, Samson, into their control. 24 Whenever the Philistines saw Samson *trudging in the mill,* it made them joyful.

Philistines: Our god has given us the great ravager of our land, *Samson,* who killed so many of us.

25 And during the festival when they were feeling merry, they called for Samson.

Philistine Mob: Bring Samson out, and have him entertain us.

So Samson was led out of the prison *and brought before all the people gathered for the festival.* They displayed him between the pillars for their entertainment, 26 and Samson spoke to the boy leading him.

Samson: Put me between the main pillars, the ones that hold up the roof, so that I can lean against them.

27 For this occasion the building was full of people—men and women and all the rulers of the Philistines were there. About 3,000 people stood on the roof watching as Samson leaned against the pillars. *The crowd watched and waited with anticipation.*

Samson *(crying out to the Lord)*: 28 Lord, Eternal One, remember me and fill me with strength this one last time, O True God, so that with this *last* act of revenge I can pay back the Philistines for the loss of my sight.

29 He took hold of the two main pillars of the building, the ones supporting the roof, and he leaned hard against them, his right hand on one, his left hand on the other.

Samson: 30 Let me die here with the Philistines.

He pushed with all his might. *The pillars gave;* the building collapsed on the rulers and all the *Philistine* people who were in it. The number *of enemies* that he killed at his death was greater than the number *of Philistines* he had killed during the rest of his life.

31 Then his brothers and the rest of his family came down *from the hill country* and took his body back up to be buried between *the towns of* Zorah and Eshtaol in the burial ground of his father Manoah. Samson had been judge of Israel for 20 years.

17 A man named Micah lived in
the hill country of Ephraim.

Micah *(to his mother)*: 2Do you remember those 1,100 pieces of silver that were stolen from you? I heard you curse the person who took them. Well, I have them. I took them, *and now I want to return them to you.*

Micah's Mother: May my son be blessed by the Eternal!

3He returned the 1,100 pieces of silver to her.

Micah's Mother: I want to give this silver *as a holy offering* to the Eternal from me for my son to create an image in cast silver.

4After Micah returned the silver, she took 200 of the coins returned by her son and gave them to the silversmith, who cast an idol that was kept in Micah's house. 5Micah had a shrine, and *in his house* he had a priestly vest *used in seeking oracles* and the *images of* household gods. He had set aside one of his sons to be his priest. 6In those days *of the judges,* there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what seemed right in his own eyes.

7Now in Bethlehem in Judah, there was a young man who was a Levite, *from the tribe of priests,* and he was sojourning among the clan of Judah. 8He left Bethlehem in Judah to make his way as best he could. On his way, he arrived at Micah's home in the hill country of Ephraim *seeking work*.

Micah: 9Where are you from?

Levite: I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am *traveling and* looking for a place to live *and work*.

Micah: 10You can stay here. Be a father and a priest to me; and I will give you 10 silver pieces a year, a set of clothes, and your room and board.

11The Levite agreed to stay with Micah and came in to live with him like one of his sons. 12So Micah installed the Levite as priest in his house.

Micah: 13Now I know that the Eternal will look with favor on me, since I have invited this Levite to be my priest.

18 During this period, Israel had
no king, and the tribe of Dan was searching for a territory they could call their own because at that time they had not been assigned land among the other peoples of Israel. 2So the people of Dan chose five brave men from out of the entire tribe, men from *the towns of* Zorah and Eshtaol, to explore the land and to seek *a new home for them*. "Go and explore the land," was their charge.

When they reached the hill country of Ephraim, they stayed in Micah's home. 3As they came near Micah's house, they recognized from his speech that the Levite priest was not from around there.

Danite Spies *(to the young Levite)*: Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?

Levite: 4*To make a long story short,* Micah made all this happen for me and put me to work. I serve him as his priest.

Danite Spies: 5Ask the True God if our mission will succeed.

Levite: 6Go in peace. The Eternal is watching over you on this mission.

7The five spies went on their way and came to Laish, *in the northern of the land of Canaan,* where they observed that the people seemed to live without concern for their security, like the people of Sidon, quiet and without suspicion, lacking in nothing, and in peace. They were far from Sidon and were not allied with anyone.

8So the men returned to their people at Zorah and Eshtaol, who wanted to hear their report. *They told their people about the land of Laish.*

Danite Spies: 9Come on, let's *gather our forces and* go to war against them, for we have seen the land and it is good. Why are you just sitting there? Don't waste another minute here. Let's go in and take that land. 10When you get there, you'll see that they don't suspect any danger. The land is large and is full of every good thing on earth, and God has given it into our hands.

11Then 600 men from the tribe of Dan armed themselves for war and set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. 12These warriors *of Dan* went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim, *or city of forests,* in Judah, which is

why the place just to the west is still called Mahaneh-dan, *camp of Dan*. 13From there, they entered the hill country of Ephraim and approached Micah's house. 14The five spies who had scouted out the land of Laish spoke to their fellow warriors.

Danite Spies: Did you know that in these houses *(the village where Micah lived)* are a priestly vest, their household gods, and a cast image of silver? Give some thought to what you would like to do now.

15They turned and went in the direction of the young Levite's house at Micah's place and greeted him. 16So the 600 Danite warriors waited outside the gate, ready to attack, 17while the five men who had spied out the land were to go inside to take the sacred objects: the ritual vestment, the household gods, and the cast image of silver. The priest stood at the gates with the warriors; 18and when the five took the priestly vest, household gods, and the cast image of silver, he said to them,

Levite: What are you doing?

Danite Spies: 19Be quiet. Keep silent, come with us, and be a father and a priest to us. Isn't it better for you to be priest and father to an entire tribe and clan of Israel than to a single household?

20The priest agreed. He took possession of the ritual vestment, household idols, and carved image and joined the people *of Dan on their journey*. 21They traveled on, putting their children, livestock, and their possessions in front of the procession. 22But when they had traveled some distance from Micah's home, his friends who lived nearby gathered together and chased after the people of Dan.

When they caught up to them, 23they shouted after the people of Dan.

Danites *(to Micah)***:** What's wrong? What brings so many of you out after us?

Micah: 24*What's wrong?* You steal my household gods and my priest and go off, and where does that leave me? What do you mean, "What's wrong?"

Danites: 25You would be wise to lower your voice, or else some hot-tempered individuals *among us* are likely to attack you. Then you'll lose your life and the lives of those you care about.

26With this the people of Dan went on their way. Micah saw that there were too many of them for him *to protest any further,* so he turned and went back home.

27The people of Dan, having taken Micah's household gods and his priest, came to Laish; and there they attacked those people who were quiet and without suspicion, killed them *without mercy,* and burned down their city. 28No one came to save the people of Laish, since they were far from Sidon and had no treaties with anyone. This all happened in the valley that is near Beth-rehob, *house of a broad place*. The Danites rebuilt the city there and lived in it. 29They changed the name of the city from Laish to Dan, after their ancestor and namesake who was born to Israel *(also called Jacob)*. 30There the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan (son of Gershom, son of Moses) and his sons became the priests to Dan and were their priests until the people of Israel were taken off into captivity. 31They kept the carved image of Micah as their own for as long as the house of the True God was at Shiloh.

19 During this period, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite from the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim had a mistress* from Bethlehem in Judah. 2But she was unfaithful to him and returned home to her father in Bethlehem in Judah, and was away from the Levite for four months. 3Then he went after her, to speak kindly with her and convince her to come home with him. He brought his servant and two donkeys with him. When the Levite reached her father's house, the woman's father saw him and went joyfully out to welcome him and brought him into the house.

4Her father made him stay for three days, so the Levite stayed there, eating and drinking. 5On the fourth day, they got up early to prepare to leave.

The Woman's Father: *What's your hurry?* Have something to eat, build up your strength, and then you can go.

6So the two men ate and drank.

* 19:1 Throughout this account (19:1–20:47) of the Levite and his relationship with the mistress, the Hebrew uses the term for a married couple. Because the English terminology for marriage does not reflect the relationship revealed in this account, marriage is not used.

The Woman's Father: Why don't you stay another night and enjoy yourself?

7When the Levite got up to go, his mistress's father kept urging him to stay, so, at last, he did.

8On the fifth day, they got up early to prepare to leave.

The Woman's Father: *What's your hurry?* Have something to eat; build up your strength *this morning*. Wait and leave this afternoon.

So the two men sat, eating *and drinking*.

9When the Levite, his mistress, and his servant got up to go, the woman's father tried to persuade them.

The Woman's Father: Look, it's almost evening. The day is almost gone. Why don't you stay another night and enjoy yourself? Tomorrow you can rise early and begin your trip home.

10But the Levite did not want to stay another night; he gathered them, and they set out. They reached the city of the Jebusites (the city we call Jerusalem), riding on donkeys. 11When they were near the city of the Jebusites, the day was almost done.

Servant: Let's spend the night here in this city of the Jebusites.

Levite: 12No, we won't stop here in this city of foreigners, people who are not of Israel, but we'll travel on to Gibeah. 13Let's see if we can reach one of those towns and spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.

14So they traveled on, and the sun set as they were at Gibeah, which belongs to *the tribe of* Benjamin. 15They turned off the road, with the intention of staying the night, and went to sit in the city square yet no one invited the Levite and his party home to spend the night.

As was the social custom in antiquity, hospitality is a significant mark of honor. Likewise inhospitality is a significant mark of social shame.

16At last, after evening fell, an old man coming in from his work in the fields noticed them. He was not of the people of Benjamin, but a man from the hill country of Ephraim who was living in Gibeah. 17The old man saw them sitting there in the square.

Old Man: Where are you going? Where are you from?

Levite: 18We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the far parts of the hill country of Ephraim. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am returning to my home. No one yet has offered us hospitality. 19We, your servants, have straw and food for the donkeys, and we also have bread and wine, enough for me, my mistress, and my young servant. We don't require anything else.

Old Man: 20Peace be with you. I will take care of everything you need, but do not spend the night in the square.

21The old man took them home and fed their donkeys. They washed *the dust of the road from* their feet, ate, and drank. 22While they were eating and drinking, the men of the city, an evil assembly, surrounded the house and began beating on the door. They called to the owner.

Men of the City: Bring out *your guest,* the man whom you have welcomed into your house. We want to have sexual relations with him!

Old Man *(pleading with them)***:** 23I beg you. Don't do this wicked thing to the traveler I have welcomed into my care. 24I have a virgin daughter, and this man has a mistress. I will bring them out to you to do what you want with them, but don't dishonor my guest with your wickedness.

25The men would not listen. At last the Levite seized his mistress and pushed her outside. They raped her repeatedly and abused her all night long until the sun came up, when they left her alone. 26Then the woman crept to the doorway of the house where her master had spent the night. She collapsed and lay there as the sun rose in the sky. 27Her master, at last, woke and rose; and when he went to the door to prepare to go on his way, there was his mistress, lying near the doorway, her hands on the threshold.

Levite: 28Get up. It's time for us to go.

But she could not answer him. He put her body on the donkey and set out for home.

29When he reached his house, he
went in and found a knife. Then holding
her firmly, he cut her body up into twelve
pieces, cut her limb from limb, and these
he sent throughout Israel. 30*And as the
pieces were received,* anyone who saw this
horrible display said, "Nothing like this
outrage has ever happened in Israel since
we came up from the land of Egypt. Think
about it, weigh it carefully, and decide
what to do."

► Certainly the "outrage" the Israelites are reacting to is the Levite's brutal dismemberment of the woman. Why would someone slaughter a woman and send her parts across the country? What is the meaning behind this heinous crime?

Once they hear the Levite's story of his attack by the Benjaminites, the community of Israel supports the Levite and holds Benjamin accountable for the Gibean men's wicked actions. When all the tribes come to the aid of the Levite, we see an Israel that is united—against Benjamin. This story lays the groundwork for our understanding of relations between the tribes as Israel enters the monarchical period. Saul, the first king and a Benjaminite, will abandon the laws of his God and will be replaced by David from Judah, who has the support of the rest of Israel.

20 All the people of Israel from
Dan to Beersheba, including
the people who dwelt *beyond
the Jordan River* in Gilead, gathered as one
before the Eternal at Mizpah. 2The leaders of every tribe, of all the tribes of Israel,
presented themselves to the assembly, to
the 400,000 soldiers armed for war. 3(And
the people of Benjamin heard that the
other tribes had gathered at Mizpah.)

Israelites: Tell us, what happened to bring about this criminal act?

Levite *(standing in front of the assembly)*: 4I arrived in Gibeah in Benjamin with my mistress. We only wanted to spend the night, 5but the leaders of the city came to the house where we were staying and surrounded it, *wanting to attack me.* They intended to kill me, but they raped my mistress until she died. 6So I took her body and cut her into pieces and sent her throughout our land that is Israel's inheritance so that everyone could know what an outrage the men of Gibeah have committed! 7So now, you people of Israel, I am looking to you for counsel. What should we do?

Not only is this act an outrage against the custom of hospitality in that day, but it is a gross violation of the life of another human being.

Israelites *(standing together)*: 8We will not return to our tents, and we will not go home to our houses, 9but this is what we will do to Gibeah: We will cast lots to choose who will go into battle against it. 10We will also choose 10 men from every 100 throughout Israel, 100 of every 1,000, and 1,000 of every 10,000 to bring provisions for the troops who will go to repay the disgrace done by Gibeah of Benjamin against the rest of Israel.

11So all the people of Israel gathered against Gibeah, united *in their judgment, intent on action.*

12The tribes of Israel sent messengers throughout the land of Benjamin.

Messengers: *Do you know what has happened?* What about this crime that has been committed among you? 13Turn over those perverted men from Gibeah so we can put them to death and cleanse this evil from Israel!

But the people of Benjamin would not listen to their kinsmen, the *other* tribes of Israel. 14The Benjaminites gathered together, out of their towns, to Gibeah to go to battle against the rest of Israel. 15-16They gathered a force of 26,000 armed men, in addition to the men of Gibeah, all of them worthy fighting men. Seven hundred of these were left-handed warriors who could sling a stone so accurately that they could hit any target, no matter how small.

17Opposing them were the forces of Israel, 400,000 warriors strong.

18The people of Israel went up to Bethel to ask of the True God who should press the first day's attack.

Israelites: What tribe should lead us in battle against Benjamin?

God: Judah shall lead the attack.

19The people of Israel rose up in the morning and encamped against Gibeah, 20where they went into battle against *the warriors of* Benjamin. 21That first day the warriors of Benjamin came out of Gibeah *and won a great victory,* striking down 22,000 warriors of Israel.

23The people of Israel presented themselves before the Eternal and wept until evening came. They laid before Him the question:

Israelites: Should we go back into battle *tomorrow* against our kin, the Benjaminites?

Eternal One: *Yes.* Go back into battle.

22The warriors of Israel took courage and drew up their battle lines where they had been at the beginning of the fight on the first day.* 24-25*In obedience to God,* for a second day the Israelites advanced against the Benjaminites. But the warriors of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, struck down 18,000 warriors of Israel, *and won another great victory.*

26So all the people of Israel, all the warriors, went back to Bethel to weep before the Eternal. They fasted until evening came, and then they offered sacrifices and burnt offerings before the Eternal. 27Again the Israelites questioned the Eternal (for in those days, the covenant chest was still with them, 28and *the priest* Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it.)

Israelites: Should we go back again into battle against our kin, the Benjaminites, or should we give up?

Eternal One: Go up again. Tomorrow I will give you victory.

29So *the warriors of* Israel *changed their strategy and* secretly stationed warriors around Gibeah, ready to ambush *the Benjaminites.* 30The third day they lined up as before and went into battle against Gibeah. 31When the warriors of Benjamin came out, they were drawn away from the city. As before, they began to draw blood, striking down their foes along the main roads (one of which goes to Bethel, the other back to Gibeah) as well as in the open country. About 30 men of Israel fell, 32and the warriors of Benjamin thought they would succeed again.

Benjaminites: This is just like the first time! We're going to destroy the Israelites today just as we did earlier.

But the Israelites were following a new plan: they began to retreat to draw the Benjaminites farther away from the city toward the roads. 33So the majority of Israelite troops pulled back to a line at Baal-tamar, while the *hidden* group waiting in ambush rushed out of their hiding place on the plain in Maareh-geba. 34Then 10,000 of the hardiest Israelite warriors rushed against Gibeah. The battle was a fierce one, and the warriors of Benjamin did not realize that their end was near. 35For the Eternal defeated Benjamin *that day* before the people of Israel, who killed 25,100 of them, almost all their men at arms. 36-37Then the people of Benjamin realized their *crushing* defeat.

The warriors of Israel had retreated before their foes, trusting the men lying in ambush who had rushed upon Gibeah and destroyed the entire city. 38Their plan was that when the ambushers sent a cloud of smoke from the city, 39the main force would turn on the pursuing warriors of Benjamin, thinking that since they had already slain 30 men *and the warriors* of Israel *were retreating,* they were going to be victorious over them again.

40But the Benjaminites were surprised. *The Israelite warriors who entered Gibeah* sent up a towering column of smoke; and the warriors of Benjamin turned around to see *their refuge,* the entire city, burning! 41The main force of Israel turned *and began attacking fiercely,* and the warriors of Benjamin lost heart, for their doom was upon them. 42-43They ran from the warriors of Israel toward the wilderness, but they were caught, both from behind and by the victorious soldiers emerging from the ruined Gibeah.

The slaughter continued *from Nohah* to the east of Gibeah, 44and 18,000 courageous warriors fell. 45Of those who turned and fled in the direction of the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, 5,000 of those were slain on the main road and another 2,000

* 20:22 Verses 22 and 23 have been transposed to help clarify the sequence of events.

were pursued as far as Gidom. 46So in all, the people of Benjamin suffered the loss of 25,000 fighting men, all of them courageous warriors.

47Six hundred of them survived; they had fled to the rock of Rimmon, where they remained for four months. 48*In the meantime,* the warriors of Israel had *done their best to* destroy the people of Benjamin, killing them, destroying their livestock, and burning every city and town they encountered.

21 One thing the people of Israel had sworn *in their council* at Mizpah was that no tribe would give wives to the men of Benjamin. 2The people returned to Bethel, *house of God,* and there they cried out and wept bitterly before the True God until evening.

Israelites: 3Why, Eternal One, True God of Israel, has this happened? Why do we have one less Israelite tribe today?

4The next day, the people rose early and built an altar, and they made sacrifices and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Israelites: 5What tribe, of all of the tribes of Israel, did not come up to the assembly of the Eternal *at Mizpah*?

For they had also taken a solemn oath that whoever did not come before the Eternal at Mizpah would be put to death.

6The people of Israel were moved with pity toward their kin, the tribe of Benjamin.

Israelites: *Look,* one tribe of Israel has been cut off from the rest of us. 7How can the survivors of Benjamin get wives, since we have all sworn by the Eternal not to give them our daughters? 8Are there any of the tribes of Israel that did not come up before the Eternal at Mizpah?

And it turned out that nobody from Jabesh-gilead had come up to the assembly; 9when the roll was called *throughout the camp,* none from Jabesh-gilead were present.

10-11So those gathered there commissioned 12,000 courageous fighting men to go and destroy Jabesh-gilead. "Kill them all," they instructed, "every man, every woman who has been with a man, every child." 12They found 400 virgins among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, and they returned these to the camp of Shiloh in the land of Canaan. 13Then those gathered sent word to those warriors of Benjamin *in exile* at the rock of Rimmon and proclaimed a peace. 14The men of Benjamin returned, and the people *of Israel* gave them the young women of Jabesh-gilead, but they were not enough for all of them.

15The people *of Israel* were filled with pity for *the people of* Benjamin, since the Eternal had separated them from their brothers of Israel.

Israelite Elders: 16What can we do to find more wives for the remaining men *of Benjamin,* since all the other Benjaminite women were destroyed? 17Benjamin must have heirs and survive, so that not a single tribe may disappear out of Israel. 18But we cannot give them our daughters, for we have sworn curses on anyone of us who gives wives to *the men of* Benjamin.

Israelites: 19Look, there is a yearly festival of the Eternal in Shiloh, north of Bethel, to the east of the road that links Bethel to Shechem and to the south of Lebonah.

20They told the Benjaminites to go and hide in the vineyards.

Israelites: 21Watch, and when the young women of Shiloh come out to participate in the dances, dash out, grab yourself a wife, and take her back home to Benjamin. 22Then if their brothers or fathers come to complain to us, we can say, "Be generous. We weren't able to capture enough brides for the men of Benjamin, so we needed more women. But none of you suffers the curse, since you didn't give your daughters of your own free will!"

23So that is what the men of Benjamin did: they kidnapped wives for themselves from the dancers *at the festival* and took them back home, where they rebuilt their towns and lived in them again. 24And the people of Israel went out from their great gathering by their families and tribes, each back to their inheritances.

25During that period, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what seemed right to them.

RUTH

01 02 03 04 05 06

The struggles of one Jewish widow and her daughter-in-law

By an unknown author

The period of the Judges, after Israel's wandering in the desert and before the founding of the monarchy, is a time of anarchy. Israel's twelve tribes are divided, sometimes warring among themselves (as against the tribe of Benjamin) and sometimes banding together to fight other nations (as against Moab). Only one generation after Israel's last conflict with Moab, described in Judges 3, an Israelite couple living in Moab marries their sons to two Moabite women, one of whom is Ruth. Their willingness to invite a foreign woman into their home results in her conversion to the Israelite religion and lays the foundation for a complete picture of loving-kindness in the Bible. Within the Book of Ruth itself, Ruth and Boaz allow their love for each other to prevail both within and despite the customs of the day—Ruth following her mother-in-law back to Israel and Boaz ignoring harvest protocol to help this lovely woman, while also serving as a kinsman-redeemer—which results in a covenant marriage together. Within the story of God's love for humanity, captured in the Bible as a whole, Ruth is matriarch of a family that God uses to change the world. Her great-grandson, King David, will unite all the tribes of Israel as one nation under God. Her descendant, Jesus, will sacrifice Himself to save humanity.

In spite of its beautiful composition and well-developed narrative, Ruth's literary origins are mysterious. Traditionally accredited to the judge and prophet Samuel in the 11th century B.C., the actual author and date of this story are unknown. Some suggest it was written in Israel during the monarchy, based on its understanding of the laws, between the 10th and 7th centuries B.C.; others believe it was composed after 586 B.C. during the exile, based on its international characters and its occasional use of Aramaic phrases. Just as elusive is the compiler of the story, who was probably male but whose dedication to female lead characters reveals the women who helped him shape this story.

1 A long time ago, when judges still
ruled *over Israel* and the land was dried
up with famine, a man from Bethle-
hem, *which ironically means "place of bread,"*
left his home in Judah to live as a foreigner
in the land of Moab. He traveled with his
wife and their two sons. 2His name was
Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi; their
two sons were called Mahlon and Chilion.
They were *descendants* of Ephraim's tribe
from Bethlehem in Judah. They had settled
and made lives for themselves in Moab,
3but *soon after,* Elimelech died leaving
Naomi in the care of her sons. 4Each son
married a woman from Moab—one was
named Orpah, the other Ruth—and they
lived together for 10 years 5before Mahlon
and Chilion died also. Naomi was left alone,
without her husband and two sons.

6-7Word had reached Moab that the
Eternal One had *once again brought life
back to the land of Israel and* blessed His
people with food. Naomi prepared to
return with her daughters-in-law. With
Orpah and Ruth at her side, she began her
journey back to Judah, leaving the place
where she had lived.

Naomi *(to Orpah and Ruth)*: 8*You have
accompanied me far enough;* you must
both return *to Moab*. Go home to your
mothers' care *and your people*. May the
Eternal show His loyal love to you just
as you demonstrated it to my dead *sons*
and me. 9I hope He will bring you new
husbands and that you will find the rest
you deserve in their homes.

She *drew close,* kissed them, *and turned to
go on her way, alone*. But Orpah and Ruth
wailed and sobbed, crying out to her.

Orpah and Ruth: 10*Do not leave us!* We
insist you take us with you to *live with
you and* your people.

Naomi: 11Go back *to your homes,* my
daughters. What possible reason would
you have for returning with me? Do you
think there are more sons inside of me?
Will you marry these unborn sons? 12*Lis-
ten to me,* daughters, and go back. I am
too old; I will not marry again *because I
cannot conceive. But even if I could*—if I
still believed there was hope for me, or
if I had a husband and conceived sons
tonight—13would you *waste a lifetime*
waiting for them to grow up? Would you
let this *hope for the future* keep you from
remarrying *now*? Of course not, my *dear*
daughters. It is obvious that the Eternal
has acted against me. My life is much
too bitter for you to share with me.

14At this Orpah and Ruth wailed and wept
again. Then Orpah kissed Naomi, *said
goodbye, and returned the way she had
come.* Yet Ruth refused to let go of Naomi.

Naomi: 15Look at your sister-in-law. She
has returned to *live with* her people and
to *worship* her gods; go and follow her.

Ruth: 16Stop pushing me away,
insisting that I stop following you!
Wherever you go, I will go.
Wherever you live, I will live.
Your people will be my people.
Your God will be my God.
17Wherever you die, I will also die
and be buried there *near you.*
May the Eternal One punish me—
and even more so—
if anything besides death comes
between us.

18When Naomi *heard this and* saw Ruth's
resolve, she stopped trying to talk her out
of returning *to Judah*. 19The two women
went on together to Bethlehem.

News of their arrival spread through-
out Bethlehem. In fact, the whole commu-
nity was humming with the report, with
the women exclaiming, "Could it really be
the same Naomi *who left us so long ago*?"

Naomi: 20Do not call me Naomi *ever again,
for I am no longer pleasant.*
Call me Mara *instead, for I am filled
with bitterness*
because the Highest One* has
treated me bitterly.

There is a Hebrew wordplay here from Naomi, "pleasant," to Mara, "bitterness." Even Orpah ("neck") turns her back on Naomi.

21I left this place full, *in spite of the
famine,*
but the Eternal has brought me
back empty *from a plentiful land.*
Why would you call me "Pleasant"
when the Eternal has testified
against me,
and the Highest One has brought
disaster upon me?

* 1:20ff Hebrew, *Shaddai*

Naomi's story is similar to the story of Job. God tests them, as Job and Naomi have full lives. Then they go from emptiness to vindication, and finally to redemption.

22This was how Naomi came into Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, from Moab. It was at the beginning of the barley harvest when they returned *to the land.*

2 Now Naomi's *deceased* husband, Elimelech, had a relative *in Bethlehem,* an *honorable,* wealthy man named Boaz. 2One day Ruth (the *foreign* woman *who returned with Naomi* from Moab) approached Naomi with a request.

Ruth: Let me go out into the field and pick up whatever grain is left behind *the harvesters.* Maybe someone will be merciful to me.

Naomi: Go ahead, my daughter.

3Ruth left and went into the fields to pick up the gleanings, *the grain that had been* left behind by the harvesters. And so it was that the portion of the field she was working in belonged to Boaz, who was a part of Elimelech's family.

4*As she was working in his field,* Boaz happened to arrive from Bethlehem, and he greeted the harvesters.

Boaz: The Eternal One be with you.

Harvesters: May the Eternal bless you!

5Then *seeing Ruth,* Boaz spoke to the young man in charge of the harvesters.

Boaz: Whom does this young woman belong to?

Overseer: 6She is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from Moab. 7She came and asked my permission to pick up the grain our harvesters leave behind and gather *it all into sheaves for herself.* Except for one small break she has been here all day, working *in the field* from the morning until now.

► When God gives His law to the Israelites, He establishes a culture of generosity. Knowing there will be people such as widows, orphans, and resident aliens who will be too poor to farm for themselves, He set limits on how much each farmer should harvest from his own land. In Leviticus 19:9-10, farmers are told not to harvest the corners of their property or return to already-harvested rows to pick up any grain that may have been left. The remaining grain in the field is called gleanings, and those are left for the poor. In a similar law, Deuteronomy 24:19-22 explains that God does this to remind His people that once they were all poor and resident aliens themselves in Egypt. The gleaners face hard labor every day, so Ruth isn't expecting the kindness Boaz shows her.

Boaz *(to Ruth)***:** 8Listen to me, my daughter. Do not go and glean in any other field. In fact, do not go outside my property at all but stay with the young women who work for me *following the harvesters and bundling the grain into sheaves.* 9Watch the harvesters, and see which field they are working in. Follow along behind these servants of mine. I have warned the young men not to touch you. If you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars my young men have filled *for the harvesters.*

10*Overwhelmed,* Ruth bowed down *before Boaz,* putting her face to the ground *in front of him.*

Ruth: I am just a foreigner. Why have you noticed me and treated me as if I'm one of your favorites?

Boaz: 11I have heard your story. I know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your own husband died. I know you left your own mother and father, *your home and* your country, and you have come to live in a culture that must seem strange to you. 12May the Eternal repay you *for your sacrifices* and reward you richly for what you have done. It is under the wings of Israel's God, the Eternal One, that you have sought shelter.

Ruth: 13I pray you will continue to look upon me with such favor, my lord. I am

comforted by your kind words, even though I am not *as worthy of them* as even one of your servant girls.

14*Later* during the meal, Boaz spoke to Ruth *again*.

Boaz: Come over here and have some of my food. Dip your piece of bread in the vinegar wine.

So Ruth sat down among the harvesters. Boaz also offered her some roasted grain. She ate as much as she wanted and even had some left over. 15*When her meal was finished,* she got back up and returned to work. Then Boaz *pulled some of* the young harvesters aside and gave them instructions *about her*.

Boaz: Let her pick up grain from among the sheaves. Do not reprimand *or humiliate* her *for gleaning where it is usually forbidden*. 16Instead, periodically pick out a stalk or two from the sheaves that have already been bound, and leave them for her to gather *for herself*. Make sure that no one gives her a hard time.

17So Ruth worked in the field *all day* until the sun had nearly set. *When she finished picking up the leftover ears,* she beat her gathered *barley* grains *from the stalks with a stick*. *All that work* resulted in over 20 quarts of grain. 18Then she carried it back to the city where her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Ruth took out the leftover food from what she could not eat *of her midday meal* and gave it to Naomi.

Naomi *(to Ruth)***:** 19Where did you go to work today? Where did you glean *all this from*? *May God* bless the person who gave you this kind of attention.

So Ruth told Naomi *the story of all that had happened to her that day and* on whose land she had worked.

Ruth: The man I worked with today is named Boaz.

Naomi: 20May the Eternal bless this man. He has not given up showing His *covenant* love toward the living and the dead.

This man is *closely* related to us—he is a kinsman-redeemer of our family.

The kinsman-redeemer is the closest relative and has the responsibility to save his family members from any evil or hardship.

Ruth*: 21That is not all he did. Boaz also instructed me to stay with his *young* workers for the remainder of his grain harvesting season.

Naomi: 22It is best that you *do as he says*. Stay with his young women *who bind the sheaves*. *They will keep you* safe from the hostility and danger of working in another's field.

23So *that is what Ruth did*. She kept close to Boaz's young female servants and picked up everything they dropped. *She worked hard* throughout the *seven weeks of the* wheat and barley seasons until the harvest was complete *in early summer*. And *this whole time* she lived at her mother-in-law's home.

3 **Naomi** *(to Ruth)***:** My child, it is my responsibility to find a *husband and* place of rest for you—a place where you will find *rest and* contentment. 2You have been *working* alongside the young women who serve Boaz. Is he not a part of our family? *Early* this evening, *during the late afternoon wind,* he will be on the threshing floor winnowing the barley.

They toss the stalks into the wind with a fork and watch the grain fall at their feet as the stalks blow away.

3Bathe and perfume yourself. Put on your best dress, then go down onto the threshing floor. *Be careful, though*. Don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. 4*Once he is relaxed,* he will lie down *to sleep*. Make sure you notice where he is. Once he has lain down, go to him. Uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.

► The Hebrew euphemism "to uncover the feet" is a sexual expression; but in this context, and in light of the honorable character of Boaz and Ruth, it is clear that she is simply making herself available for marriage.

* 2:21 Hebrew manuscripts add, "the Moabite woman."

Ruth: [5]I will do everything you have told me to do.

[6]So she went down to the threshing floor and followed through with everything her mother-in-law told her to do. [7]Not much later, Boaz finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits. He made his way to the end of a pile of grain and lay down there *to sleep*. Then *very quietly,* Ruth snuck *to where he was lying down.* She uncovered his feet and lay down *at his feet.* [8]*Later, sometime* in the middle of the night, Boaz was startled *and woke up*. When he rolled over *and looked around,* he discovered there was a woman lying at his feet!

Boaz: [9]Who are you?

Ruth: I am your servant Ruth. Spread out *the hem of* your garment so that it covers your servant. You are a near relative *of our family.*

Boaz: [10]May the Eternal bless you, my daughter, for the loyal love you are showing now is even greater than what you showed before. You have not pursued a younger man—either a rich one or a poor one. [11]*You may rest easy.* You have nothing to fear, my child. I will do everything you ask. Everyone in this city agrees you are a woman of virtuous character. [12]You are right that I am in line as a near relative *of your family*. But *I am not the only one, nor the most likely*. There is another man who is more closely related to you than I am.

► If ever a landowner needs to lease out his land for money, then his closest relative, called the "kinsman-redeemer," is supposed to buy the land back for his relative. The same is true if a man has to sell his family members into indentured servitude—the kinsman-redeemer is to buy back the slave. This system reflects God's relationship with Israel; God continually saves His people from subservience to other nations. Since both Naomi and Ruth are widows without male sons, they are left in poverty. Naomi will have to lease out her husband's land to support them, and she may eventually have to sell herself and Ruth just to stay fed. By redeeming Elimelech's land, marrying Ruth, and eventually giving her a son, Boaz keeps the family intact as it would have been had Elimelech or either of his sons survived.

Boaz: [13]Spend the rest of the night here. In the morning, *I will give* him the chance to *act as your kinsman-redeemer and* redeem you *and your family*. If he is willing to do this, good. But if he is not willing to fulfill his responsibility, then as the Eternal One lives, *I promise* I will redeem *your family by marrying* you. Now remain here until morning comes.

[14]So Ruth lay at his feet until *early* morning—then she got up *to leave while it was still dark,* before she could be recognized by anyone, because Boaz realized no one should know the woman was on the threshing room floor.

Boaz: [15]Now bring me the outer garment you are wearing. Hold it out, *and hold on tightly*.

She did so, and Boaz filled her garment with six measures of barley grain. He handed it to her; then he* *left her and* went into the town *to conduct his business.*

[16]When Ruth returned to Naomi's home, her mother-in-law asked her daughter what happened. Ruth related all that Boaz had *said and* done.

Ruth: [17]He even gave me these six measures of barley grain saying to me, "You can't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."

Naomi: [18]Now you must wait, daughter. *We must wait and* see what happens. *Be at peace*. That man will not rest today until this is resolved.

4 At that same time, Boaz went to the *city* gate and he sat down. Just then, the kinsman-redeemer *of the family* he had told *Ruth* about walked by.

Normally the city gate is where the business of the city is conducted.]

* 3:15 Other ancient manuscripts read "she."

Boaz: My friend, come and sit down with me *for awhile*. *We have some business.*

So the man came and sat down *beside Boaz*. 2*Before he spoke further to the man,* he gathered together 10 elders from the city and asked them to preside there, which they did.

Boaz *(to the kinsman-redeemer)*: 3You have heard of Naomi? She is the woman who *recently* returned from Moab. She is transferring her rights to the plot of land belonging to *her deceased husband*—our relative—Elimelech. 4I wanted you to know about it *because as a close family member, you have the first right to* purchase it. *If you want to do so,* we have enough elders sitting here to witness the transaction. If you want to *become the guardian and* redeem this land, it is yours. But if you* are not interested in doing this, tell me *now*. The right belongs to you, *but if you refuse it,* I am next in line.

Kinsman-Redeemer: *Of course,* I exercise my option to redeem this land.

Boaz: 5Now, *just so you know,* on the day you buy this *plot of* land [from Naomi, you will also acquire Ruth the Moabitess; she is]* the dead man's widow. *It will be your responsibility to make sure she has children* so that they can carry on her dead husband's name with the inheritance.

Kinsman-Redeemer: 6Then I will not be able to redeem it. I will not put my own property at risk. I relinquish my right to redeem the land. You do it.

7Now in the old days of Israel *when this story was playing out,* land was redeemed and *property was* transferred legally when a man *involved in the sale* removed one of his sandals and gave it to the other. This was how contracts were sealed in Israel. 8So the kinsman-redeemer took off his sandal *and handed it to Boaz*.

Kinsman-Redeemer: It's now your responsibility.

Boaz *(to the elders and all the people)*: 9Every one of you have witnessed *what happened here* today. I secured the rights to everything that belonged to Elimelech and *his sons,* Mahlon and Chilion, from Naomi. 10I have also taken responsibility for Ruth—the woman from Moab who was married to Mahlon. She will become my wife. I will see to it that his family and this city remember Mahlon. I will *raise children who will bear his name and* make sure his property stays in the family. You are all witnesses *to this* today.

Elders and People: 11We are witnesses *of what has happened here today*. May the Eternal take this woman who is becoming a part of your family *today* and make her like Rachel and Leah, the two women responsible for building the nation of Israel *with their children.* And may your reputation become well known and well respected throughout Ephrathah and Bethlehem. 12May the children the Eternal gives you and this woman make your family like the family of Perez, who was born from *a Levirate union between* Judah and Tamar.*

13Then Boaz took *responsibility of* Ruth, and they married. After they came together, Ruth conceived by the Eternal's provision, and *later* she gave birth to a son.

Women *(to Naomi)*: 14Praise the Eternal One. *He has not abandoned you.* He did not leave you without a redeeming guardian. May your offspring become famous all through Israel. 15May this child give you a new life. May he *strengthen you and* provide for you in your old age. Look at your daughter-in-law, Ruth. She loves you. *This one devoted daughter* is better to you than seven sons would be. She is the one who gave you this child.

16Then Naomi held the child tightly in her arms and cared for him. 17All around her, friends cried out, "Naomi has a son!" They named the child Obed *because he would provide for his grandmother*. Obed *grew up and* became the father of Jesse. Jesse, too, became *a father one day,* the father of David.

18Here is the genealogy of Perez's family: Perez was Hezron's father. 19Hezron was Ram's father. Ram was Amminadab's father. 20Amminadab was Nahshon's father. Nahshon was Salmon's* father. 21Salmon was Boaz's father. Boaz was Obed's father. 22Obed was Jesse's father. And Jesse was the father of David.

* 4:4 Most Hebrew manuscripts read, "he." * 4:5 Hebrew manuscripts read, "from Naomi and Ruth the Moabitess, you will acquire." * 4:12 Genesis 38 * 4:20 Most Hebrew manuscripts read, "Salma."

1 SAMUEL

Israel has its first king and the troubles that follow

By Samuel, a prophet of Israel

The story of the people of Israel in some ways resembles a classical tragedy: the ending is foreshadowed; and even in the times of great glory and happiness, disaster isn't far away. The books of Samuel tell how the people of Israel decide that instead of trusting in God, they will place their trust in a human king, as all of their neighbors have. After the chaos and violence of the time described in the Book of Judges, perhaps their desire for security is understandable; but the people of Israel had always been told they are different from other nations, that true security can only be found in God.

Described in the books of Samuel—the stories of Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David—are people of great faith and courage, like Hannah and Samuel, and people who start off well but fail in a number of ways, like Saul. In the character of David is that human king whom the Israelites want. David, who is loved by God, represents the high point of Israel's civilization and is the model for the Liberator the Jews expect in the time of Jesus (and still today).

Tradition associates the judge Samuel with the recording of these stories collected into the books bearing his name (1 Chronicles 29:29-30). While he may not have literally written the exact words we have today, he certainly crafted the stories compiled in these books by future editors through his divinely inspired work in Israel.

Samuel is the last of the judges of Israel, the last great defender who brings together political and religious power in order to liberate the people. In terms of personal holiness, the Jewish tradition compares him to Moses and Aaron (Psalm 99:6), and this crucial time recorded in the books of Samuel demands all of his resources as prophet and leader. Through his work, Israel transitions from a tribal society led by regional judges to a united kingdom under one monarch.

The people of ancient Israel lived in a time of great fear and conflict—a time not so very different from our own. Their responses—to turn to political and temporal power for safety, to forget the things God had asked of them—may be familiar to us. Leaders rise and fall; nations prosper and decline; but through it all, God remains. While David is the central figure of these books, and his memory inspires us because of his heroism, creativity, and humanity, the images of Hannah, who trusts God completely, and Samuel, who warns that trusting in political power instead of God brings heartbreak, also linger. Great stories never go out of date, and this is one of the greatest.

1 *When the judges ruled over Israel,*
there was a man from Ramathaim-
zophim, from the hill country of
Ephraim. He was Elkanah, who descended
from Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, and Zuph, an
Ephraimite. 2He had two wives: Peninnah,
who bore him sons and daughters, and
Hannah, who remained childless.

► At the end of the Book of Judges, the world has descended into violence and chaos—it is, as the book concludes, a time when "there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what seemed right to them" (Judges 21:25). And their selfish desires are often very wrong morally, socially, and personally. Israel is a dark place waiting for a light to enter, and as is usually the case in the story of the people of God, God has a plan.

3Elkanah used to go up every year from
his city to worship and offer sacrifices at
the altar of the Eternal One, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, at Shiloh, where the
priests of the Eternal were Eli's two sons,
Hophni and Phinehas. 4On the days he
made a sacrifice, Elkanah would share a
portion *of his offering* with his wife Penin-
nah and all her children, 5but he offered a
double portion *of sacrificial meat* for Han-
nah because he loved her even though the
Eternal One had not given her children.
6Peninnah used to infuriate Hannah until
Hannah trembled with irritation because
the Eternal had not given Hannah chil-
dren. 7This went on year after year; and
every time Hannah went up to the house
of the Eternal, Peninnah would infuriate
her. So, *as she often did,* Hannah wept and
refused to eat.

► The story of Samuel begins quietly, not with a great warrior coming onto the scene, but with the faithful prayer of a woman who wants to be a mother. The underlying message of the books of Samuel is, as in many other places in the Bible, that faith and trust in God are more important than any trust we place in human beings—even powerful human beings. Hannah's prayers for a child, her absolute faith in God's plan, and her willingness to be a part of it however she can, resonate as the kings and warriors begin to enter the stage. Without her faith, there can be no story.

Elkanah *(seeing Hannah's despair)***:** 8Why
are you crying and not eating? Why are
you so sad, *Hannah?* Don't I love you
more than any 10 sons could?

9-10One day after they ate and drank at
Shiloh, Hannah got up *and presented
herself before the Lord.* It so happened
that the priest Eli was sitting *in a place of
honor* beside the doorpost of the Eternal's
congregation tent *as Hannah entered.* She
was heartbroken, and she began to pray to
the Eternal One, weeping uncontrollably
as she did.

Hannah: 11Eternal One, Commander of
heavenly armies, if only You will look
down at the misery of Your servant and
remember me—oh, don't forget me!—and
give Your servant a son, then I promise
I will devote the boy to Your service *as
a Nazirite* all the days of his life. [He will
never touch wine or other strong drink,]*
and no razor will ever cut his hair.

12As she prayed *silently* before the Eternal
One, *the priest* Eli watched her mouth:
13Hannah's lips were moving, but since she
was praying silently, he could not hear her
words. So Eli thought she was drunk.

Eli: 14How long are you going to continue
drinking, *making a spectacle of yourself?*
Stop drinking wine, *and sober up!*

Hannah: 15My lord, I am not drunk on wine
or any strong drink; I am just a woman
with a wounded spirit. I have been pour-
ing out *the pain in* my soul before the
Eternal One. 16Please don't consider your
servant some worthless woman just
because I have been speaking for so long
out of worry and exasperation.

Eli: 17Go, don't worry about this anymore,
and may the True God of Israel fulfill the
petition you have made to Him.

* 1:11 Most manuscripts omit this portion.

Hannah: 18May your servant be favored in your sight.

Then Hannah rose and went back to where she was staying. The sadness lifted from her, so she was able to eat.

19The next morning, they rose early to worship the Eternal One. Then they went back to their home at Ramah, and Elkanah slept with Hannah his wife. The Eternal remembered her *petition;* 20and in the new year, Hannah became pregnant. When her son was born, she named him Samuel, *which means "His name is El (God),"* because she said,

Hannah: I asked the Eternal One for him.

21*The next year,* Elkanah and all his family went up *to Shiloh* to make their sacrifices to the Eternal and to fulfill his vow. 22But Hannah remained behind.

Hannah *(to Elkanah)***:** When the child can eat solid food, I will bring him so that he can appear in the presence of the Eternal One and remain there continually.

Elkanah *(to Hannah)***:** 23Do whatever you think best. If you want to wait until Samuel is weaned, do that. Since the Eternal is faithful, surely He will keep His word.

So Hannah stayed at home and nursed her son until he was weaned. 24When that day came, she gathered a three-year-old bull,* over half a bushel of flour, and a skin of wine; and she took him to the house of the Eternal One at Shiloh. Samuel was just a lad. 25They slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to *the priest* Eli.

Hannah *(to Eli)***:** 26My lord, I swear I am the woman who was praying to the Eternal One in front of you. 27It was this child I prayed for, and the Eternal has indeed granted me the petition I made. 28So, *as I vowed,* I will lend him back to the Eternal. For as long as he lives, let him serve our Eternal One.

And she left Samuel there *with Eli* to serve the Eternal One.

2 Then Hannah prayed *out of her deepest feelings.*

Hannah: My heart rejoices in the Eternal One;
my strength grows strong in the Eternal.
My mouth can mock my enemies
because I celebrate how You have saved me!

2No one is holy like the Eternal One—
no, no one but You;
and there is no rock *as solid* as our True God.
3Stop talking so proudly,
and don't let such arrogance flow from your lips,
For the Eternal One is a True God who knows,
and He weighs the actions *He sees.*
4The bows of the mighty crack in two,
but the feeble are given new strength.
5Those who were full have had to work hard so they can eat,
but those who were starving have become fat *with rich food.*
The one who was infertile has borne seven children,
while the one who bore many sits *alone* in sadness.
6The Eternal One kills and brings to life;
He sends down to the grave and raises up *new life.*
7The Eternal One makes both poor and rich;
some He humbles, and others He honors.
8He lifts the poor up out of the dust,
the needy from the trash heap.
He raises them to sit with princes
and seats them on a glorious throne.
For the pillars of the earth are the Eternal One's,
and on them, He has set the world.

9He will watch over the footsteps of the faithful,
but the wicked will be made silent in the darkness,
for one does not win by strength alone.
10The Eternal One will shatter His foes;
from *His throne in* heaven, He will thunder with rage.
The Eternal One will be judge to the ends of the earth;
He gives strength to His king,
And power to the one He chooses to rule.

* 1:24 Hebrew manuscripts read, "three bulls."

11So Elkanah *and his family* returned home to Ramah, while Samuel remained behind with Eli the priest to minister before the Eternal One.

12Although Eli's sons *served as priests, they* were really worthless men with no understanding of the Eternal 13-14or of their priestly duties. When someone presented meat as a ritual offering *to the Lord,* the priest would send a servant with a three-pronged fork to probe around in the pot or kettle as the sacrifice boiled; and whatever he brought up with the fork, the priest would keep as his own. They did this at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came *to sacrifice.*

15The priest's servant would even tell those who were going to burn fat as a sacrifice,

Servant: Give the priest meat to roast. He won't accept boiled meat from you, only raw meat.

16And if the worshiper *protested,* saying the priest could take whatever he wanted after the fat was burned, the servant would say,

Servant: Give it to me now; if necessary, it will be taken from you by force.

17Because they despised the Eternal's ritual offerings, the Eternal One judged that the sons *of Eli* had sinned greatly.

18Now Samuel was then a *small* boy, working in the house of the Eternal One. He wore a linen vest, *one of the priestly garments.* 19His mother used to make him a new robe every year, and she would take it up to him when she and her husband came to perform the yearly sacrifice. 20On that *joyful* occasion, Eli would bless Elkanah and Hannah.

Eli: May the Eternal One bless you with *more* children by this woman for the great gift she made to the Eternal.

Then they would return home.

21The Eternal One showed his favor toward Hannah *again,* and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters, and her son Samuel grew up in the presence of the Eternal One.

22Eli, who had grown old *and tired,* heard what his sons were doing to all those Israelites *who came to Shiloh to perform their sacrifices.* He heard that they were even having sexual relations with the women who worked at the door of the meeting tent.

Eli *(to his sons)***:** 23Why do you do such *horrible* things? The people have told me about all the evil you have done. 24No, my sons, I do not hear good words spoken about you by the people of the Eternal. 25If one person offends another, [at least someone can plead with the True God on the sinner's behalf].* But if someone offends the Eternal One, then who will plead for that person?

But Eli's sons did not listen to his words, for the Eternal One had already decided to destroy them.

26The boy Samuel grew *tall, wise in the ways of the Lord,* and in favor with God and the people *he served.*

27A man sent by the True God came to Eli.

Man: This is the message of the Eternal One: "I made Myself known to your family when Israel was enslaved under Pharaoh in Egypt. 28I chose your ancestor *Aaron* from among all the tribes of Israel to be My priest: to serve at the altar, to offer incense, and to wear the priestly vest in My presence. And I repaid your family by presenting them with all the offerings made to Me by fire from all the people of Israel. 29Why do you look with such greedy eyes on all the sacrifices and offerings I have directed *the people to bring* to My house? Why do you honor your sons more than you honor Me by feasting on the choicest parts of every single offering made by My people Israel?"

30Therefore the Eternal God of Israel declares: "I promised that your family would go in and out of My presence forever. But now I surely declare, those who honor Me I will honor, but people who choose to despise Me, I, in turn, will consider contemptible: *those who hate Me will not matter to Me.* 31Look, the time approaches when I will cut away your strength and the strength of your family, so that none of you will live to old age. 32Then, in agony, you will see all the good things I do for Israel; *there will be great distress,* and no one in your family will live to old age ever again.

* 2:25 Hebrew manuscripts read, "God will mediate for him."

33"Any of your family not cut off will
grieve continually and will cry their
eyes out. All the other members of your
household will die *violently* in the prime
of life. 34The fate of your sons Hophni
and Phinehas will be a sign of the future.
Both of them will die on the very same
day. 35I will raise up a faithful priest who
will do what I desire and purpose in My
heart and mind. I will build him a secure
house, and he will go in and out before
My anointed one continually. 36Those
of your family who survive will come to
him and bow down for a piece of silver
or a loaf of bread, and they will beg him,
'Please make me a priest so at least I can
have a morsel of bread.'"

3 The boy Samuel continued to serve the Eternal One under the guidance of Eli. In those days, messages from the Eternal were rare, and *sacred dreams or* visions were given to very few.

2Eli, *who was very old,* had become almost blind. He was lying in his room; 3*it was late at night but before dawn* as the lamp of God still burned. Samuel was resting in the house of the Eternal One, where the covenant chest of the True God was located, *and he heard a voice.*

Eternal One: 4Samuel! Samuel!

Samuel: Here I am! 5(running to Eli) I heard you calling; here I am!

Eli: I did not call you, *my son.* Go back, and lie down.

So Samuel went back to bed. 6But the Eternal called him again.

Eternal One: Samuel!

Samuel *(running to Eli)***:** I heard you calling; here I am!

Eli: *No,* I did not call you, my son. Go back, and lie down. *I need my rest.*

7Samuel did not recognize *the voice of* the Eternal One, for the word of the Eternal had not been revealed to Samuel yet. *So Samuel went back again to his bed.* 8And the Eternal One called him a third time.

Samuel *(running to Eli)***:** I know you called me; I am here!

Eli *(realizing the Lord was calling Samuel)***:** 9Go back and lie down, *my son.* If the voice calls you again, I want you to say, "Speak, Eternal One. Your servant is listening."

So Samuel went to his bed in his place *and listened.* 10Then the Eternal One came into his presence as before.

Eternal One: Samuel! Samuel!

Samuel: Speak, *Eternal One.* Your servant is listening.

Eternal One: 11Pay attention! I am about to do something *so amazing* in Israel that it will sting the ears of everyone who hears it. 12The day is coming when I will carry out the vow I made to Eli about his family, every word of it. 13I have told him that I will punish his house forever for the sins of his sons, bringing a curse on themselves that he knew about but did nothing to stop. 14So I vow that the sins of the house of Eli may never be atoned for by sacrifice or by offering.

15*After hearing this message,* Samuel lay there until morning and then opened the doors of the Eternal One's house, but he was afraid to tell Eli what *God* had said to him.

Eli: 16Samuel, my son.

Samuel: Here I am.

Eli: 17What was it that He told you? Tell me everything. May the True God carry out His vengeance on you and worse, if you hold anything back from me that He said to you.

18So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing.

Eli: This message is truly from the Eternal One. Let Him do what seems good to Him.

► When Eli hears God's message to Samuel, a message that surely breaks his heart, Eli knows his sons have dishonored God and deserve punishment. His willingness to honor God's message is truly a measure of his faith. This is one of many places in the

books of Samuel where we can recognize the justice of God's plan and still share some sorrow with those who will suffer because of it.

19As Samuel grew, the Eternal One guided
him and none of His words were lost *on*
Samuel. 20And all Israel, from Dan to Beer-
sheba, learned that Samuel was a prophet
of the Eternal One and that his words
could be trusted.

21*From time to time,* the Eternal con-
tinued to appear at Shiloh, where He had
spoken to Samuel.

4 And all of Israel was influenced by
Samuel's words.

[In those days, the Philistines
warred against Israel,]* and the warriors
of Israel went out to fight them. They
camped at Ebenezer while the Philistine
forces made camp at Aphek. 2The Philis-
tines lined up against Israel; and when
they advanced, they defeated Israel, kill-
ing about 4,000 of Israel's warriors on the
battlefield. 3When the troops returned to
their camp, the elders of Israel asked,

Elders: Why has the Eternal One let us be defeated by the Philistines today? *Tomorrow,* let us take His covenant chest from Shiloh and carry it before us *into battle,* so that the chest may be among us and save us from the power of the Philistines.

4So the people sent *messengers* to Shiloh
and brought back the covenant chest of
the Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, who is enthroned between the
winged guardians.

The two sons of Eli—Hophni and
Phinehas—accompanied the covenant
chest of the True God *on its journey to the*
battlefront. 5When it entered the camp, the
Israelites raised a shout so loud it *seemed*
to shake the earth. 6When the Philistines
heard the noise, they wondered what
the great shout from the Hebrews' camp
might mean; and when they heard that
it was in response to the arrival of the
covenant chest of the Eternal, 7they shook
with fear.

Philistines *(among themselves)***:** The Israelites have brought their God into their camp! We're doomed! Nothing like this has ever happened *to us* before! 8What will we do? What can save us from these powerful gods? These are the same gods who struck down the *mighty* Egyptians in the desert with every sort of plague.

Philistine Generals: 9Be strong, Philistines. *Stand tall* like men, or you will become the slaves to these Hebrews, instead of their serving us. Be men, and fight!

10So the Philistines *stood their ground and*
fought *and won a great victory*. The people
of Israel were crushed, and the soldiers
fled *from the field of battle* back to their
homes. It was a horrible slaughter, with
the Israelites losing 30,000 foot soldiers.

11But *more importantly,* they lost the
covenant chest of the True God. The Phi-
listines captured the chest, and Eli's sons,
Hophni and Phinehas, were killed.

12A Benjaminite ran from the battle-
field and arrived in Shiloh that same day.
He was in mourning—his clothes torn
and dust heaped on his head. 13When he
arrived, Eli was sitting in his place of honor
next to the city gate waiting anxiously for
the covenant chest of God. When the man
came into the city and told his news, the
entire city cried out *in grief*. 14But Eli, *who*
could not see the messenger's clothing, won-
dered at the meaning of the cries.

Eli: What is that noise?

The man hurried to Eli and told him *what*
had happened. 15Eli was *by this time* 98
years old and blind.

Benjaminite Messenger: 16I have just come from the battle. I fled the front lines *to escape with my life*.

Eli: How did the battle go, my son?

Benjaminite Messenger: 17Many of the people were slaughtered, and Israel has fled from the Philistines. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the covenant chest of the True God is captured.

18When he heard this news about the
covenant chest of the True God, Eli fell
backward from his seat beside the gate,
broke his neck, and died, for he was very
old and heavyset.

* 4:1 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

He was a leader over Israel for 40 years.

19His daughter-in-law, Phinehas's wife, was pregnant and close to the end of her term. When she heard the news—that the covenant chest of the True God had been captured *by the Philistines* and that her husband and father-in-law were both dead—she was bowed over by her labor pains. She gave birth, 20and as she was about to die, the midwives told her,

Midwives: Don't be afraid. You have a son.

But she did not answer or seem to hear them. 21She said only that the son should be called Ichabod, meaning, "Where has the glory gone?" *For so it must have seemed to her* with the loss of the covenant chest of God and the deaths of her husband and father-in-law.

Eli's Daughter-in-law: 22The glory has gone from Israel because the Philistines have captured the chest of the True God.

5 The Philistines brought the *captured* covenant chest of the True God from Ebenezer to *one of their capital cities called* Ashdod. 2There the Philistines took the chest of the True God into the house of *their god,* Dagon, and placed it *in a place of honor* beside *the idol of* Dagon. 3When the people of the city *anxiously* awoke early the next morning, there was Dagon, lying on his face on the ground, *as if bowing* before the covenant chest of the Eternal. So they grabbed the idol and put it back in its proper place. 4But when they awoke the next morning, only the trunk of the idol was untouched. Dagon had fallen to the ground on his face before the covenant chest of the Eternal One *again, and this time* his head and hands had been cut off and were lying across the threshold. 5That is why the priests and worshipers of Dagon in the house of Dagon in Ashdod refused to step on the threshold even till this day.

6The hand of the Eternal One came down hard *with punishment* on the people of Ashdod *while the covenant chest rested there*. He ravaged the people of Ashdod and the surrounding territory and struck them with *swollen, painful growths like* tumors. 7When the people of Ashdod saw how they were *cursed,* they said,

People of Ashdod: We can't let the chest of the True God of Israel remain here because their God continues to punish us and our god Dagon.

8-9So they gathered together all the rulers of the Philistines to ask what should be done with the covenant chest of Israel's God.

People of Gath: Send this chest of Israel's God to us.

They did so. But after they had moved the chest of the True God of Israel to Gath, *another of the capital cities,* the hand of the Eternal One began to punish the people of Gath and sent them into a panic. He also struck them with *swollen, painful,* tumor-like growths—the young and old alike. 10So then they sent the covenant chest of the True God of Israel on to *a third capital city,* Ekron; but when the people of Ekron saw that the covenant chest was coming, they protested.

People of Ekron: Have you brought this chest of the Israelite God here to kill us now?

11So they gathered together all the rulers of the Philistines.

People of Ekron: Send away this covenant chest of the God of Israel. Send it back where it came from so that it doesn't kill us all!

For there was great panic throughout the city. The True God's hand rested heavily on them; 12and those He did not kill, He struck with *swollen, painful* tumors. *Their suffering was so intense* their cries could be heard in the heavens.

6 The covenant chest of the Eternal One had been in the land of the Philistines for seven months. 2Then the rulers of the Philistines sent for their priests and fortune-tellers.

Rulers: What should we do with this chest of the Eternal One? *We need to get rid of it.* What should we send with it when we return it?

Priests and Fortune-tellers: 3Whatever you do, don't send this covenant chest of the True God of Israel back by itself. You should certainly offer Him compensation for your guilt. If you do, you will all be healed. That's the only way you can be certain that His hand will be lifted.

Rulers: [4]What should we send as this guilt offering to Him *when we return the covenant chest*?

► Ancient people understand diseases and various infestations as omens of divine wrath. In order to appease the God of the Israelites, the Philistines cast metal tumors and mice to give back to the Eternal One what He gave to them.

Priests and Fortune-Tellers: *Have your artisans make* five gold tumors and five gold mice, one for each of the rulers of the Philistines' *capital cities,* because the same plague came upon all of the Philistines and all of our rulers. [5]So you must make images of the tumors and of the mice that devastate our land and honor this God of Israel. Maybe then He will release His grip on this land, its people, and its gods. [6]Why would you be as stubborn as the Egyptians and their Pharaoh were? *You've heard the stories, haven't you?* When this God had taught them a lesson, didn't they release the people *of Israel*? Didn't they go?

[7]So do this now: *have your carpenters* make a new wagon, find two milk cows that have never been yoked, and yoke them to the cart. But take away their calves and pen them up. [8]Take this chest of the Eternal One and set it upon the wagon. In a box beside it, put the gold images you are presenting to this God as a guilt offering. Then turn the cows loose, and let them go on their way. [9]Watch closely. If the team pulls the wagon up to this God's country, to Beth-shemesh, then you know that He has been the One punishing us. If they don't, then at least we'll know that it was not His hand that struck us, that it has just been bad luck.

[10]And that is what the leaders did. They separated two milk cows *from their calves*. They yoked the cows to the wagon and took the calves home. [11]They set the covenant chest of the Eternal upon the wagon, and next to it, they placed the box with the gold tumors and gold mice. [12]The cows went straight along the road toward Beth-shemesh, mooing *after their lost calves* as they went. They went straight ahead *without any hesitation,* and the rulers of the Philistines followed as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

[13]The people of Beth-shemesh were in the valley harvesting their wheat at that time. When they looked up and saw the covenant chest, they ran to greet it with joy. [14]The wagon came to a halt at a large stone in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh. The people split up the cart *for firewood* and sacrificed the cattle as a burnt offering to the Eternal One *on the large stone*. [15]The Levites took the chest of the Eternal and the box next to it down *from the wagon*. They took the gold images from the box and set them upon the stone *altar*. Then the people of Beth-shemesh offered sacrifices and made other burnt offerings to the Eternal One.

[16]When the five rulers of the Philistines saw *how their offering had been received* that day, they returned to Ekron.

[17]The five gold *images of swollen* tumors presented to the Eternal One by the Philistines as a guilt offering represented Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron—one for each. [18]Likewise the golden mice represented all the cities of the Philistines governed by their rulers, both the walled cities and the villages surrounding them. The large stone in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh where they set the chest of the Eternal remains there *as a witness to these events*.

[19]The Eternal struck the people of Beth-shemesh because some looked into the covenant chest. God struck down 75* men, and the people were saddened because of the slaughter the Eternal One had brought among their people.

People of Beth-shemesh: [20]Who can stand in the presence of the Eternal One, this holy God? Who will take the covenant chest *so we can be safe from Him?*

[21]So the people of Beth-shemesh sent messengers to the people of Kiriath-jearim to tell them that the Philistines had returned the chest of the Eternal One *to Beth-shemesh* and that they should come down and take it with them.

7 The people of Kiriath-jearim *did as they were asked.* They collected the chest of the Eternal One and

* 6:19 Hebrew, "50,000 and 70 men"

brought it up the hill to the house of Abinadab. They performed sacred rituals to set apart his son Eleazar to be in charge of caring for the chest of the Eternal.

► This section about the chest of the covenant shows God's power in the world when all the nations around Israel believe in their own gods. Hebrew literature often talks about the Lord as the greatest of all gods, and this passage shows Him using the covenant chest to declare His preeminence. He embarrasses another god in his own temple, brings death and destruction on those around Him (as He did with the plagues of Egypt), and inflicts something like the bubonic plague, which would devastate Europe in the Middle Ages, on the Philistines. God is powerful and must be treated with the greatest of reverence. Even the people of God are happy to see the chest of the covenant move on, because it is too powerful for sinful human beings to live close to with comfort.

[2]Time passed, 20 years *or so,* from the time that the covenant chest was taken to Kiriath-jearim, and all the people of Israel began to grieve over *their separation from* the Eternal One.

Samuel *(to the Israelites)*: [3]If you really want to totally devote yourselves and return to the Eternal One, then get rid of all the foreign gods and goddesses you have gathered. Devote yourselves to the Eternal, serve Him and Him alone, and He will save you from the oppression of the Philistines.

► The Canaanites have a long history of worshiping idols or local gods. In this case, the god being worshiped is Astarte (Ashtoreth), a fertility goddess similar to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. In Canaanite mythology, she is the sister and wife of the high god Baal. She and similar goddesses are worshiped throughout the ancient Near East; and the children of Israel are constantly falling away from serving the Lord by worshiping Astarte, Baal, and other pagan gods. God commands His people not to raise up idols or bow down to any gods except Him. Along with the worship of these gods come many strange practices that pollute the people of the Lord.

[4]So the people of Israel got rid of their gods and goddesses,* and they began to serve only the Eternal One.

Samuel: [5]Assemble all of Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Eternal on your behalf.

[6]That day they gathered at Mizpah, drew water, poured it out *ritually* in front of the Eternal One, and fasted.

People: We have sinned. *We have rebelled* against the Eternal.

Samuel judged the Israelites at Mizpah, *delivering the people from danger and establishing justice in the land.*

[7]When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines *gathered an armed force and* went to attack them. When the people of Israel heard that the Philistines were coming, they were filled with fear. *They turned to God's prophet.*

People of Israel *(to Samuel)*: [8]Don't stop calling out to the Eternal our God for us. Ask Him to save us from the Philistine army *that is coming.*

[9]Samuel took a young lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Eternal One. He called out to the Eternal on behalf of Israel, and the Eternal responded. *Here is what happened:* [10]As Samuel was performing the sacrifice, the voice of the Eternal rolled like thunder and confused the advancing Philistine army so that Israel easily struck them down. [11]From Mizpah, the Israelites chased them beyond Bethcar, striking them along the way.

* 7:4 Hebrew, *Baals* and *Astartes*

12That's why Samuel set up a stone
between Mizpah and Shen; and he called
that stone Ebenezer, *which means "rock of help,"* for he said,

Samuel: The Eternal One has helped us so far.

13So the Philistines were humbled and
did not invade the lands of Israel again.
The Eternal One held off the Philistines
for as long as Samuel *judged Israel.* 14The
Israelite cities the Philistines had seized
between Ekron and Gath were returned,
and Israel took its territory back from
Philistine rule. There was also peace with
the Amorites.

15Now Samuel was a *prophet and*
judge over Israel for the rest of his life.
16He traveled a *40-mile* circuit *just north of Jerusalem* every year between Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, solving Israel's problems
in each of these places. 17But he would
always return to his home in Ramah, the
base from which he judged Israel and
where he built an altar to the Eternal.

8 When Samuel was old, he named his
sons judges of Israel *to rule over the people and be their deliverers.* 2His
first son, Joel, and his second son, Abijah, were judges in Beersheba, 3but they
were not like Samuel. They profited from
dishonesty, took bribes, and fostered injustice. 4So the elders of Israel gathered and
came to Ramah to tell Samuel.

Elders: 5You have grown old, *Samuel,* and
your sons do not administer justice the
way that you did. *Before things worsen,*
appoint a king to rule us, as other
nations have.

6This request—"appoint a king to rule
us"—bothered Samuel, so he prayed to the
Eternal One 7and received an answer.

Eternal One *(to Samuel)***:** Listen to what
the people are asking you to do. It is not
a rejection of you—it is a rejection of
My rule over them. 8It is what they have
always done, from the day I brought
them out of Egypt until today, rejecting
Me and serving other gods. Now they are
just doing it to you. 9So listen to what
they are asking you to do, but make
it plain to them what they are asking.
Warn them about what will happen if a
king is appointed to rule them.

10So Samuel told the people who were
asking for a king what the Eternal One
had said.

Samuel: 11If a king rules over you, things
will be different from now on. He will
make your sons drive his chariots, be
his horsemen, and go *into battle* ahead
of his chariots. 12Your king will select
commanders over 1,000 and commanders over 50. He will make some of you to
plow his fields and collect his harvest;
some of you will be *the blacksmiths* forging his shields and swords for battle and
outfitting his chariots. 13He will force
your daughters to make perfumes, to
cook *his meals,* and to bake *his bread.*
14He will seize the choicest of your fields,
vineyards, and olive orchards to give to
his courtiers, 15and a tenth of your grain
and your vineyards to give to his court
eunuchs and servants. 16This king *you ask for* will take your slaves, male and
female, *as his own* and put the choicest
of your donkeys and your young men
to do his work. 17He will take a tenth of
your flocks. You will *essentially* become
his slaves. 18One day you will cry for
mercy from the Eternal One *to save you*
from this king you have chosen for yourselves, but *be assured,* He will not hear
you on that day.

People of Israel *(ignoring Samuel)***:** 19We
have decided that we will have a king
who will rule over us 20so that we will
be like all other nations and will have
someone to judge us and to lead us into
battle.

21After Samuel had heard their demands,
he told the Eternal One what they had
said.

Eternal One *(to Samuel)***:** 22Do as they
have asked. Give them a king.

So Samuel told the people of Israel to go
back to their cities *until he would call them together to anoint them a king.*

9 A powerful man named Kish,
who descended from Abiel, Zeror,
Becorath, and Aphiah (the son of a
Benjaminite), lived among the people of
Benjamin. 2Kish had a handsome young
son named Saul. Now Saul was not only
the most handsome man in Israel, but he
was also *the most imposing,* standing taller
than all others.

3One day Saul's father Kish had lost his donkeys, *having wandered away,* so he told his son Saul to take one of the servants and look for them. 4They traveled through the hill country of Ephraim, through the land of Shalishah, and through the land of Shaalim, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, and still they did not see the donkeys.

5*At last,* when they came to Zuph, Saul told the servant who accompanied him,

Saul: We had better turn around. If we keep going, my father will stop worrying about his donkeys and start worrying about us.

Servant: 6I hear there is a man of God in this village, a man who is respected because what he predicts is always true. *Before we go home,* let's go *and talk* to him; maybe he will have some guidance about this journey we have begun.

Saul: 7But if we go, what will we bring to this man? *We can't show up empty-handed,* but even the bread in our sacks is gone. I have nothing to give the man of God. Do you have anything?

Servant: 8I have a tenth of an ounce of silver. I will give it to the man of God, and maybe he can tell us where to go.

9It used to be in Israel that when people wanted to ask God a question, they would say, "Let's go talk to the seer." Now they are most commonly referred to as prophets, but they were called seers.

Saul: 10-11Very good. Let's go, then.

As they traveled up to the city to visit the man of God, they saw some girls on their way to draw water *at the well.*

Saul: Can we find the seer here?

Girls: 12Yes, he's just ahead of you. He has come here because there is a sacrifice today *at the altar* on the high place. You can catch him if you hurry. 13Look for him just as you come into the city, and you should catch him before he goes up to the high place to eat. No one will eat until he gets there, since he is the one who will bless the sacrifice. After he does that, those who have been invited can eat. Now go on. You should encounter him right away.

14They went *immediately,* and as they entered the city, Samuel was walking in their direction on his way up to the high place.

15Now the Eternal One had told Samuel on the previous day,

Eternal One: 16Tomorrow at about this same time I will send you a young man from Benjamin. You will anoint him to be a ruler over all Israel. *I will give him strength* to save My people from the Philistines because I hear their cries *in their misery*.

17When Samuel saw Saul *walking toward him,* the Eternal spoke to him.

Eternal One: Look! This is the young man I told you about. I've chosen him to rule over My people.

18There inside the gate, Saul walked up to Samuel.

Saul: Can you tell me, please, where I might find the seer's house?

Samuel: 19You have found him. Come with me to the high place, and eat with me today. Tomorrow morning I will tell you what you need to know and then send you on your way. 20As for those donkeys that wandered off three days ago? Don't give them any further thought. Someone has found them. Israel is more concerned today with you and your family.

Saul: 21I come from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and I belong to the poorest family in Benjamin. Why are you saying these things to me?

22Samuel took Saul and his servant up to the hall where around 30 people waited, and he made them sit in the places of honor.

Samuel *(to the cook)***:** 23Bring the portion I gave you and asked you to set aside.

24The cook brought the thigh along with other select parts and set them in front of Saul.

Samuel *(pointing to the meat)*: Take a look. This was set aside for you. Eat *and enjoy it all* because this has been reserved for you until the appointed time. I have invited these people *to be our guests*.

So Saul feasted with Samuel *the rest of* the day. 25When they returned to the city from *eating at* the high place, Samuel spoke with Saul on the roof.

26*The next morning,* at the break of dawn, Samuel shouted up to Saul on the roof.

Samuel *(to Saul)*: Wake up! It is time for me to send you on your way.

Saul rose, and he and Samuel walked out into the street. 27When they reached the edge of the city, Samuel told him,

Samuel: Send your servant on ahead. When he's far enough away, stop and let's talk. I need to give you a message from the True God.

10 Samuel took a vial of *olive* oil and poured it on Saul's head, *anointing him,* and then kissed him.

Samuel: The Eternal One of Israel has anointed you as ruler over His possession, *over all Israel*. [You will be king over the people of the Eternal One, and you will deliver them from the enemies that surround them now. And this will be the sign to you that *I am speaking truth,* and God has anointed you king over what is His]:* 2when you leave me today, you will meet two men not far from Rachel's tomb, in Benjamin's territory at Zelzah. These men will tell you, "The donkeys you sought have been found. Your father has stopped worrying about them, and now he is worried about you. He asks, 'But what about my son?'" 3When you leave them behind and reach the oak of Tabor, you will meet three men going to sacrifice to God at Bethel. One will have three young goats; one will have three loaves of bread; another will have a skin full of wine. 4They will greet you and offer you two of the loaves of bread. Take them, *and go on*. 5When you leave them behind and reach the Philistine garrison at the hill of God *(Gibeath-elohim),* just as you come into the city, you will meet a group of prophets returning from the high place. *Musicians* leading them will be playing harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres; and the prophets will be caught up in prophetic *ecstasy.* 6Then the Spirit of the Eternal One will overtake you, you will be caught up in the same prophetic *spirit* as these prophets, and you will be changed into a different person. 7When these signs come to pass, do what you think is best. The True God is with you. 8Go down to Gilgal ahead of me. I will come to present peace sacrifices and burnt offerings. Wait for seven days, and I will show you what to do.

9As Saul turned to leave Samuel, the True God transformed his heart. As a result, all that Samuel had predicted came to pass that day. 10When Saul came up to the hill *of God,* he met a band of prophets; *and as Samuel had said,* the Spirit of God overtook him, and he was caught up in their prophetic *ecstasy*.

11Then the people who knew him saw that he began to prophesy with the prophets.

People *(among themselves)*: What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul one of the prophets now?

Local Citizen: 12And who is their father?

This is one way the saying, "Is Saul one of the prophets?" originated.

13When Saul finished prophesying, he went to a high place *to a local shrine*.

14When Saul *returned home,* his uncle asked him and his servant where they had been.

Saul: We went to look for the donkeys. When we couldn't find them, we spoke with *the seer,* Samuel.

Uncle: 15What did Samuel tell you?

Saul: 16He told us that the donkeys had been found.

But Saul did not tell him anything about the kingdom *or anything else* Samuel had said.

► Why is Saul chosen as the first king? He is from the tiny tribe of Benjamin, so he seems to be outside the

* 10:1 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

mainstream of political power. But he is a handsome and tall young man, meaning he is appealing in appearance and able to inspire confidence in warriors. At this first appearance, it even seems as if his inner qualities might match his outer qualities—God transforms him and gives him the power to prophesy—but as the story goes on, his insecurities and his jealousy of David are his undoing.

17Sometime later Samuel called the people
to come and gather in the presence of the
Eternal One at Mizpah. 18He stood before
the Israelites *with an important message.*

Samuel: Listen to what the Eternal One,
the God of Israel, has to say to you:
"I brought Israel up from Egypt and
rescued you from Egyptian bondage,
and then I delivered you from all of the
nations that sought to burden you."
19Today, though, you have rejected the
True God who has saved you from every
disaster and distress, and you have asked
for a king to rule over you. *If that is what
you want,* then line up by tribe and clan
in front of the Eternal One.

20So Samuel brought all of the tribes of
Israel in front of him, and he chose the
tribe of Benjamin by drawing lots. 21Then
he sorted through the clans of the tribe
of Benjamin *by the same method,* and the
clan of the Matrites was chosen. [Within
that clan, he brought each man forward
one by one,]* and Saul, son of Kish, was
chosen. But when they looked for him, he
was nowhere to be found.

22So they asked the Eternal One if the
man had yet arrived.

Eternal One: Look! He has hidden himself
among the baggage.

23Then they hurried to find him and bring
him in front of the people; and when he
emerged, he stood head and shoulders
above everyone else.

Samuel *(to the people)*: 24Do you see the
man whom the Eternal One has chosen
for you as king? No one else among the
people *of Israel* can compare to him.

People *(cheering and chanting)*: Long live
the king!

25Samuel informed the people about the
rights and responsibilities of the king, and
he wrote all these details in a book that
he placed in the presence of the Eternal
One. Then he sent all the people to their
homes. 26Saul, too, went home to Gibeah,
accompanied by a group of warriors
who had been moved by the True God *to
accompany him.* 27Still, some worthless
skeptics *and unbelievers* asked, "How can
this *no-name from Benjamin* protect us?"
and they refused to honor him with an
appropriate gift. But Saul kept silent.

[At that time, Nahash, the king of the
Ammonites, tyrannized the men of the
tribes of Dan and Reuben, putting out one
of each man's eyes and denying the pos-
sibility of their deliverance. Not one of the
Israelites across the Jordan still had both
his eyes, but 7,000 men had escaped from
this conflict and reached Jabesh-gilead.]*

11 So *after a month had passed,*
Nahash the Ammonite besieged
Jabesh-gilead. 2The men of
Jabesh tried to make a treaty with Nahash,
telling him they would serve him.

Nahesh: I will make this treaty with you
on one condition: I will put out the right
eye of every one of you and so humiliate
Israel.

Elders: 3Give us seven days to send mes-
sengers throughout Israel. If no one
comes to deliver us, we will surrender
to you.

4When the messengers reached Gibeah,
where Saul was *ruling,* they told the
people *about Nahash and his cruelty,* and it
made them weep out loud. 5Now Saul was
just coming in from plowing in the fields
when he heard the commotion.

Saul: What has happened? Why is every-
one so sad?

So they told the king about the *pre-
dicament and* request from the people of
Jabesh. 6When he heard their story, the
Spirit of the True God moved upon Saul,
and he was furious. 7He took a team of
oxen, *just like the one he had just been
plowing the fields with,* cut them into

* 10:21 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion. * 10:27 This portion appears in the LXX; most ancient texts omit it.

pieces, and sent the pieces throughout the land of Israel with his first *royal* decree: "May those who refuse to answer this call from Saul and Samuel have their oxen torn apart like this!" Because they were afraid of making the Eternal One angry, people *from every tribe* came forward to fight as one.

8Saul gathered them at Bezek, and the Israelites numbered 300,000 *fighting men,* with Judah providing 30,000. 9The messengers who had come *from Jabesh* were sent back to tell the people in Jabesh-gilead to look for deliverance before the heat of the next day. They were thrilled *by the news.*

10So the citizens of Jabesh sent a message *to Nahash.*

People of Jabesh: Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you may do whatever you wish to us.

11The next morning Saul divided the people into three regiments; they entered the Ammonite camp *that night under the cloak of darkness* during the morning watch and slaughtered the soldiers until the next afternoon. The survivors were *so few and* so scattered you could not find two *Ammonites* together.

People *(to Samuel)***:** 12Who are those people who jeered, "Is Saul going to be our king?" *Where are they now?* Hand them over so we can kill them!

Saul: 13*No.* Not one man will be executed today because the Eternal One has given a great victory to Israel.

Samuel *(to the people)***:** 14Come with me to Gilgal. There we will renew the kingdom *and crown Saul as our king.*

15So representatives from all the tribes went to Gilgal. There Saul was installed as king *of Israel* before the Eternal One; then they *joyfully* offered peace offerings to the Eternal, and Saul and all the Israelites celebrated.

► The historical books of the Hebrew Bible often have sections where great religious leaders make a final speech. This is a summing-up of their lives and often a prophetic warning about the future. Call it "foreshadowing," if you will, because everyone who hears this story knows that everything Samuel predicts comes true. As long as the people and their king serve only the Lord, they prosper; but if they and their king turn away from that faith, they suffer. As those who read the books of Samuel know, the people of Israel turn away from God; and eventually, great empires come and lay waste to the land.

12 **Samuel** *(to the Israelites)***:** I have listened to your voice and all you have said, and I have given you a king to rule over you. 2He is now your ruler and will walk before you. I have grown old and gray, but my sons still live among you. I have led you since I was a young man, *but those days are over.*

3Here I am. Speak up in front of the Eternal One and in front of His anointed king *if you have the same grievances* against me *as you have against my sons.* Have I ever taken an ox from you? A donkey? Have I ever cheated any of you? Threatened any of you? Have any of you given me a bribe to make me change my judgment? [If any of this is true, say so,]* I will make it right.

► Samuel asks his listeners to affirm that he has acted with integrity as their leader. Money has not swayed him, nor has personal emotion; he has done what is good in the sight of God. (Maybe, like Eli before him, his sons are a mess, but that's another matter.) The people take seriously what he has to say next for two reasons: they trust Samuel, and they fear God.

Today some leaders taint religion by acting as Samuel's sons did. Their personal greed, desire for political power, or unwillingness to put God first make some think that religion itself is a sham. Faithful leaders can still be found, but Samuel's example suggests that it's a good idea to question the actions of our leaders before we

* 12:3 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

let them tell us what they think God wants from us.

People: 4No, you have never cheated us, you have never threatened us, and you have never taken anything from anyone.

Samuel: 5Then let the Eternal One, who witnesses against you, and His anointed *king,* who bears witness today, see that you have found me innocent of any wrongdoing against you.

People: He is our witness.

Samuel: 6The Eternal One is our witness, the One who first raised Moses and Aaron *to be leaders of the people,* the One who brought your ancestors here out of *the oppression of* Egypt. 7Now stand ready as I will present to you, before the Eternal One, a declaration of all the righteous acts the Eternal has done on behalf of you and your ancestors.

8When Jacob went down into Egypt, your ancestors cried to the Eternal One *for help,* and the Eternal raised Moses and Aaron to lead your ancestors out of their bondage and bring them to this land. 9But *once they were here,* they forgot the Eternal One, their True God, so He allowed Sisera, the general of the armies of Hazor, and later the Philistines and then the king of Moab to subdue them. So the people had to fight for their survival. 10*Under this heavy oppression,* the people cried out to the Eternal, confessing, "We have sinned. We have forsaken the Eternal to serve the local gods.* But if You will save us now from the *heavy* hands of our enemies, we will serve You." 11Then the Eternal One raised up Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel, who pulled you out of the grasp of your enemies *and brought peace from warfare* on every side so that you could live in safety. 12But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites was arrayed *for battle* against you, you ran to me, saying, "Give us a king to rule over us," even though the Eternal One, your True God, has always been your king. 13So now, look: here is the king you chose, the king for whom you asked. The Eternal has indeed set a king to rule over you.

14If you will revere and serve the Eternal, if you listen to His voice and do not disobey His commands, then you and this king who rules over you will follow the Eternal One, your True God, *and all will go well with you.*

15But if you ignore His voice, if you disobey the commands of the Eternal, then His mighty hand *of judgment* will be raised against you and against your ancestors.

16Stand ready, for the Eternal One is going to show you a great sight. 17It is the wheat harvest now, *and is this not the time after the early rains?* But I will call upon the Eternal to send thunder and rain so you will realize the depths of your sin before God because you demanded a king to rule over you.

18Samuel prayed to the Eternal. He sent thunder and rain *to pelt the fields* that day, and the people were afraid of Him and of Samuel.

People *(to Samuel)***:** 19Pray to the Eternal One your God on behalf of your servants so we will not die for adding to all the weight of our sin the evil of demanding our own king.

Samuel: 20Don't be frightened. *It is true that* you have done evil, but never stop following the Eternal One. Serve Him completely, 21and do not follow empty things that do not have the power to benefit or save you. They are worthless. 22For the sake of His reputation, He will not cast away His *chosen* people. *Before you ever chose Him,* the Eternal One chose you as His own because it pleased Him.

23As for me, the last thing I would ever do is to stop praying for you. That would be a sin against the Eternal One on my part. I will always try to teach you *to live and act* in a way that is good and proper *in His eyes.* 24Make this your one purpose: to revere Him and serve Him faithfully with complete devotion because He has done great things for you. 25But if you continue in your evil ways *against Him,* you and your king will be swept off *the face of the earth.*

13 Saul was about 30* years old when he became king, and *after* he ruled for *at least* two

* 12:10 Hebrew, *Baals* and *Astartes* * 13:1 All Hebrew manuscripts and most Greek manuscripts omit Saul's age. The entire verse is problematic. Many suggestions have been offered, but none are clearly satisfying. Saul was older than 20 and less than 40 when he began his reign. He ruled at least 2 years and less than 42 years. It is difficult to be more specific.

years, 2Saul chose 3,000 men of Israel:
2,000 stayed with him in the hill country
of Bethel at a place called Michmash, and
the other 1,000 joined *Saul's son* Jonathan
at Gibeah in Benjamin. He sent all the rest
home to their tents.

3Jonathan crushed the Philistine regiment at Geba, and news of this slaughter reached the Philistines. Saul ordered that a trumpet be blown throughout Israel *to announce Jonathan's victory to the people.*

Saul: Let the Hebrew people know about this!

4When all Israel had heard the news of how Saul had defeated the Philistines, and when they learned that the Philistines were filled with hatred toward them, Saul called the people out to join him at Gilgal.

5Now the Philistines had gathered their forces: 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and so many foot soldiers they were like grains of sand on the beach. They made camp at Michmash, east of Beth-aven. 6When the people of Israel saw they were in danger, for their troops were seriously outnumbered, they hid in caves and in holes, among the rocks, tombs, and cisterns. 7Some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan *River* into Gad and Gilead. But Saul remained at Gilgal; the people continued to follow him, but they were terrified.

8Saul waited for Samuel for seven days, the amount of time he had been told by Samuel to wait. But the prophet did not come to Gilgal, and the people began to slip away. *A few more days and Saul would have no army left, so he decided to take matters into his own hands.*

Saul: 9Bring me the *animals for* burnt offerings and the offerings of peace *for the Lord.*

10*Although Saul was not a priest,* he offered the burnt offering *himself without waiting for Samuel.* Immediately after Saul finished the offering, *when the aroma of the sacrifice lingered over the land,* Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him and to pay his respects. *But Samuel knew Saul had overstepped his bounds.*

Samuel: 11What have you done?

Saul: The people were deserting me! You didn't come when you promised, and the Philistines were gathering *for war* at Michmash. 12I thought, "The Philistines are going to attack me here in Gilgal, and I haven't even asked the Eternal One to favor us." So I took matters into my own hands—I didn't want to—but I offered the burnt offering myself.

Samuel: 13That was a foolish thing, Saul. You have not kept the commandment that the Eternal, your True God, gave to you. He was willing to establish your kingdom over Israel for all time, 14but now your kingdom, *your dynasty,* will not last. He has found a man who seeks His will and has appointed him king over all the people *instead of you* because you have not kept to what the Eternal One commanded.

15Samuel left Gilgal then and went on his way to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. When Saul counted his forces, they numbered about 600 men. 16Saul, his son Jonathan, and the people who had remained with him camped at Geba in Benjamin, but the Philistines were camped at Michmash.

17Philistine raiders left their camp in three divisions: one group went toward Ophrah, in the land of Shual. 18Another group went toward Beth-horon, and another group went toward the borderland that looks down on the valley of Zeboim in the wilderness.

19Now *at that time* there were no blacksmiths in all the land of Israel because the Philistines said, "Then the Hebrews will be capable of making swords or spears." 20That meant that the Israelites had to go to Philistine *blacksmiths* to have their farm implements and their axes sharpened. 21They charged one-fourth of an ounce to sharpen picks and plow blades, and one-eighth of an ounce for axes and goads. 22That meant that on the day of the battle, none of the forces of Israel owned swords or spears, except for Saul and his son Jonathan.

23The garrison of Philistines left *the camp* and came to the pass of Michmash.

14 One day Saul's son, Jonathan, *came up with a plan. He* turned to his armor-bearer.

Jonathan: Come on. Let's go down to the Philistines over there.

But he didn't tell his father *what he had decided.*

2Saul remained outside Gibeah under
the pomegranate tree at Migron with
about 600 of his soldiers. 3Ahijah, the son
of Ahitub and nephew of Ichabod (who
was a son of Phinehas, who was born to
Eli, who had been the priest of the Eternal
One in Shiloh), was also there *with Saul,*
bearing the priestly vest. None of the peo-
ple knew that Jonathan had gone.

4-5The mountain pass that Jonathan
took to reach the Philistines was bordered
on either end by rocky crags. The one on
the north in front of Michmash was called
Bozez, and the other on the south near
Geba was called Seneh.

Jonathan *(to his armor-bearer)***:** 6Come
on! Let's cross over to this force of *Phi-*
listines, these uncircumcised, *these idol-*
worshipers. Maybe the Eternal One will
fight for us. If He wants to save us, then
no force is too big or too small.

Armor-bearer: 7Do whatever you think is
right, and I will follow you. My decision
will be your decision.

Jonathan: 8Now we will approach the
Philistines and let them see us. 9If they
say, "Wait there. We are coming to you,"
then we will stay where we are, and we
will not advance. 10But if they say, "Come
here," then we will go to them, and that
will be the sign that the Eternal has
given us power over them.

11So they let the Philistines see them, and
the Philistine soldiers ridiculed them.

Soldiers: Look! There are some Hebrews
climbing out of the holes where they've
been hiding!

12They signaled to Jonathan and his
armor-bearer.

Soldiers: *Come here, you two!* Come here,
and we'll show you something!

The Philistines believe no one can climb up to them.

Jonathan *(to the armor-bearer)***:** Follow
me! The Eternal One has assured victory
for Israel.

13Jonathan scrambled up *the steep incline*
on his hands and feet *to the Philistine sol-*
diers, his armor-bearer right behind. *When*
he appeared before the Philistines, they fell
before him, and he and his armor-bearer
killed them *right and left.* 14In that first
assault, Jonathan and his armor-bearer
killed about 20 men within an area of
about a half-acre. 15*When the news of this*
slaughter spread, it caused trembling in
the *Philistine* camp, *among the soldiers* in
the field, even among the whole nation.
The garrison *of troops* was *confused and*
afraid, and the raiding parties *who had*
terrorized Israel trembled. Soon the earth
itself quaked, and an awesome trembling
abounded.

16*From a distance* Saul's watchmen
at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the multitude
of Philistines melting away, rushing back
and forth.

Saul *(to his soldiers)***:** 17Call the roll. I want
to know who is missing from our camp.

After the roll call, they realized Jonathan
and his armor-bearer were gone.

Saul *(to Ahijah the priest)***:** 18Bring the cov-
enant chest of the True God here.

The chest of God was traveling with the
Israelites in those days. 19While Saul was
talking with *Ahijah* the priest, the rau-
cous commotion in the Philistine ranks
grew. He turned to *Ahijah* the priest *who*
was consulting the oracle of the Urim and
Thummim to determine God's will.

Saul *(to the priest)***:** Withdraw your hand!

20Then Saul rallied all his troops and led
them into battle, and there was so great a
confusion that no one knew exactly whom
they were fighting. 21Those Hebrews who
had been with the Philistines in their
camps changed sides and began fighting
alongside the Israelites who were with
Saul and Jonathan, 22and those Israelites
who had gone into hiding in the hill coun-
try of Ephraim came *flooding out of the*
hills to fight when they heard the Philis-
tines were running away.

23So the Eternal One gave Israel the
victory that day, and the battle passed
beyond Beth-aven. 24But Saul *did a foolish*
thing: he placed all of his troops under an
oath that caused added pressure.

Saul: A curse on anyone who stops to eat
before evening comes and I have my
revenge on my enemies!

So none of the army ate anything,
25[although they passed through a forest

and by a honeycomb]* with honey on the ground. 26The people passed and the honey was dripping out, but none of them reached out for a taste because they were afraid of Saul's curse. 27But Jonathan had not heard Saul's words, so *when he passed the honeycomb,* he reached out with the staff he was carrying, took some honey, put it in his mouth, and immediately felt refreshed.

Soldier: 28Your father strictly charged us not to eat anything! He said we would be cursed if we did; that is why we are so weak *with hunger*.

Jonathan: 29Then my father has troubled our people *for no reason*. See how much stronger I am after tasting the honey? 30Wouldn't it have been better if our soldiers had been free to eat some of the food they had taken from the enemy? Our slaughter of the Philistines is not as great as it could be *because we are too weak to pursue it!*

31*So after this victory,* after the Israelites had crushed the Philistines from Michmash to Aijalon, they were faint. 32*When evening came and they were permitted to eat,* they seized the spoils *of battle,* took sheep and oxen and calves, slaughtered them on the ground, and ate them with their blood, *which is strictly forbidden by the law of Moses*. 33This was reported to Saul.

Soldier: Look, our soldiers are sinning against the Eternal One by eating *the meat together* with the blood *of those animals!*

Saul: You should not have done this. Roll a large stone before me here *so I can prepare an altar*. 34Go among the people and tell them, "Bring your oxen or sheep; kill them here, and eat, but do not sin against the Eternal by eating *the meat together* with the blood."

So all the soldiers brought their own animals that night and slaughtered them at the stone altar. 35This was the first altar Saul built to the Eternal One.

Saul: 36Let us go down against the Philistine forces tonight and attack them until morning, until not one of them is left alive.

His followers encouraged him to do as he wished, *everyone that is, except for the priest*.

Priest *(protesting)***:** Let us consult the True God.

So Saul and his priest come before the Lord and perform the appropriate rituals so that he can know the will of God.

Saul *(to God)***:** 37Do You want me to go after the Philistines *tonight? If we go,* will You give Israel victory?

But God did not answer him that day. 38*So he gathered the people together.*

Saul: Come now, all you leaders of the land. Let us determine where we have sinned today. 39For as the Eternal One—the God who delivers Israel—lives, wherever the sin lies, even in my son Jonathan, that person will surely die!

No one among the people answered him. 40So Saul separated himself and Jonathan from the others, ordering the people to stand on one side and he and Jonathan on the other.

People: Do as you please.

41Then Saul asked the Eternal One, the God of Israel, to reveal the truth. [The priest consulted the stones of the divine oracle to determine whether the sin was committed by the common people of Israel or by someone in his royal family.]* The oracle indicated that the family of Saul, not the people of Israel, was at fault.

Saul *(to the priest)***:** 42Cast again to see whether it is me or my son Jonathan.

The results indicated Jonathan.

Saul *(to Jonathan)***:** 43What have you done?

Jonathan: I certainly tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff I carried. I am ready to die.

Saul: 44May the True God do the same and more to me, my son. Jonathan, you must die.

But the people step in to protect Jonathan.

* 14:25 Meaning of the manuscripts is uncertain. * 14:41 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

People *(to Saul)*: 45Would you execute Jonathan, the one who won Israel's great victory? Of course not! As the Eternal One lives, not a hair of his head should be harmed because he worked with the True God today *to give us victory!*

So the people ransomed Jonathan, and he was not killed. 46Saul, *now humiliated,* stopped pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines *who were left* returned to their own land.

47When Saul entered into his kingship, he made war with all of Israel's enemies—Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Throughout his life he fought and condemned them. 48He fought bravely and defeated the Amalekites and rescued Israel from the onslaught of all those who plundered her.

49Saul's three sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua, and his two daughters were Merab (the firstborn) and Michal (the younger). 50Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz, and the commander of his forces was *his cousin* Abner, son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51Kish, the father of Saul, and Ner, the father of Abner, were sons of Abiel.

52The Israelites fought hard against the Philistines throughout Saul's reign; and whenever Saul found a strong or brave fighter, he added him to his forces.

15 **Samuel** *(to Saul)*: 1-2Because the Eternal One sent me to anoint you as ruler over His people Israel, listen to what the Eternal One, the Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say: "I will punish Amalek because they waylaid Israel in her path out of Egypt. 3I want you to go down against Amalek and destroy them, everything they have. *Do not allow anything to survive;* destroy them all—man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

► Although Saul is given great victories, God rejects him, regretting that Saul was ever chosen as king. Several reasons are given for why Saul was judged for listening to his own counsel rather than trusting in God's. First he takes the priest's role as his own and carries out a ritual sacrifice. Later his hungry soldiers break the dietary regulations from the law of Moses by devouring meat and blood together. Finally Saul does not destroy every aspect of the Amalekite kingdom as God commanded.

4So Saul gathered his forces, and at Telaim he counted them: 200,000 foot soldiers with 10,000 men from Judah. 5He approached the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the valley there. 6From there he sent *a message* to the Kenite people.

Message from Saul: Get out! Be gone! You showed kindness to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Get away from among the Amalekites, or I will be forced to destroy you with them.

So the Kenites left their homes among the Amalekites. 7Then Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. 8He cut down the entire population with the sword, *as God had told him to do,* except he captured King Agag of the Amalekites and kept him alive. 9Saul and the army spared Agag, and they saved the best of the livestock: the sheep, the oxen, the lambs, and *the best of* all the stock. They kept what was valuable instead of destroying it, and they only destroyed those things they considered worthless.

10Then Samuel heard the voice of the Eternal.

Eternal One: 11I regret that I made Saul king *over Israel* because he has turned away from Me and from executing My commands.

► What do we make of this idea that God has changed His mind? Classical theologians (Augustine and Aquinas, particularly) believed that God is unchangeable, above all such petty things as regret, anger, and sorrow, although His actions sometimes *seem* as though God feels such things. More contemporary theologians suggest that God can change His mind as His purpose is being worked out through the actions of human beings. In either case, what we see here is God

seeking someone who will act as His regent and do exactly as He says—and clearly, Saul is no longer capable of being that person.

Samuel was distressed *when he heard this,* and he cried out to the Eternal One all night long.

► Samuel feels terrible about what is going to happen, and he spends the night weeping. This reaction makes Samuel's conversation with Saul that much more powerful—what sorrow and anger Samuel must be feeling as he is laying down the law to this young king he anointed with his own hands. This tragic twist in the story of Saul develops because he has failed to live up to God's requirements, so God decides that His chosen king will not remain on the throne.

12 Then he rose early in the morning to go and find Saul, only to hear that Saul had gone on to Carmel, where he had erected a monument to himself, and returned to Gilgal. 13 *At last* Samuel caught up with Saul. *When Saul saw him, he greeted him as if nothing was wrong.*

Saul *(to Samuel)***:** May you be blessed by the Eternal One. I have carried out His commands.

Samuel: 14 Then why do I hear the sounds of sheep and cattle?

Saul: 15 They brought the best of the Amalekites' sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Eternal One your God. But we destroyed all the rest *as we were told.*

Samuel: 16 *That's enough.* Stop talking, and let me tell you what the Eternal told me last night.

Saul: Go ahead, *I'm listening.*

Samuel: 17 Don't you remember when you didn't amount to much in your own sight, but you were made the leader of the tribes of Israel? Wasn't it the Eternal One who anointed you king over them? 18 The Eternal One sent you on a mission, commanding you, "Go and destroy the Amalekites, who are sinners. Fight them until they are completely destroyed."

19 Why didn't you obey the voice of the Eternal One? Why did you grab the spoils *of battle,* doing what the Eternal considers evil?

Saul *(defending himself)***:** 20 I did what the Eternal One instructed. As He commanded, I went on the mission and decimated all the Amalekites, and I have brought back Agag, their king. 21 It was the people who took the sheep and cattle from the spoil that would have been devoted to destruction and brought them back to sacrifice to the Eternal One, your True God, in Gilgal.

Samuel: 22 Does the Eternal One delight in
sacrifices and burnt offerings
as much as in *perfect* obedience to
His voice?
Be certain of this: that obedience is
better than sacrifice;
to heed *His voice* is better than
offering the fat of rams.
23 Rebellion is as much a sin as fortune-
telling,
and willfulness is as wicked as
worshiping strange gods.
Because you have rejected His
commands,
He has rejected you as king.

Saul: 24 I have sinned. I disobeyed the voice of the Eternal One and your instructions because I was afraid of the people. I listened to their counsel *instead of yours.* 25 So now, please pardon my sin, and return with me so that I can worship the Eternal.

Samuel: 26 I will not return with you. Because you have rejected the voice of the Eternal One, He has rejected your claims to rule Israel. *He is through with you.*

27 As Samuel turned to go, Saul *knelt to the ground,* caught the prophet's robe, and held on so tight that it tore.

Samuel: 28 Today the Eternal One has torn the kingdom of Israel from you to give to your neighbor, who is a better man than you. 29 The One who is the Glory of Israel

will not recant or change His mind, for He is not like some mortal being who changes his mind.

Saul: [30]I have sinned. But please, do me this honor in front of the elders of Israel and all the people. Come back with me so that I may worship the Eternal One, your True God.

[31]So Samuel returned with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Eternal One. *Samuel then completed what Saul had begun.*

Samuel: [32]Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites.

Agag was led to him, being cautiously optimistic that the worst was surely past.

Samuel: [33]Just as your sword has taken children from women, so will this sword make your mother a childless woman.

So Samuel chopped Agag into pieces before the Eternal One at Gilgal. [34]Then Samuel went back to Ramah, and Saul returned to his house in Gibeah of Saul.

[35]Samuel never saw Saul again until the day he died. The prophet grieved over the *hapless* king. And the Eternal *grieved, too,* regretting that He had ever anointed Saul king over Israel.

16 **Eternal One** *(to Samuel)***:** How long will you mourn over Saul? I have rejected him as king over *My people* Israel. Now take your horn, fill it with oil, and depart. I have selected a new king for Me from among the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem.

The Lord has yet another mission for Samuel.

Samuel: [2]How can I do that? If Saul hears *I am anointing a new king,* he will kill me!

Eternal One: Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Eternal One." [3]Invite Jesse to that sacrifice, and *when he arrives,* I will show you what to do. You will anoint for Me the one I show to you.

[4]Samuel did as the Eternal One had told him, and he went to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came out to him, *unsure of what business he had there.*

Elders *(trembling)***:** Do you come in peace?

Samuel: [5]Yes, in peace. I have come to sacrifice to the Eternal One. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.

And Samuel consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice as well. [6]When they came, he noticed *the eldest son,* Eliab.

Samuel *(to himself)***:** Surely this is the one the Eternal One will anoint.

Eternal One *(to Samuel)***:** [7]Take no notice of his looks or his height. He is not the one, for the Eternal One does not pay attention to what humans value. Humans only care about the external appearance, but the Eternal considers the inner character.

[8]Jesse called *his son* Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. Samuel looked at him.

Samuel: The Eternal has not chosen him either.

[9]Then Jesse brought *his son* Shammah in front *of Samuel.*

Samuel: The Eternal has not chosen him either.

[10]Jesse walked seven of his sons in front of Samuel, *and each time,* Samuel refused them because the Eternal One had chosen none of them.

Samuel *(to Jesse)***:** [11]Are all your sons here?

Jesse: All but the youngest. He is off keeping the sheep.

Samuel: Send for him, and bring him here. We will not sit down until he arrives.

[12]Jesse sent for the youngest son, *David,* and he came in *front of Samuel.* He was a handsome boy, with a healthy complexion and bright eyes.

Eternal One: Rise and anoint him, because this is the one.

[13]Then Samuel took the horn filled with *olive* oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Eternal fell strongly on David and remained

from that day on. Samuel then left for Ramah.

14The Spirit of the Eternal left Saul, and an evil spirit sent from the Eternal One tormented him. 15*Saul's servants saw this.*

Servants *(to Saul)*: Look, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. 16Let our lord command that his servants find someone skillful on the harp, so that when this evil spirit from God is bothering you, he will play and ease your mind.

Saul *(to his servants)*: 17*I agree.* Find someone who can play well, and bring him here to me.

One of the younger men there spoke up.

A Young Servant: 18I know someone, one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem, who plays skillfully and who is a man of courage, a warrior, sensible in what he says, and handsome; and the Eternal One is *surely* with him.

19So Saul dispatched messengers to Jesse.

Saul's Message: Send your son David, who is watching your flocks, to me. *Your king needs his service.*

20So Jesse did *as his king commanded.* He sent Saul a young goat and a donkey loaded down with bread and a skin of wine by his son David. 21David came to Saul and served him. The king loved him greatly and made David his armor-bearer. 22Then he sent a message to Jesse.

Saul's Message: David has impressed me. Please allow him to remain here in my service.

23Whenever God allowed the evil spirit to afflict Saul, David would play the harp, Saul would be relieved of his torment, and the evil spirit would depart.

17 Now the Philistines had gathered an army for battle at Socoh, which is in the land of Judah, and they pitched their tents in Ephes-dammim between Socoh and Azekah. 2*Unwilling to allow another Philistine invasion of their nation,* Saul and the forces of Israel went out *against them.* They camped in the valley of Elah and formed ranks against the Philistines. 3The Philistines stood on one mountain and the Israelites on another, with the valley between them.

4Then a champion emerged from the Philistine camp, Goliath of Gath *(one of the five capital cities in the Philistine confederation),* who was over nine feet tall.* 5He wore a bronze helmet and a chain-mail coat that weighed more than 100 pounds of bronze. 6His legs were protected by bronze shin guards, and he had a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders, *ready to throw.* 7The shaft of his spear was as *thick as* a weaver's beam, the iron head of his spear weighed 20 pounds, and his shield-bearer went ahead of him. *He was a fearsome sight.*

8Goliath stood and shouted to the watching Israelites.

Goliath: Why have you come to fight us? Am I not a Philistine, *a warrior for a powerful empire*? And don't you serve Saul, *your so-called king?* Choose yourselves a champion, and send him out to me. 9If he kills me when we fight, then we will serve you; but if I defeat him and kill him, then you will serve us. 10Today I challenge the entire army of Israel: send me someone to fight!

11When Saul and his army heard the Philistine's words, they were shocked and frightened.

No one compares physically to Goliath. A hand-to-hand battle would be a slaughter, and the Philistines would conquer Israel anyway. Who can save them?

12David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah who had eight sons. At this time, Jesse was already an old man. 13Jesse's three oldest sons, Eliab (the firstborn), Abinadab (the second), and Shammah (the third) had gone with Saul to the battlefield. 14David was the youngest son; and while the three oldest went with Saul, 15he went back and forth between Saul's *battle* and his father's sheep in Bethlehem *taking provisions to the troops and bringing word from the front line.*

16For 40 days this Philistine *giant, Goliath of Gath,* stepped forward, challenging *the men of Israel* every morning and evening. *But no one was brave enough to accept the challenge.*

* 17:4 Greek manuscripts read, "over six feet tall."

Jesse *(to his son David)*: 17Take ⅜ of a bushel of roasted grain and these 10 loaves *of bread* to your brothers in the camp. 18Also take these 10 blocks of cheese to the commander of their company. See how your brothers are doing, and bring me some word from them. 19Saul, your brothers, and all the men of Israel are arrayed in the valley of Elah fighting against the Philistines.

► The story of David and Goliath is one that has grown in popular attention, and many people who have never read the Bible know it as a simple story of the underdog defeating the favored warrior. Although there is another story of how David is noticed by the king (when he was brought to Saul's court to play his music), in this story, David comes to the king's attention as God's warrior, contrasting Saul in almost every way. A mere boy, David doesn't trust in his own strength or in armor or in fancy weapons. David places his trust in God, and his courage comes from belief that God can use him, as small as he is compared to his opponent, because God is all-powerful.

20David rose early the next morning, left the sheep in the care of another, took the provisions, and obeyed Jesse's instructions. David reached the camp just as the army was lining up and shouting its war cries. 21Both Israel and the Philistines prepared to fight against each other. 22David left the provisions with the person in charge of baggage; he ran to the front lines *and shoved his way through the soldiers* to greet his brothers. 23As David talked with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, emerged again and shouted his challenge *to the men of Israel*. This time young David heard his words.

24When they saw Goliath, all the Israelites were frightened and retreated from him.

Soldiers: 25Have you seen this man who steps forward? He's trying to taunt Israel. Our king will reward the man who kills him with wealth, a royal marriage, and freedom for his entire family from taxation *and obligations* in Israel.

David *(asking those around him)*: 26What is the reward for removing this insult from Israel by killing this man? No uncircumcised Philistine can get away with taunting the armies of the living God!

Soldiers: 27You've heard what will be given to the man who kills him. *We were just talking about it.*

28David's oldest brother, Eliab, overheard this conversation and became angry with David.

Eliab: Why have you come down here? Who is watching your tiny flock in the wilderness? *I'm your brother, and* I know you—you're arrogant, and your heart is evil. You've come to watch the battle *as if it were just entertainment.*

David: 29What have I done now? I was just asking a question.

30David ignored him and asked another *soldier* the same question, and the people gave him the same answer. 31When news of David's *valiant* words reached the king, Saul sent for David.

David *(to Saul)*: 32Don't let anyone be frightened because of that man. I am your servant, and I will go and fight with him.

Saul: 33*Don't be ridiculous*—you can't fight the Philistine. You're only a youth, and he has been a warrior since his childhood. *You lack age and experience.*

David: 34I work as a shepherd for my father. Whenever a lion or a bear has come and attacked one of my lambs, 35I have gone after it and struck it down to rescue the lamb from the predator's mouth; if it turned to attack me, I would take it by the chin, beat it, and kill it. 36I have killed both a lion and a bear; and as your servant I will kill this uncircumcised Philistine, too, since he has dared to taunt the armies of the living God.

37The Eternal One, who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.

Saul: Go then, and may the Eternal One be with you!

38So Saul outfitted David in the king's own
armor: a bronze helmet to protect his
head and a coat of mail *to protect his chest.*
39David strapped on Saul's sword outside
the armor and then discovered he could
not move because he was not used to the
restrictions of the weighty armor.

David: I'm not used to these things. *How*
can I attack an enemy when I can't even
walk? So he removed *every bit of* Saul's
armor. *He would fight the Philistine as he*
had fought those lions and bears.

40He took his staff in his hand and went to
the stream to choose five smooth stones,
which he kept in a pouch in his shep-
herd's bag. He had his sling ready as he
approached the Philistine.

41The Philistine, with his shield-
bearer in front of him, came closer to
David. 42When he saw that David was only
a healthy and handsome boy, Goliath's
eyes filled with contempt.

Goliath: 43Am I a dog that you come to
beat me with a stick?

And he cursed David, invoking the names
of his *Philistine* gods.

Goliath: 44Come here, and I will feed your
flesh to the birds of the air and the wild
animals of the fields.

David: 45You come to me carrying a sword
and spear and javelin *as your weapons,*
but I come armed with the name of the
Eternal One, the Commander of *heavenly*
armies, the True God of the armies of
Israel, the One you have insulted. 46This
very day, the Eternal One will give you
into my hands. I will strike you down
and cut off your head, and I will feed the
birds of the air and the wild animals of
the fields with the flesh of your Philistine
warriors. Then all the land will know the
True God is with Israel, 47and all of those
gathered here will know that the Eternal
One does not save by sword and spear.
The battle is the Eternal One's, and He
will give you into our hands.

48When the Philistine stood up and
approached, David ran toward the line of
battle to meet him. 49*As quick as a flash,*
he reached into his bag, put a stone in his
sling, and launched it at the Philistine,
hitting him in the head. The stone sank
deeply into his forehead, and the Philistine
fell face-first onto the ground.

50That was how David defeated the
Philistine with only a sling and a *single*
stone, striking him down, ending his life
without a sword in his hand.

► David's victory over Goliath sets in motion the rest of the story. The army of Israel wins a great victory over the panicked Philistines after David strikes down their champion, and David is elevated in the eyes of all (and soon will become Saul's leading general). But the seeds of the ongoing struggle between Saul and David are also sown on this day, as the people celebrate the good-looking boy's valor and heroism, filling Saul with jealousy. Soon Saul is thinking that David has everything but the kingdom's throne, and he turns on the boy who has saved his people. Their war destroys Saul and complicates David's life and eventual rule.

51Then David ran to the Philistine and
stood over his *lifeless* body. He pulled the
man's sword from its scabbard and fin-
ished him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their
champion was dead, *they knew they would*
be next, so they ran away. 52The people of
Israel and Judah gave a great shout and
chased the Philistines the length of the
valley* and back to the gates of Ekron; and
Philistines wounded in the battle fell all
along the *five miles of the* Shaaraim Way,
which ran between *the Philistine capital*
cities of Gath and Ekron. 53Then the Isra-
elites turned back from chasing the Philis-
tines and plundered the Philistine camps.

54*As the sons of Israel were distributing*
the spoils from the battle, David took the
Philistine's head and went to Jerusalem,
but he kept the man's armor *and other pos-*
sessions back in his own tent.

55*Earlier in the day,* as David was
choosing his stones and bravely approach-
ing the Philistine, Saul asked *his cousin*
Abner, who was general of the army, *where*
David came from.

* 17:52 Some Greek manuscripts read, "to the entrance of Gath."

Saul: Abner, who is that young man's father?

Abner: I swear to you, my king, I don't know.

Saul: [56]Well, find out who his father is.

[57]When David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner brought him in front of Saul holding the head of the Philistine.

Saul: [58]Who is your father, young man?

David: I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.

18 By the time David had finished speaking to Saul, *Saul's son* Jonathan was bound to David *in friendship,* and Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. [2]Saul took David *into his service* on that day and would not let him return to his father's home. [3]And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as he loved himself. [4]He took off the robe he wore and gave it to David, and also his armor, sword, bow, and belt, *symbolically transferring to David his right to ascend the throne.*

[5]David went wherever Saul sent him and was successful *in battle;* and as a result, Saul made him commander of his army. And all the people, even those who served Saul, were pleased.

[6]On the day they were returning from David's victory over the Philistine, the women came out from all the cities of Israel to meet the king, singing and dancing with tambourines and other instruments, making joyful music. [7]*At one point,* the women sang as they danced *and celebrated.*

Women: Saul has slain his thousands,
and David, his tens of thousands.

[8]This chant made Saul tremble with fury.

Saul: *Do you hear this?* They have said that David killed tens of thousands and that I only killed thousands. What else is left for him but my kingdom?

[9]From that moment on, Saul was suspicious of David.

[10]On the next day, the True God sent an evil spirit to overwhelm Saul and put him in a prophetic state inside his residence. While David was playing the harp, as he did every day *to try and soothe the king,* Saul had his spear in his hand [11]and decided to throw it at David, thinking, "I will pin him to the wall." But David twice escaped Saul's *angry attacks.*

[12]Saul was afraid of David because *the Spirit of* the Eternal was with him but had left Saul. [13]So, at last, Saul removed David from his presence, making him a commander over 1,000 men, *hoping he would die in battle.* But David went out *to the battle* and returned. [14]David was successful in everything he did because the Eternal One was present with him.

[15]When Saul saw that David achieved such success, he was *amazed and* afraid of him. [16]All of Israel and Judah loved David, who led their soldiers *into battle* and brought them back *victorious.*

Saul came up with a plan and called David.

Saul: [17]David, I want you to take my oldest daughter Merab in marriage. I ask only one thing in return: valiantly fight the Eternal One's battles on my behalf.

Saul was thinking that he did not need to murder David himself; instead, the Philistines would eventually kill David.

David *(to Saul)***:** [18]Who am I, what have I done, and who is my family in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?

[19]But at the time when Saul's daughter Merab was to be given to David *as his wife,* she was instead given in marriage to Adriel the Meholathite. [20]Saul's daughter Michal, however, loved David; and when Saul heard this, he was pleased.

► Although Michal is the only woman in the Bible described as loving a man, this is not a beautiful love story between David and Michal. Michal, the daughter of a king, was born to be a political pawn, not to marry for love. First Saul offers her as a reward to David if he slays 100 Philistines, a task the king is certain will kill David. When David succeeds, Michal helps him build credibility as the future king among the Israelites who do not know that God has already anointed him

king. But those Israelites also don't know that God has condemned Saul's lineage, declaring that none of his descendants will ascend the throne of Israel. That decry excludes any of Michal's children, too, so her marriage to David is doomed to failure, no matter how much she loves him.

21He thought that he would give her to David to trap him *in a dangerous situation* where the Philistines could still destroy David. So Saul spoke to David again.

Saul *(to David)***:** I want you to marry my *other* daughter.

22(to his servants) Talk to David privately. Tell him, "The king is very happy with you, and you are loved by those who serve him. So why don't you become the king's son-in-law?"

23So Saul's servants spoke these words to David *as requested,* but again he replied *modestly*.

David: Does it seem to you such a simple thing that I should become the king's son-in-law? What about the fact that I have no money *to pay the brideprice* and come from an unknown family *with no political connections*?

24Saul's servants reported David's concerns back to the king.

Saul: 25Tell David that in place of the traditional dowry, I want only the foreskins of 100 Philistines, so the king will be avenged against his enemies.

Saul thought David would be killed by the Philistines *while attempting this task*. 26When the servants repeated Saul's words, he agreed *to Saul's terms and decided to fulfill these conditions* to be the king's son-in-law. Before the allotted time elapsed *to pay the dowry,* 27David went with his men, killed 200 Philistines, and presented their foreskins to the king so that he could become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave David his daughter Michal in marriage; 28but when the king saw how David enjoyed the favor of the Eternal One, and that his daughter Michal loved him, 29he felt even more threatened by David. After *his plan failed,* Saul considered David his constant enemy.

30Whenever the commanders of the Philistine army came out to fight, David distinguished himself against them more than any of Saul's other servants, so that everyone valued him.

19 Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants *to figure out a way* to kill David, but Jonathan was very fond of David.

► In the friendship between Jonathan and David, Jonathan stands to lose everything he has if David becomes king, yet he betrays family and ambition by befriending him. These two young men make a pact to protect and love each other in life; and if something should happen to Jonathan, David agrees to honor Jonathan's descendants out of the love he bears for Jonathan. Later that promise results in David elevating one of Jonathan's sons to the king's table. In a time when any reminders of the previous regime would have been distracting and even dangerous, David shows he can do more than just be strategic and political.

Love knocks down barriers and makes us set aside our selfish concerns. This friendship has long been counted as a model for how two people might love and serve each other.

Jonathan *(warning David)***:** 2My father wants you dead. Watch out tomorrow morning. Think of a safe place to hide that nobody knows about. 3I will go into the field near where you are hiding, and I will speak on your behalf to my father. If I learn anything, I will tell you.

4Jonathan spoke generously on behalf of his friend to his father, Saul.

Jonathan: The king should not sin against his servant David, who has never sinned against you. Indeed his achievements have been of real service to you *and your kingdom.* 5He faced death when he

fought against the Philistine, and the Eternal One gave David a great victory for all of Israel. When you saw it then, you were filled with joy. Why would you now sin against an innocent person like David by killing him without a proper cause?

Saul *(considering this counsel)*: 6As the Eternal One lives, David should not be murdered.

7Jonathan found David and told him everything that had happened, and then Jonathan brought David back into the service of Saul *the king*.

8Once again there was war between *Israel and* the Philistines, and David went out to fight them. He crushed them and made them flee.

9Again the Eternal sent an evil spirit to disturb Saul as he sat at home, spear in hand, listening to David play music; 10again Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but Saul missed him and the spear stuck into the wall. David escaped that night *and ran to his home*.

11Saul dispatched some of his officers to watch David's house so that they could kill him the next day. David's wife Michal warned him.

Michal: If you don't save yourself tonight, tomorrow morning you'll be killed.

12So Michal lowered David down through the window, and he escaped. 13Then she laid a large idol on the bed, made it a wig of goat's hair, and covered it with clothes. 14When Saul's officers came to take David *to the king,* she told them, "He's sick."

15*Hearing this report,* Saul ordered his officers to *return and* see David for themselves. *He would not be deterred.*

Saul: Even if you have to carry him to me in his bed, do it so I can kill him.

16When the officers returned, *they threw back the blankets and, instead of David,* they discovered the idol with its goat-hair wig in the bed. *So they took Michal to Saul.*

Saul *(to Michal)*: 17Why have you betrayed me like this, *daughter,* and let my enemy escape?

Michal *(lying)*: He said to me, "Let me go. Don't make me kill you."

18David fled to Samuel in Ramah, and he told him everything that had happened. Samuel took David to *the town of* Naioth, and they lived there.

19Saul soon learned that David was at Naioth in Ramah, 20so he sent officers to arrest him *and bring him back*. But when they came, they found a group of prophets in a prophetic trance with Samuel standing and leading them, and the Spirit of the True God entered Saul's officers so that they, too, *were caught up and* prophesied.

21When Saul heard this news, he sent other officers who were also affected in this way. He sent a third set of officers, and again, the same thing happened *when they encountered Samuel and the prophets.*

22So finally Saul went, himself, to Ramah. When he arrived at the large cistern at Secu, he asked where he might find Samuel and David and was told they were at Naoith in Ramah. 23As Saul traveled, the Spirit of God entered him, and he, too, fell into a constant prophetic trance. When he reached Naoith in Ramah, 24he stripped off all his clothes and fell into a prophetic ecstasy before Samuel, lying naked all that day and night. (This is another way the saying arose, "Is Saul also one of the prophets?")

20 David ran *for his life*. He left Naioth in Ramah and found Jonathan.

David: What have I done? Of what am I guilty? What crime have I committed against your father to make him want to kill me?

Jonathan: 2Impossible! *Don't worry about it.* You're not going to die. My father doesn't make any decision, large or small, without telling me. And why would my father hide this from me? It is not so.

David: 3But your father knows we are friends, and he has said, "Don't tell Jonathan about this; he will be upset." I swear to you, as the Eternal lives—and as you live—I am on the verge of being killed.

Jonathan: 4Whatever you ask, I will do for you.

David: 5Look. Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should be sitting with the king at his table. But let me go and hide myself in the field until three days have passed.

6If your father asks about me, tell him
that I asked to return to my hometown,
Bethlehem, for an annual family sacri-
fice. 7If he says, "Fine," then all will be
well with your servant. But if he is angry,
you will know that he intends to harm
me. 8So deal kindly with your servant, for
you have made a sacred covenant with
me, your servant. But if I am guilty, then
kill me yourself. Why should you have to
bring me in front of your father?

Jonathan: 9That will never happen. If I
knew my father planned to hurt you,
wouldn't I tell you?

David: 10So who will tell me if your father
gives you a *good or* bad answer?

Jonathan: 11Let's go out to the field.

They went out to the field *so that David could find a place to lie low*.

Jonathan *(to David)*: 12Let the Eternal
God of Israel be my witness; *this is my vow*. When I have talked to my father,
about this time tomorrow or *no later than* the third day, if he acts friendly
about you, won't I send an answer to
you? 13But if my father plans to harm
you, then may the Eternal do to me
what he plans for you—and more—if I
don't let you know and send you away
to safety.

May the Eternal One be with you, as
He has been with my father. 14If I live,
then show to me the faithful love of
the Eternal that I may not die. 15Do not
ever take your faithful love away from
my descendants, not even if the Eternal
were to remove all the enemies of *the house of* David from the face of the earth.

16With these words, Jonathan made a covenant with David and his descendants.

Jonathan: May the Eternal One guarantee *this promise* by the hands of David's enemies.

17And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for Jonathan loved him more than life itself.

Jonathan: 18Tomorrow is *the festival of* the new moon. People will notice you are
gone because your place will be empty.
19On the day after tomorrow, *you will be greatly missed*. On that day, quickly
go down to that place where you hid
yourself the first time and wait by the
stone Ezel. 20I will shoot three arrows
to the side *of the stone,* as if I'm shooting at a target. 21Then I will send a boy
after them, saying, "Go find the arrows."
If I tell him, "Look, the arrows are on
this side of you," then come back, for
as the Eternal One lives, you are not in
any danger. 22But if I tell the boy, "No,
the arrows are beyond you," then flee,
because the Eternal has shown you that
you must leave. 23But as for the agreement that we have spoken together, the
Eternal One is witness to it forever.

24So David hid himself in the field.

When the new moon *festival* began and the king sat down to eat, 25he took
his usual seat *in a place of safety with his back* to the wall. Abner, *his general,* sat at
the king's side; Jonathan stood, but David's
seat was empty. 26That first night, Saul
said nothing. He thought that perhaps
David had somehow become ritually
unclean, and he could not attend a sacred
feast. 27But on the next day, the second
day of the *feast of the* new moon, when
David's seat remained empty, Saul spoke
to Jonathan.

Saul: Why hasn't the son of Jesse joined us
at the feast these past two days?

Jonathan: 28David asked me if he could
go to Bethlehem. 29"Please allow me to
go," he said. "Our family is sacrificing in
the city, and my brother has insisted that
I come. So if you think highly of me, I
ask that you let me go there and see my
brothers." That is why he is not at the
king's table.

30Saul, *not fooled for a moment,* became very angry with Jonathan.

Saul: You son of a degenerate and rebellious woman! Do you think I don't know
that you have befriended the son of
Jesse? This is just as shameful for you as
your mother's nakedness was. 31As long
as David walks the earth, you will never
rule this kingdom. Now send for him.
Bring him here to me, because he will
most certainly die.

Jonathan: 32Why should David be put to
death? What offense has he committed?

33At that, Saul threw his spear at him, fully intending to hit him, so Jonathan knew

that it was truly his father's intention to have David killed. 34Jonathan left the table in a rage, without eating a bite on the second day of the festival. He was grieved because of David and because his father had disgraced him.

35In the morning, Jonathan *took his bow and* went out into the field, as he had arranged with David, and he brought a small boy with him.

Jonathan *(to the boy)*: 36Run and find the arrows that I shoot.

The boy ran, and Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. 37When the boy reached the place where the arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out.

Jonathan: Isn't the arrow beyond you? 38Hurry! Be quick about it. Don't hang around out there!

So Jonathan's young servant gathered the arrows and returned to his master. 39He knew nothing, of course; only Jonathan and David knew what had just transpired. 40Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and told him to take them back to the city.

41As soon as the boy left, David rose from his hiding place south of the stone and prostrated himself before Jonathan. He bowed *to Jonathan* three times, and then David and Jonathan kissed each other. Both of them wept, but David wept more.

Jonathan *(to David)*: 42Go in peace *and safety,* since we have both sworn in the name of the Eternal One, "He will mediate between me and you, and between our descendants, forever."

David got up *from the ground* and left, and Jonathan returned to the city.

► In the law of Moses, people are commanded to love their neighbors as themselves; and Jonathan does just that, loving David as he does himself. David's love for Jonathan is also clear. When they are parted here, David is filled with sadness. Although both of them weep, David weeps more; and when Saul and Jonathan are later killed in battle, David celebrates and remembers their friendship in one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. These two demonstrate exactly what it means to follow the command of the law and love unselfishly.

21 David went to *a place called* Nob, where he visited the priest Ahimelech, who came forward fearfully to meet him.

Ahimelech: Why are you here alone, without anyone else?

David: 2The king has given me a mission that is not to be revealed to anyone else, and my servants are waiting for me at a place where I have sent them. 3Now what do you have here *to eat*? Let me have five loaves of bread or whatever you have.

Ahimelech: 4I have no ordinary bread—only the holy bread. *You may take it,* if your men have not recently had sexual intercourse.

David: 5Of course. They have stayed away from women since we have been on the road, three days now. If their bodies must be kept pure even when we go on a typical journey, how much more must they be kept pure when we are on a mission like this one?

6The priest gave him consecrated bread since the bread of the Presence was replaced when other fresh, hot bread was brought before the Eternal One and no other bread was available.

7Now one of Saul's servants, Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds, was waiting before the Eternal that day.

David *(to Ahimelech)*: 8Isn't there a sword or spear here? I left so swiftly on my errand for the king that I did not bring my sword or weapons with me.

Ahimelech: 9*We have no weapons here except* the sword of Goliath, the Philistine you killed in the valley of Elah. Look, you'll find it wrapped in a cloth behind the sacred vest. You may take that, if you like, for that is the only weapon here.

David: It is one of a kind. Let me take it.

10So David left and fled that same day
from Saul and went to *Saul's enemy,* King
Achish of Gath. 11The king's servants
reminded the king,

Servants: Isn't this David *who some claim to be* the very ruler of the land? Didn't they sing about him while they *celebrated and* danced?

Saul has slain his thousands
and David, his tens of thousands.

12When David heard that these were the
kinds of things people were saying about
him, he was afraid of what Achish, the
king of Gath, might do, 13so he acted differently when they were around and even
pretended to be insane. He scarred the
doors at the city's gates *with his fingernails*
and drooled into his beard.

Achish *(to his servants)***:** 14Look at him.
Can't you see this man is crazy? Why
have you brought him to me *here in my house*? 15Don't I have enough crazy
people around here already, or did you
think I might need yet another?

22 That is how David escaped,
and from there, he went to the
cave of Adullam to hide. When
his brothers and the rest of his family
heard he was there, they went down to be
with him. 2A group gathered around him,
composed of those who were in debt or
who were not content *with Saul* or who
were in trouble. Soon David was captain of
about 400 such men.

3David traveled then to Mizpah
in Moab, *the homeland of his great-grandmother, Ruth,* to address the king of
Moab.

David: Please allow my mother and father
to remain here until I can see what it is
that the True God has in store for me.

4So David left his parents there, and they
remained with the king of Moab as long as
David remained in the stronghold.

5*David was visited later by* Gad the
prophet.

Gad *(to David)***:** Do not stay here in the
stronghold. Leave here, and go to the
land of *the tribe of* Judah.

So David left that place and went into the
forest of Hereth.

6Meanwhile Saul was sitting, spear in
hand, under a *gnarled and bushy* tamarisk
tree on the crest of a high hill in Gibeah.
His servants were standing around him
when he heard the news that David and
his followers had been located.

Saul *(to his servants)***:** 7Listen up, all you
men of Benjamin. Will Jesse's son, *David, do for you what I have?* Will he give
each of you fields and vineyards? Will
he make each of you commander over
thousands or over hundreds? 8Is that
why all of you have betrayed me? None
of you told me that my own son had
made a covenant with the son of Jesse.
None of you are sorry for me or let me
know that my son had stirred up my servant to challenge me, to lie in ambush,
just as he is doing at this moment.

9Doeg the Edomite stood among Saul's
servants.

Doeg: I saw the son of Jesse when he
came to Nob to *speak with the priest,*
Ahimelech son of Ahitub. 10Ahimelech
asked the Eternal One questions on
David's behalf, gave him provisions, and
even gave him the *legendary* sword of
Goliath the Philistine.

11So the king sent for the priest Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, and for all his family
who were the priests at Nob, and they
came before Saul.

Saul: 12Pay attention, son of Ahitub.

Ahimelech: I am listening, my lord.

Saul: 13Why have you plotted against me
with the son of Jesse, giving him bread
and a sword and speaking to the True
God on his behalf, so that he should rise
up *to fight* against me? At this moment
he must be lying in ambush.

Ahimelech: 14Which of your servants,
good king, is so faithful as David? Isn't
he the king's son-in-law, the captain of
your guard? *Hasn't he always been quick to do the king's bidding* and honored in
the king's household? 15Is this the first
time I have inquired of God for David?
Of course not! Do not, O king, imagine
that I, your servant, or anyone in my
family has intended wrong *against the king,* for we know next to nothing about
your affairs.

Saul *(to Ahimelech)*: 16You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and all of your family.

► Saul may be truly at his worst. He fails to have reverence for God's priests and orders them to be killed for harboring David. Not even Saul's servants can support this horrid behavior, and they refuse to come under God's curse by striking down His priests.

The king turned to his guards.

Saul: 17Kill them, kill all of these priests of the Eternal because they have given their support to David. They knew he was running away, and they did not tell me.

But the servants of the king refused to attack the priests of the Eternal. *Saul was furious, so he turned to one he could trust.*

Saul *(to Doeg)*: 18Carry out my orders. Turn around, and kill these priests.

So Doeg the Edomite attacked them. That day he turned and killed 85 men who wore the priestly linen garment. 19Then he went after Nob, the city of the priests, with his sword and *utterly destroyed everything he found there*—all the men, women, children, and infants. Doeg even turned his blade against the oxen, donkeys, and sheep. 20Only Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, escaped, and he fled to David *for protection.* 21He informed David that Saul had massacred the priests of the Eternal.

David *(to Abiathar)*: 22I knew, when I saw Doeg the Edomite that day, that he would certainly tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of every person in your family. 23Stay here with me, and don't be afraid. The one who seeks my life also seeks yours; you will certainly be safe with me.

23 When David heard that the Philistines had attacked Keilah, ransacking the threshing floors and stealing *the grain,* 2he *prayed and* asked God *for guidance.*

David *(to the Lord)*: Should I attack these Philistines?

Eternal One: Yes. Save Keilah, and defeat the Philistines.

David's Men *(objecting)*: 3We have a lot to fear *even as we sit* here in Judah. Think how much worse it will be if we go to fight the armies of the Philistines in Keilah.

4So David asked the Eternal again *just to make sure.*

Eternal One: Yes, defend Keilah. I will grant you victory over the Philistines.

5So David and his men went down to Keilah and fought the Philistines, carried away their livestock, and slaughtered them. This is how David saved the people of Keilah.

6When Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, came to David at Keilah, he had fled carrying a sacred priestly garment. 7When Saul heard that David had gone to rescue Keilah, *he was hopeful.*

Saul: Surely the True God has sent David into my trap because he has entered into a city with gates and bars.

8So Saul summoned the people to go down to Keilah and besiege David and his men. 9When David heard that Saul was coming to attack him, he asked Abiathar to bring him the priestly vest so that he could ask the True God for direction.

David: 10Eternal God of Israel, Your servant has heard that Saul *the king* is coming to Keilah to destroy the city since I am here. 11Will the leaders of Keilah hand me over *to save their lives*? Is what I heard true? Is Saul really coming? I beg of You, please tell Your servant.

Eternal One: He will come.

David: 12Then will the men of Keilah hand me over along with my men to Saul *when he arrives*?

Eternal One: They will do this.

13So David and his followers, who now numbered about 600, left Keilah going wherever they could. When Saul heard that David had left Keilah, he gave up the chase *because the trail was now cold.* 14David hid out in secure places in the wilderness, in the hill country of the

wilderness of Ziph *in the land of the tribe of Judah*. Every day, Saul sent out spies to find him *and kill him,* but the True God did not allow Saul to capture or kill David.

15While David was in the wilderness of Ziph at *a place called* Horesh, he heard that Saul was looking for him. 16Then Jonathan, son of Saul, *figured out where David was and* went out to meet him at Horesh. *Although David and his men were in a tight spot,* Jonathan reassured David's *faith* in the True God.

Jonathan: 17Don't be afraid. My father Saul will not get his hands on you *today or any other day*. *Someday* you will be king over all Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.

18Then the two of them made a *sacred* covenant before the Eternal One. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan returned to his home.

19*At that time, some of* the people of Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and told him David was hiding in some of the secure places at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah to the south of Jeshimon.

People of Ziph: 20Now, O king, come down whenever you desire, and we will do our part by handing him over to you.

Saul: 21May the Eternal One favor you for having compassion on me! 22Check one more time to be sure; find out where he is exactly and who has seen him there because I hear that he is crafty. 23Look around, find out all his hiding places, and come back to me when you are certain of your information. Then I will go back with you, and if he is still in the land, I will find him among *the tribe of* Judah no matter how many thousands of people there are.

24They set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Meanwhile David and his followers were hiding in the wilderness of Maon, in the desert plain* to the south of Jeshimon. 25When Saul and his men went to search for them, David found out and went to the rock in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard this, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon.

26*At one point,* Saul *and his men* were on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other. David and his men picked up the pace, trying to escape, but Saul and his forces were closing in fast and hoped to capture them.

27Then a messenger arrived and spoke to Saul.

Messenger: Come quickly! A Philistine raiding party is in the land!

28So Saul stopped his pursuit of David and went to fight the Philistines, which is why that place is known as the Rock of Escape.

29From there David went up and lived in the narrow canyons and cliffs of Engedi.

24 After Saul had returned from chasing the Philistines, he was told that David had gone to the wilderness of Engedi. 2He gathered 3,000 hardened fighting men from across Israel and sought David in the vicinity of the Rocks of Wild Goats. 3When he came to the sheep shelters beside the road, a cave was there, and Saul went inside to relieve himself. *Unguarded, he was especially vulnerable to attack.*

Now *Saul didn't know it, but* David and his men were hiding in the recesses of that very cave. *David's guards thought it was the perfect time to strike.*

► It seems as if much of the First Book of Samuel is taken up with Saul trying to kill David and David escaping; and when David catches Saul in the most vulnerable position, his men urge him to kill Saul. It would be nothing more than self-defense. Wouldn't Saul kill David if Saul caught him with his pants down? Isn't Saul turning over every stone in the wilderness looking for David so he can kill him?

David's Men: 4This must be the very day the Eternal One told you about: "Watch! I will give your enemy to you, and you will do whatever you please with him."

David crept forward quietly and *moved in so close* he was able to cut a corner from Saul's robe. 5But immediately afterward, David felt awful about what he had done.

* 23:24 Hebrew, *Arabah*

David settles for a symbolic victory—he cuts off a corner of Saul's robe while Saul is otherwise occupied—but then he feels ashamed. If David is supposed to be king someday, God will make that happen. But until that time, who is he to bring shame on the king whom God anointed as his ruler?

The exchange between David and Saul shows both men at their best. At times, David could be a schemer; Saul's obsession and possible mental illness could obscure the good qualities that caused God to choose him in the first place. But in this exchange, each acknowledges the other. Saul sees that David could have killed him and chose not to; for the moment, he sees the truth about their relationship. In return Saul acknowledges what he knows in his heart to be true: David will someday be the king, and not he or his sons. And as Eli did earlier, Saul here accepts God's plan, even though it will be the destruction of his line. Saul doesn't always keep this understanding, and he will pursue David again. But Saul has his good—even noble—qualities, especially as his time grows short.

David *(to his men)***:** 6God forbid that I do any harm to my lord, the one chosen by the Eternal to rule. How could I *even pretend to* assault him, knowing he is the Eternal's anointed *king*?

7David reprimanded his men, refusing to allow them to attack Saul. At last Saul finished and went outside the cave.

8David followed him *at a safe distance.* When Saul exited the cave, David called out.

David: My lord, the king!

Saul turned around to see David bowing low, his face touching the ground *to show his respect.*

David: 9My lord, why do you listen to those who say I plan to harm you? 10Look! Today the Eternal One placed you at my mercy in that cave. *I could have done anything to you, and* some said I should kill you. But I refused. I said, "I will not raise my hand against my lord, the Eternal's anointed *king*."

11Father, do you see what I am holding in my hand? It is the corner of your robe. Recognize and understand that I have not committed evil or treason against you—that I cut this off and did not kill you. I have not wronged you, even though you are hunting me and trying to kill me.

12May the Eternal One judge between us. If the Eternal chooses to avenge me and punish you, then let Him, but I will not take revenge against you. 13As the old proverb says, "From the wicked flows wickedness." But I will not harm you.

14Whom did the king of Israel come out in pursuit of, anyway? A dead dog? A lone flea? *Someone as insignificant as I am?* 15May the Eternal One judge between us. May He see *who has done wrong* and argue my case and uphold justice on my behalf.

16David's voice fell silent. *Saul could hardly believe his eyes and ears.*

Saul: Is that really you, David my son? (weeping loudly) 17*It's true that* you are more righteous than I am—you have repaid me with good when I handed you only evil. 18Today you demonstrated how you dealt kindly with me by not killing me when the Eternal gave you power over me. 19Who has ever come across his enemy *in such a vulnerable position* and yet allowed him to go away safely? So may the Eternal reward you richly for the good you have done for me today.

20Now I know that you will surely be king *someday,* and that you will establish the kingdom of Israel. 21So swear to me—by the Eternal One—that when that time comes, you will not destroy my descendants, and you won't wipe my name from my family tree.

22David swore this to Saul. Saul went home, and David and his men returned to their hideout.

25 At last, Samuel died, and all of the people of Israel gathered to mourn him. They buried him at his home in Ramah *on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. Once the mourning period was over,* David *and his men* went

down to the wilderness of Paran* *(the desert area far to the south).*

2A certain man in Maon owned property in Carmel, *a town south of Hebron near the Dead Sea.* This man was very rich: he owned 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. It was sheepshearing time in Carmel, *which was celebrated with feasting and generosity.* 3This *rich* man's name was Nabal, *which means "foolish,"* and his wife was Abigail, *which means "my father is joy."* She was smart and beautiful, but he was mean-spirited and bad-tempered, *an embarrassment to* his Calebite tribe.

4*From his hiding place* in the wilderness, David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, 5so David gathered 10 young men to send to Nabal *asking for gifts.*

David *(to the young men)***:** Go up to Carmel *in Judah,* to Nabal, and greet him in my name: 6"*Live long.* Peace be to you, your entire household, and all you possess. 7I hear that it is time to shear the sheep. *I want you to know that* your shepherds have been among us *in the wilderness,* and not only did we not harm them, but not an animal was taken during their time among us in Carmel. 8Ask your young men; they will tell you *this is true.* Please *return our kindness and* look on my young men with favor since we come on this feast day. Please give whatever you can spare to them and to your son David."

9When David's young men came to Nabal, they delivered David's message and waited *for Nabal's response.*

Nabal: 10Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? *I've never heard of him, so* he must be nothing more than a slave who abandoned his master. 11Should I take bread and water and meat from my own servants and give it to men who come from who knows where?

12So David's young men returned to him by the same road and told him what had happened.

David *(ordering his men)***:** 13Strap on your swords!

All of them put on their swords, including David, and about 400 of his men followed him while 200 remained behind with their supplies.

14One of Nabal's servants *recognized his master's insolence and* told Abigail, Nabal's wife, *what was happening.*

Servant: David sent messengers from the wilderness to salute our master, and Nabal returned their honor with insults. 15David's men have been very good to us. Nothing happened to us while we were with his company, and we never lost a single sheep in the fields in the time we were there. 16They were like a wall protecting us day and night the whole time we were near them keeping the sheep.

17You should know this and think about what to do next. Evil is coming to my master and his entire household *if you don't do something.* Nabal is so worthless that no one can talk to him.

18Then Abigail, *knowing the stakes,* rushed about gathering *gifts similar to what her husband should have offered:* 200 loaves, 2 jugs of wine, 5 sheep (butchered and dressed), more than 50 quarts of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 fig cakes. She had these loaded on donkeys.

Abigail *(to her servants)***:** 19Go ahead of me *with all the gifts.* I'll be right behind you.

But she never stopped to speak to her husband Nabal. *She had decided to approach David herself.*

20As she rode down the mountain on a hidden trail, David and his men were approaching, and they met.

21Earlier David had made an oath.

David: It looks as though we protected everything this guy owns—so that he lost none of the things belonging to him—for nothing. *We did him a good turn,* and now he rewards us with evil. 22May the True God do so to my enemies*—and more—if tomorrow morning I've left alive a single male of Nabal's household.

23When Abigail saw David, she dropped quickly from her donkey and fell to the ground in front of him, bowing.

Abigail *(at David's feet)***:** 24My lord, any guilt here falls on me. Please let me, your servant, speak, and may you hear the words I speak. 25My lord, you must not take seriously the words of this worthless man, Nabal. His actions have proven

* 25:1 Some Greek manuscripts read, "Maon." * 25:22 Some Greek manuscripts read, "me."

that his name and his nature are the same: Nabal is a fool. Unfortunately I, your servant, did not see the young men you sent.

26Now, my lord, as the Eternal One lives and as you live, since the Eternal has kept you from senseless killing and from seizing vengeance yourself, may your enemies and all who seek to harm you, my lord, be like Nabal.

27Now, *please,* accept my gift and distribute it among the young men who are with you. 28Please forgive your servant's shortcomings. The Eternal will certainly make my lord's house into a lasting dynasty because you fight on behalf of Him, and no evil will be found in you as long as you live. 29If anyone dares to rise up against you and seek your life, then you will be protected by the Eternal One, your True God, who will launch the lives of your enemies like stones from a sling.

30When the Eternal has done for my lord all the good things He has promised and has installed you as ruler over all Israel, 31you will never have to be grieved or conscience-stricken for having shed blood needlessly or for taking vengeance into your own hands. When He has dealt generously with my lord, I pray you will remember me, your servant.

David *(to Abigail)***:** 32Blessed is the Eternal God of Israel, who sent you here today to intercept me. 33And blessed is your wisdom—blessed are you—for keeping me from shedding blood *needlessly* and from taking vengeance into my own hands. 34For as surely as the Eternal God of Israel lives and sent you to me, if you had not hurried out to meet me, tomorrow there would not have been a single male left alive in Nabal's household.

35Then David accepted her gifts.

David: Arise, and return home in peace. I have listened to your words, and I have granted your request.

36Abigail returned to Nabal, who was holding a kingly feast in his house. Nabal's heart was light because he was very drunk, so Abigail chose not to tell him anything until the next morning. 37The next morning, when he was sober, Abigail told him about her meeting with David and he went cold inside. 38About 10 days later, the Eternal One struck down Nabal, and he died.

39When David heard this news, he blessed God.

David: Blessed is the Eternal One, who protected my honor from Nabal's insults and who kept *me,* His servant, from executing evil. Instead, the Eternal One turned Nabal's evil back on him.

40Then David sent servants to Carmel asking Abigail to be his wife.

Servants: David has sent us to bring you to him so that you can be his wife.

41She stood, and then bowed to the ground before David's servants.

Abigail: I am your servant, willing to wash the feet of my lord's servants.

42Then Abigail quickly got up, mounted her donkey, and went with the messengers of David attended by her five handmaidens. *Not long after,* she married him.

43David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel; she and Abigail were both wives of David. 44*By this time,* Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's *former* wife, to Palti (the son of Laish) from Gallim.

► Two women figure prominently in David's ascension to Israel's throne: Michal and Abigail. As the daughter of the king, Michal is born into the world of palace intrigue, but Abigail talks her way into it. As a beautiful, articulate woman, she is desirable to any man, but she has special appeal to David. Abigail brings with her Nabal's wealth and power in the south. By marrying this Calebite widow, David gains political influence with the southern tribes that soon gets him crowned king in Hebron (2 Samuel 2:2-4), a large city within Caleb's territory.

26 Then the Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and told him David was hiding on the heights of Hachilah, which is across from Jeshimon. 2Saul again gathered 3,000 seasoned Israelite soldiers, and he went down to the wilderness of Ziph to find David. 3They camped by the road on the hill of

Hachilah, across from Jeshimon, but David *and his men* were hidden in the wilderness. When he learned that Saul was coming after him, 4David sent out some spies who discovered Saul was certainly at it again.

5Then David went to Saul's camp and found where Saul slept, as well as Abner son of Ner, general of the army, surrounded by their men. 6David *looked over the situation and* spoke to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai, son of Zeruiah and brother of Joab.

David: Who will follow me into the center of Saul's camp?

Abishai: I'm right there with you.

7So David and Abishai snuck into the encampment under the cover of darkness, and at last they found Saul sleeping in the middle of the camp, his spear stuck into the ground near his head, with Abner and the other soldiers lying around him *asleep*.

Abishai *(to David)*: 8*This is your chance!* God has placed your enemy at your mercy. Let me take his spear and pin him to the ground. I only need one try.

David: 9*No.* Don't kill him. Who can *legitimately* strike the Eternal's anointed *king* without consequences? 10As the Eternal One lives, *his time will come*. The Eternal will strike him down; either he will die, or he will go into battle one day and be slain. 11God forbid that I would be the one to harm the Eternal's anointed *king*. But please, take his spear next to his head and that water jug, and let's go.

12So David took the spear and the water jug from right beside Saul's head and crept back *through the camp*. No one saw or knew they were there. No one woke up because the Eternal had caused the entire camp to fall into a deep sleep. 13David went up a hill, standing a safe distance away. 14Then he shouted to Abner, son of Ner, and the army.

David: Abner! Can you hear me?

Abner: Who hails the king's *camp*?

David: 15What kind of man are you? Is anyone your equal in all Israel? So why haven't you done a better job guarding your lord *and master,* the *anointed* king? After all, one of the people who crept into your camp *tonight* could have murdered your lord. 16This is not a good thing that you have done, because you failed to protect your lord, the anointed of the Eternal. As the Eternal One lives, you deserve to die. Where is his spear? Where is the water jug that was at his head?

17Saul recognized David's voice.

Saul: Is that you, David my son?

David: Yes, you are hearing my voice, my lord, my king.

18Why does my lord continue to chase his servant? What have I done? Am I guilty of something?

19Now then, may my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the Eternal has stirred you to try and kill me, may He be appeased by an offering. But if mere mortals have done this, may the Eternal curse them because they have driven me away today *from Israel,* my heritage in the Eternal One. *Exiling me is tantamount to* saying "Go and serve other gods."

20Now I ask you, don't kill me here, so far from the Eternal's presence. The king of Israel *and his army* have come after a single flea, as one goes to hunt a partridge in the mountains.

Saul: 21David! I was remiss. Come back, my son. I will never try to hurt you again because today you treated my life as precious *and preserved it*. I have been a fool and made a big mistake.

David: 22Here is your spear, O king. Send one of your young soldiers to retrieve it.

23The Eternal One rewards those who are faithful and righteous, for He gave you into my power today, and I chose not to harm His anointed *king*. 24As I treated your life as precious, may He guard my life, rescuing me from all troubles.

Saul: 25*May God* bless you, my son David! May you accomplish everything *you set out to do,* and may you excel.

So David went his way, and Saul returned home.

27 David was convinced that someday Saul would succeed—*that whatever he might have*

said, he would track David down to kill him. So David decided his safest choice would be to escape to Philistia, because Saul could not pursue him outside Israel and he would be safe. 2So David with his 600 men went to King Achish, son of Maoch, in Gath. 3David and his men stayed with *King* Achish in Gath. All their families and David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal, were there also.

4When Saul heard that David had gone to Gath *and allied himself with the Philistines,* he gave up his pursuit.

David *(to King Achish)*: 5If I have found favor with you, then give us someplace in one of the villages to live. Why should you share the royal city with me, your servant?

6So Achish set aside Ziklag for them; and ever after, it belonged to the kings of Judah. 7David lived in the land of the Philistines for a year and four months.

8Now David and his men raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites (the inhabitants of the country of much earlier times from Shur and on toward Egypt). 9David *and his men* invaded these areas, killing everyone, men and women, but bringing cattle, donkeys, sheep, camels, and garments of these territories back to the land of Achish.

Achish: 10Whom did you raid today?

David *(lying to him)*: *Today we went out into* the desert country in the south against Judah, the Jerahmeelites, and the Kenites.

11The reason David never permitted survivors of his raids was because he could not risk one of them being brought alive to *the Philistines in* Gath and telling the truth—that David has done this or that. This was David's practice during the entire time he lived in the land of the Philistines.

12*Because he did not know the truth,* Achish trusted David. He thought David had made himself such an enemy of Israel that he would have to remain Achish's servant for the rest of his life.

28 Then it came time for the Philistines to gather their forces to go to war against *the people of* Israel, and Achish spoke to David.

Achish: Of course you and your men will join us in the coming fight.

David: 2Good. You will see what your servant can do *in battle.*

Achish: Excellent. You will be my bodyguard as long as I live.

3Remember, Samuel had died *some time previously* and had been mourned by all of Israel. He was buried in his hometown of Ramah, *and his wisdom died with him.*

Another important thing to know: Saul had ordered all of the mediums and any others who claimed to speak to the dead thrown out of Israel.

4The Philistines gathered *for war,* and they made their camp at Shunem. Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. 5When Saul looked out over the forces of the Philistines, he was filled with fear and lost his confidence. 6Saul asked the Eternal for guidance, but He did not give him an answer, neither in dreams nor by consulting the Urim nor through prophecy.

► This is simultaneously one of Saul's greatest offenses against God and one of the times when he is a sympathetic character. As he comes to battle the Philistines, he has been cut off from any contact with God. It must seem as though everyone conspires against him, that he is all alone in the world; so, against his own decree forbidding such a thing, he consults a medium who can speak to the dead, a dark practice according to Hebrew law.

Saul *(to his servants)*: 7Find me a woman, a *spiritual* medium—someone I can ask for guidance.

Servants: A *spiritual* medium lives in En-dor.

8So Saul disguised himself in different clothes, and taking two men with him, he went to see this woman in the dark of night.

Saul: I need you to call up someone *from the grave*—I'll tell you who—*so I can ask him questions.*

Medium of En-dor: 9Don't you know what Saul has decreed? You should know that he has thrown all the mediums and all others who speak for the dead out of Israel. Why are you asking me to risk my life?

Saul *(swearing by the Lord)*: 10Nothing bad will happen to you. I promise.

Medium of En-dor: 11Whom do you want me to bring up *from the dead* for you?

Saul: I need to speak with *the prophet* Samuel.

12*The medium began her rituals, but* when she began to see Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice, *realizing that her customer was Saul.*

Medium of En-dor: Why have you lied to me? You're really Saul!

Saul: 13Don't be frightened. *Nothing will happen to you. Just tell me,* what do you see?

Medium of En-dor: I see *someone who looks like* a divine being rising out of the ground!

Saul: 14Describe him for me.

Medium of En-dor: An old man is coming, wrapped in a robe.

Saul knew this was Samuel, and he dropped to the ground, putting his face to the floor.

Samuel *(to Saul)*: 15Why have you disturbed me by calling me up *from the land of the dead*?

Saul: I don't know what to do! The Philistines have gathered against us, and the True God has turned His back on me. He won't answer me in dreams or by prophecy, so I've summoned you for advice.

Samuel: 16Saul, why do you ask me what to do since *you know* the Eternal One has turned against you and is now your enemy? 17He has done to you exactly as He told you through me, for He has wrestled the kingdom away from you in order to give it to your neighbor, David. 18You did not obey the Eternal One's orders to be an agent of His wrath on Amalek. That is why He has brought these circumstances upon you today. 19And that is not all. He will hand you and your kingdom over to the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons will be where I am. The Eternal One will hand your entire army over to the Philistines.

20When Saul heard Samuel's words, he collapsed to the ground in terror and weakness, for he had not eaten all day and all night. 21The woman came to him, and she saw that he was filled with fear.

Medium of En-dor: Your servant has done what you asked. I have risked my life to do it. 22Now, please, listen to your servant. Have something to eat before you go. Eat what I offer you, so you can leave with some strength.

Saul: 23No, I won't eat anything.

His servants joined her in urging the king *to eat,* and at last he listened to them. He rose from the ground and sat on the bed. 24The woman took a fatted calf, slaughtered it, *and prepared it.* She took flour, kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread. 25*When the food was ready,* she served it to Saul and his servants, and they ate it before they departed that night.

► The medium reveals herself to be a woman of compassion; when the king collapses in fear and hunger, she feeds him—a last meal, prepared and served with kindness, for a condemned man. And Saul, knowing his fate beforehand, is ready to die in battle.

29 The Philistines gathered for battle at Aphek, while the armies of Israel camped near the spring of Jezreel. 2The armies of the Philistines were marching forward by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were marching in the rear with King Achish.

Philistine Generals: 3What are these Hebrews doing here?

King Achish: Isn't this David, *who used to be* the servant of King Saul of Israel? He has been with me for days, for years;

and since he came over to our side and my service, I have never had a problem with him.

Philistine Generals *(angry)*: 4Send David back to the place you have appointed for him. Don't let him go into battle with us—we might find him an enemy instead of an ally. Do you know how he could be reconciled with his former master? By handing him our heads!

5Isn't this the same David about whom the Israelites sang *war songs* while they danced *and celebrated*?

Saul has slain his thousands
and David, his tens of thousands.

Achish *(calling to David)*: 6As the Eternal One lives, you have been honest with me, and I wish you could march into battle and back at my side. I have found no fault in you before. But the generals—*the leaders of my troops*—will not have you go with us. 7Go home now, and go in peace. Don't do anything to upset them further.

This decision is certainly in David's favor—could he really have gone to battle against Israel?—but he acts as though he is offended.

David: 8What have I done *to deserve this?* Has your servant done anything since he entered your service to prevent him going out and fighting against my lord the king's enemies?

Achish: 9As I see it, you are no more to blame than a messenger of God, but the commanders of my troops have said they will not allow you to go into battle with us.

10Get up early tomorrow morning with your lord's servants, and return *to the home I have given you in Ziklag.* Rise early tomorrow, and go as soon as it is light.

11So the next morning, David and his men got up early and traveled *south* to the land of the Philistines, but the Philistine army went north to Jezreel.

30 When David and his men reached Ziklag three days later, they discovered that the Amalekites had raided the desert hill country. They had attacked Ziklag *in David's absence,* burned it, 2and carried away the women and all the other inhabitants whom David had left behind. None of them were killed, but they were taken captive and carried back *toward Amalek.*

3So David and his men arrived in the burned city and found their wives, daughters, and sons gone, taken captive *by the Amalekite raiders.* 4*And when they saw this,* they cried out and wept aloud until they could weep no more. 5David's wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, were among those carried off.

6David, too, was in anguish. Some of his men talked about stoning him because they were so bitter about their families being taken. But David took comfort in the Eternal One, his True God.

7He called for the priest, Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, and instructed him to bring the priestly vest, which he did.

David *(to the Lord)*: 8Should we pursue these raiders? Can we catch them?

Eternal One: Go after them. You will catch them, and you will certainly rescue your families.

9-10So David set out with his 600 men. They came to the wadi Besor, *a dry creek bed* where he left behind 200 men who were too exhausted to continue the pursuit.

11In the open country *beyond,* some of his soldiers found an Egyptian. They took him to David, fed him, and gave him water. 12They gave him some fig cake and two clusters of raisins. After the man had eaten, he regained his strength. He had not had food or water for three days and nights.

David: 13Who are your people? Where are you from?

Egyptian: I am a young man of Egypt who served an Amalekite, but my master left me behind three days ago because I was sick. 14We had gone raiding in the desert country, against the Cherethites and the territories of Judah and of Caleb, and we burned down the town of Ziklag.

David: 15Can you lead me to this raiding party?

Egyptian: I will take you to them, if you will swear to me by the True God that

you won't kill me or give me back to my master.

16He led David to where the Amalekites were spread out all over the place eating and drinking and dancing, because they had taken such great spoils in their raids against Philistia and Judah. 17David fought against them from one twilight to the next, and he killed all of them except for 400 young men who escaped on camels.

18So David recovered everything that had been taken, including his two wives. 19Nothing was missing—from the smallest thing to the greatest *treasure,* none of the sons or daughters, no property of any kind. David brought everything home. 20David also captured their flocks and herds, which they were driving ahead of other livestock, and the people agreed this would be David's share *of the Amalekites' property*.

21David and his people returned to the wadi Besor, where the 200 had remained behind, and those men went out to meet David and all those with him. As David approached, he greeted them. 22But some of the wicked and greedy ones who had fought alongside David spoke out.

Wicked Men: Because these men didn't go with us, why should we give them back the things we recovered for them? Sure, let them take back their wives and their children. *But that's all. We'll keep the rest,* and they must leave.

David: 23My brothers, this is not how we're going to treat what the Eternal One has returned to us. He saved us and gave us success over the raiding party that sacked our city. 24Why would anyone agree with you about this matter? The share of the one who fights is the same as the share of the one who looks after the supplies. We all share equally.

25In fact, he made this a law and an ordinance, and it remains so in Israel today.

26And after David returned to Ziklag, he gave part of the spoil he had taken to his friends who ruled over Judah, with the message, "This is a present for you taken from the enemies of the Eternal."

27These gifts were sent to Bethel, to Ramoth in the desert south, to Jattir, 28to Aroer, to Siphmoth, to Eshtemoa, 29to Racal, to the towns of the Jerahmeelites, to the towns of the Kenites, 30to Hormah, to Bor-ashan, to Athach, 31and to Hebron—all places where David and his men had lived and traveled.

31 Meanwhile the Philistine and Israelite armies had clashed. The men of Israel ran away, but *many of them* were killed on the heights of Gilboa. 2The Philistines even followed Saul and his sons and closed in on them; there they killed his sons, Jonathan *(the beloved friend of David),* Abinadab, and Malchi-shua.

► Notice that David does not participate in the battle against his own people, and that even while he lives among the Philistines hiding from Saul, he doesn't serve them. This expedition against the raiding Amalekites offers a powerful explanation both for why David doesn't fight for the Philistine king and why he doesn't fight to preserve the armies of Israel. Because David is far away with his own desperate battles to fight, no shame falls on him for any oaths he might have broken.

3The battle closed in around Saul, and he was shot with arrows and badly wounded.

Saul *(to his armor-bearer)***:** 4*Please* take out your sword and thrust it through me. Don't let these uncircumcised *dogs* come and put their swords and spears into me for their sport.

But his armor-bearer was afraid and would not do it. Saul drew his own sword and fell upon it. 5When the armor-bearer saw this, he also drew his sword and fell upon it and died. 6So Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all his men died together on the same day.

► The deaths of Saul and his sons conclude the First Book of Samuel. God's anointed dies, and the armies of Israel are defeated. Some commentators, even though they may condemn suicide, do not fault Saul for falling on his own sword. Remembering how the Philistines blinded and tormented the

That looks like the end of the story, but it isn't. It is a tragedy, though a necessary one for Israel. At the beginning of his reign, Saul gathers a huge army to fight the Ammonites, who threaten to blind the men of Jabesh-gilead. Many years later, the people of the country hear what has happened. They raise an army of their own, march all night into the Philistine town of Beth-shan, and without regard to the danger, take down the bodies and return to their own country to give Saul and his family a decent and respectful burial.

Saul is many things—a brute, a coward, a prince, a warrior, a faithful follower, a faithless wallower—and now he is dead. Some might celebrate; others mourn him. The king the people asked for has been dethroned, and the kingdom lies open to invasion, but God's plan is still operating. In the Second Book of Samuel, it is evident this is part of a larger order. The people's king has been defeated, but God's king is on his way.

hero and judge Samson, Saul knows his fate is torture and abuse. Not only does he not want to suffer that as a man, but also as God's anointed king, he does not want these "uncircumcised dogs"—that is, followers of other gods—to claim such an advantage over the Lord. So he falls on his sword, and the Philistines, prevented from their torture, behead Saul's body, strip him, and exhibit his and his sons' corpses in public.

7When the people of Israel who were on
the other side of the valley, and even those
beyond the Jordan *River,* learned that the
Israelite army had been defeated and
heard that Saul and his sons were dead,
they left their cities and fled. Then the
Philistines came and lived in them.

8The next day, as the Philistine army
was looting the bodies of the fallen *Israelites,* they found Saul and his three sons
dead on the heights of Gilboa. 9They cut
off Saul's head, stripped his body of his
weapons, and sent messengers with the
good news to the temples and to the people throughout Philistia. 10They put Saul's
armor in the temple of Astarte and nailed
his body to the wall at Beth-shan.

11But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-
gilead heard about this indignity done to
Saul by the Philistines, 12the brave men
among them rose up and traveled through
the night. *When they arrived,* they took
down the bodies of Saul and his sons from
the wall at Beth-shan. They returned to
Jabesh and burned them there. 13Then
they took their bones and buried them
in Jabesh beneath the tamarisk tree,
like the one where Saul had held court in Gibeah, and for seven days they fasted *and mourned.*

2 SAMUEL

From Saul to David with great tragedy and loss

By Samuel, a prophet of Israel

The royal drama that begins in the first volume of Samuel continues in this second volume of the story: the transition from Saul to David as king over Israel, and the downward spiral of David's later years in his kingdom and his own family. Despite everything, David is still a devoted and successful king and prepares Israel for the rule of his son.

The Second Book of Samuel picks up a story already in progress. The First Book of Samuel begins after a long and horrifying period of chaos when the people of God were inconsistent in their faithfulness toward God. Their safety was likewise insecure as He used the surrounding peoples to teach Israel a series of lessons. The people at last demanded a king, a military leader to guide them as all the other nations around them had. How could they be expected to defend themselves just by relying on God and on the leaders God appointed?

Beginnings and endings are important to any story, so it is not surprising to see major changes in the Samuel story in chapters 1 and 24 of 2 Samuel. King Saul and Prince Jonathan are killed at the battle of Gilboa. David realizes that the Eternal One has now placed him in the position of king, but it is a long process to heal a nation and earn the people's trust. He starts with making Hebron his royal capital for 7 years before moving his house and the sacred covenant chest to Jerusalem for the remainder of his 40-year reign. David starts off quite well, but once he leads Israel from Jerusalem instead of from the battlefield, his own house and the whole empire start to unravel. The Davidic drama includes everything from rape and incest to multiple attempts to take over his throne.

For the people of Israel, this second book about their monarchy has great significance. With David the little nation of Israel finally pulls together. They can point to this as their high point. The promise God made to David is remembered by every generation to come. He is the great king, and his royal house is critical for the future of the children of Israel and eventually for the Christian church that is to follow.

1 After Saul *and Jonathan* were killed *in battle with the Philistines,* David returned from defeating the Amalekites, and for two days he rested in Ziklag.
2 On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp *in mourning,* his clothes torn, dirt on his head. When he reached David, he fell to the ground facedown before him.

► At the end of 1 Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and the armies of Israel went to war with the Philistines. The Philistine king wanted David and his men to fight for the Philistines against Israel because David was mighty in battle. But the king's generals convinced him that David could not be trusted, and an attack on his people sent David hurrying off in another direction just as the battle was joined between Israel and Philistia. In that battle, disaster struck: the army of Israel was routed. Saul fought bravely but was defeated, at last falling on his own sword rather than be captured, tortured, and exhibited as a prize; and Saul's son Jonathan, beloved friend of David, also died in the battle. The fall of the first royal house of Israel is complete, and now Israel faces grave danger.

David: 3 From where have you come?

Soldier: I have come from the camp of Israel; I escaped *after the battle.*

David: 4 What happened? Tell me!

Soldier: The Israelites ran from the battle, and many of them were killed. King Saul and his son Jonathan are dead.

David: 5 How do you know they are dead?

Soldier: 6 Because I happened to be on Mount Gilboa *during the attack,* and I saw Saul leaning against his spear as the chariots and cavalry approached. 7 He looked around and saw me, and he called to me. I told him, "I am here, *my lord.*"
8 He asked who I was, and I told him I am an Amalekite. 9 Then he said, "Come here. Stand over me, and kill me because I am suffering but am still alive." 10 So I did what he asked, because I knew he would not live after he had fallen. I took the crown from his head and his gold armlet and brought them here to you, my lord *whom I recognize as the next king.*

11 When David heard these words, he tore his clothing *in grief;* and all the men with him did the same. 12 They mourned and wept, and they fasted until evening in honor of Saul and Jonathan and the army of the Eternal One of Israel, because they were cut down by the sword *of the enemy.*

David *(to the soldier)***:** 13 Where is your home?

Soldier: I am the son of an alien *living in Israel,* an Amalekite. *Therefore I am bound by some of the Israelite law.*

David: 14 Weren't you afraid to strike down the Eternal One's anointed *king knowing the law would require your death*?

15 So David called for one of his soldiers to come forward and kill the Amalekite soldier, which he did.

David: 16 You have only yourself to blame. Your own words convicted you when you said you had killed the Eternal's anointed *king.*

17 Then David mourned the death of Saul and his son Jonathan with this song of grief, 18 the Song of the Bow, which he ordered taught to the people of Judah and recorded in the book of the Upright.*

► Although Saul sought David's death on many occasions, and although David cannot act as king until Saul dies, David executes the Amalekite mercenary who has the insolence to strike down God's rightly-anointed king for his disrespect to the position. Demonstrating his respect for Saul, David then composes one of the most beautiful expressions of grief in the Bible, a song of loss and sadness to relay the nation's sense of sorrow, and his own.

* 1:18 Literally, the book of Jashar

David: [19]The beauty of Israel lies dead
upon your high places.
O how the mighty have fallen!
[20]Don't speak of this in *the city of* Gath;
don't proclaim it in the streets of
Ashkelon,
Or the daughters of the Philistines will
rejoice.
The daughters of the foreigners*
will sing for joy.
[21]Mountains of Gilboa, let no rain or dew
water you;
may your mountain fields offer only
dust.
The shield of the mighty was defiled
with your enemy's blood;
even the shield of Saul is no longer
anointed with oil *by the*
Eternal.
[22]With the blood of the slain
and with the fat of the strong,
Jonathan's bow never lost aim;
Saul's sword never came back
empty.
[23]Saul and Jonathan were beloved and
delightful,
always together in life and now in
death.
They were faster than eagles;
they were mightier than lions.
[24]O daughters of Israel, cry out for
Saul,
who clothed you in luxurious
crimson,
who adorned your garments with
ornaments of gold.
[25]O how the mighty have fallen
in *the height of* the battle!
Jonathan lies dead upon your high
places.
[26]I agonize over you, my brother
Jonathan.
I have delighted in you;
and your love for me was
wonderful,
beyond *even* the love of women.
[27]O how the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war lie
broken!

► Jonathan he misses especially because Jonathan was his friend, a companion, David says, whose love was greater than any love a woman could have for a man. David and Jonathan shared a relationship built in adversity, and the secret they kept from Saul that preserved David's life made the relationship stronger than what most will ever experience.

2 After David mourned, he asked the Eternal One a question.

David: Should I go up *now* to one of the cities of Judah?

The Eternal indicated that he should go.

David: Where should I go?

Eternal One: Hebron.

[2]So David went to Hebron, *a royal city,*
with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and
Abigail the widow of Nabal from Carmel.
[3]David also brought along all his men and
their households, and they settled in and
around Hebron. [4]Then the people of Judah
came and anointed David king over them.
They told David how the people of Jabesh-
gilead had buried Saul *with dignity,* [5]so
David sent messengers to them.

David's Message: May you be blessed by
the Eternal One for your loyalty to your
king Saul by burying him. [6]May the Eter-
nal always love and be faithful to you! I
will also reward you for this noble act.
[7]Now be strong and mighty, for Saul your
king is dead, and the people of Judah
have anointed me as their new king.

[8]But *it was not so simple.* Abner, Ner's son
who had commanded Saul's armies, took
Saul's son Ish-bosheth and brought him
to Mahanaim; [9]and there Abner named
Ish-bosheth king over Gilead and over the
Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and
all Israel. [10]Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was 40
years old when he began to rule Israel, and
he was king for two years. But the people
of Judah followed David, [11]and he was king
over them in Hebron for 7½ years.

[12]Abner, the son of Ner, and the ser-
vants of Ish-bosheth (the son of Saul) trav-
eled from Mahanaim to Gibeon. [13]*David's*
general Joab, whose mother was *David's*
sister Zeruiah, and David's servants went
out to meet them at the pool of Gibeon.
Abner's forces were by one side of the
pool, Joab's forces by the other.

* 1:20 Literally, "daughters of the uncircumcised"

Abner *(to Joab)*: 14Why don't we send our young soldiers out to have a contest before us?

Joab: All right. Send them forward.

15Twelve men came forward to represent the people of Benjamin and Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and twelve to represent David *and his people*. 16They all caught their opponents by the head and thrust their swords into their opponents' sides, so they all fell down together. That is why this place was called *the Field of Adversaries,* Helkath-hazzurim in Gibeon.

17The battle *that followed this contest* was brutal that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by the servants of David.

18All three of Zeruiah's sons were fighting *for David*: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel was a swift runner, fast as a gazelle, 19and he chased after Abner intently. 20Abner looked behind him.

Abner: Is that you, Asahel?

Asahel: It is.

Abner: 21Stop pursuing me. Attack one of the soldiers *of your own rank,* and take his possessions instead.

But Asahel would not stop in his pursuit.

Abner: 22If you don't stop pursuing me, I'll have no choice but to kill you! And how could I show my face in front of your brother Joab *if I do such a thing*?

23But Asahel refused to be diverted. Abner *didn't even use the point of his spear. He* thrust with the butt of his spear, and the spear struck Asahel in his abdomen and passed all the way through him. He fell, and there he died. And all those who arrived on that spot stopped and just stood there *staring in amazement*.

24But *Asahel's brothers,* Joab and Abishai, pursued Abner *with their forces*. As the sun was setting, they reached the hill of Ammah that is in front of Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. 25The people of Benjamin banded together to protect Abner, and they made their stand on top of a hill.

Abner *(calling to Joab)*: 26Are we to continue this killing forever? Don't you see that this will come to a bitter end? How long until you order your forces to stop pursuing their brothers?

Joab: 27I swear before the living God that if you had not said this, my forces would have pursued their *Israelite* brothers until morning.

28Joab blew the trumpet to call off the attack against the men of Israel, and all pursuit and battle stopped. 29Abner and his men went on, traveling all night across the desert plain.* They crossed the Jordan *River,* and by traveling all morning reached Mahanaim. 30Joab *and his forces,* meanwhile, came back together after pursuing Abner. They discovered that in addition to Asahel, 19 of David's men were missing; 31but David's men had killed 360 of the men of Benjamin *and the others* who served Abner.

32They brought Asahel's body back and buried him in Bethlehem in his ancestral tomb. Joab and his men marched all night and arrived home in Hebron at dawn.

3 This was *the beginning of* a long war between the forces loyal to David and the forces loyal to Saul's *son Ish-bosheth*. David's forces continued to grow in strength, while the forces of Saul's *son Ish-bosheth* grew ever weaker.

2While David was *king* at Hebron, he fathered these sons: the first was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel; 3his second was Chileab, whose mother was Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel; his third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; 4his fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith; his fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital; 5his sixth was Ithream, whose mother was David's wife Eglah. All of these sons were born at Hebron.

6During the war between David and the house of Saul, Abner was carving out a place of power among those who supported Saul's family. 7Earlier Saul had a mistress named Rizpah, who was the daughter of Aiah. Ish-bosheth went to Abner and accused him.

Ish-bosheth: Why have you slept with my father's mistress?

* 2:29 Hebrew, *Arabah*

Ish-bosheth is outraged because sleeping with a king's wife or concubine is tantamount to claiming the throne.

8This accusation of *disloyalty* made Abner very angry.

Abner: Am I no better than a dog, whose head *is turned by any female*? Do I serve Judah? I have done nothing but give my loyalty to your father Saul, to his brothers, and to his friends; and I have not betrayed you to David. How can you come to me and accuse me of a crime concerning this woman? *Now I will see you are overthrown.*

9May the True God punish me severely if I don't do for David what the Eternal One has promised him: 10to take away the throne from Saul and set up David's throne, who will be king over *both* Israel and Judah, from Dan *in the far north* to Beersheba *in the southern desert.*

11Ish-bosheth didn't dare to say anything else to Abner after this; he was afraid of him.

12Abner sent this message on his own behalf to David *at Hebron*:

Abner's Message: Who is in charge of this land? Make an agreement with me, and I will give you my support. I will persuade everyone in Israel to support your cause.

David: 13Fine. I will make a covenant with you. But one thing is nonnegotiable: I don't want to see you unless you have Saul's daughter Michal with you when you come before me.

14*At the same time,* David sent Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, this message:

David's Message: Send me *back* my wife, *your sister,* Michal. I bought her with a bride-price of 100 Philistine foreskins.

15So Ish-bosheth sent *for Michal* and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel, the son of Laish. 16Paltiel followed the party, weeping, all the way to Bahurim *in Benjamin.* Finally Abner ordered him to stop following them, and he returned home.

17Abner sent a message to the leaders of Israel.

Abner's Message: For some time now you have wanted David to be your king; 18now is the time for you to make it happen. You remember that the Eternal One promised David that He would use him to deliver Israel from the Philistines and from all our enemies.

19Abner also communicated directly with the people of Benjamin, *Saul's tribe, to enlist their support;* and at last he went to Hebron to tell David that the people of Israel—all of them, including Benjamin—were ready to support him.

20Abner came with 20 of his men to meet with David at Hebron, and David held a great feast for them.

Abner *(to David)***:** 21Let me go now and enlist all of Israel behind you my lord, the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and you will be ruler over all your heart desires.

David dismissed Abner then and sent him away in peace. 22But after he left, Joab and some of David's warriors returned with the spoils of a raid. 23Joab and his forces arrived and heard that Abner, the son of Ner, had met with the king, and that he had gone his way in peace. 24Joab went to David.

Joab is still angry over the death of his brother Asahel, and he considers it a blood debt that needs to be collected.

Joab: What have you done? You had Abner in your hands! Why did you let him get away? He's gone. 25Don't you know that Abner, the son of Ner, came here only to deceive you, to find out your strength and what you are up to?

26When Joab left David's presence, he sent for messengers to find Abner. They caught up to him at the cistern of Sirah; and without David's knowledge, 27Abner returned to Hebron. Then, under the pretext of speaking to Abner privately, Joab took him inside the gateway and stabbed him in the stomach. Joab had his revenge on Abner for killing his brother Asahel, and Abner died.

28When David heard this news, *he wanted it understood:*

David: I and my kingdom are guiltless for all time in the eyes of the Eternal of the murder of Abner, son of Ner. 29May all the

guilt fall on Joab and on his descendants. May the men in Joab's line always have an oozing sore or skin disease, no longer be fit for battle, fall in battle, or go hungry.

30 *This was the curse King David pronounced* because Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner in revenge for their brother Asahel, whom Abner killed at the battle at Gibeon. 31 Then David gave an order to Joab and his followers.

David: Tear your clothes. Put on sackcloth, and *let me see you* mourn for Abner in front *of the procession.*

And King David himself walked *in the procession* behind the corpse. 32 They buried Abner at Hebron. At the graveside, David lifted his voice and wept for Abner; and the people wept with him.

33 The king sang a *song of* lament for Abner.

David: Why should Abner die a fool's death?
34 Your hands were not bound;
your feet were not chained.
You have fallen
as one falls among the wicked.

And the people wept again over Abner's *grave.*

► This song reminds us that David may be the writer of many psalms, and that David is a great warrior, musician, poet, and soon, a great king. David is also a person of great contradiction—not perfect, by any means—but a man of oversized loves and passions who must generally have his heart in the right place, since we're reminded again and again that God loves him. He is powerful, and people in his way do tend to have horrible things happen to them. But he respects the dead, and sometimes, as with Saul, grieves in ways that feel—all these centuries later—authentic.

35 *After the ceremony,* the people came to David and tried to convince him to eat something that day, but he turned them away *because fasting until evening was part of the mourning ritual.*

David: May the True God punish me severely if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets.

36 The people noticed *that he honored Abner by fasting,* and they approved—as they approved of everything their king did. 37 So everyone believed it was not David's intention, nor did he have any part in the murder of Abner, the son of Ner.

David *(to his servants)*: 38 Don't you know that today a prince, a great man, has fallen in Israel? 39 Although I am his anointed king, today I have no power *to punish his murderers.* The sons of *my sister* Zeruiah are too violent for me *to restrain.* May the Eternal repay the wicked according to their wickedness!

4 When Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, heard that *his general* Abner was dead, *murdered* in Hebron, he panicked, and so did all Israel. 2 Now the two captains of Ish-bosheth's raiding parties were Baanah and Rechab, the sons of Rimmon, a Benjaminite from the town of Beeroth (which was considered to belong to Benjamin *since the time its original inhabitants tricked the Israelites into making a pact of friendship with them.* 3 The people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim, where they still live as aliens).

4 Saul's son Jonathan, *David's friend,* had a son named Mephibosheth who was unable to use his feet. When he was only five, the news of his father and grandfather's defeat came from Jezreel. In her rush to flee, his nurse grabbed him up, and Mephibosheth fell; he had been lame *ever since.*

5 Baanah and Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, *hatched a plan.* They set out, and they came to Ish-bosheth's residence during the noonday heat as he was taking a nap. 6-7 They crept inside the house as if to get some wheat. There they stabbed Ish-bosheth in the abdomen while he lay asleep on his bed, killing him. Then Rechab and his brother Baanah cut off Ish-bosheth's head and escaped. They carried his head away and traveled all night across the desert plains.*

* 4:6-7 Hebrew, *Arabah*

[8]At Hebron, they brought Ish-bosheth's head before David.

Baanah and Rechab: Here is the head of your enemy, Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, who tried to kill you. Today the Eternal One has avenged my lord, the king, against Saul and his clan.

David: [9]As the Eternal One lives, the One who has redeemed my life from every danger, [10]when the messenger brought me the word, "Saul is dead"—as though that would be some reason for me to rejoice, *that would get him a reward*—I seized him and had him killed at Ziklag. That was his reward for bringing me such news. [11]How much more *do you deserve to be punished,* you wicked men who kill a righteous man in his own bedroom? Don't you imagine that now I'll make you answer for his blood with your own and wipe you from the face of the earth?

[12]David commanded his young men, and they killed Baanah and Rechab. Then the young men cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies *as an example* beside the pool at Hebron. But Ish-bosheth's head they took and buried in Abner's tomb in Hebron.

5 Then all the tribes *that made up the people* of Israel came to David at Hebron.

Leaders of Israel: *We are all related:* we are *flesh of* your flesh, *bone of* your bones. [2]When Saul was king, you always led *the army of* Israel out and then brought it back *safely*. The Eternal said to you, "You will be the shepherd of My people Israel, the ruler over all of them."

[3]All the leaders of Israel came before the king there at Hebron. So King David made a covenant with the leaders there before the Eternal, and they anointed David king over all Israel. [4]David was 30 years old when he first became king, and he was king for 40 years; [5]he reigned in Hebron over Judah *alone* for 7½ years, and then he reigned over the united *kingdom of* Judah and Israel for 33 years.

[6]*At one point,* David and his army marched to Jerusalem to fight the Jebusites who lived there. The Jebusites *felt secure behind their walls and* were sure David could not enter into the city. They jeered, "Even the blind and the lame could defend this city against you." [7]Despite the taunts, David *and his army* managed to capture the fortress of Zion, which became the city of David.*

David *(to his army)*: [8]If you want to strike down the Jebusites—these blind and lame defenders whom I hate—then go through the water tunnel.

(From this exchange came the saying, "The blind and the lame cannot enter the house.")

[9]Once David captured the fortress, he stayed there and named it the city of David. He built it up all around, *carefully terracing the hillside* from the Millo* inward. [10]And David continued to grow in power *and reputation* because the Eternal God, Commander of *heavenly* armies, was with him.

[11]King Hiram of Tyre sent diplomats to David with cedars and carpenters and masons to build David a palace.

[12]David realized then that the Eternal One had established him as king over Israel and that He was increasing David's kingdom *in power and majesty* for the sake of His people Israel.

[13-14]After the move from Hebron *to Jerusalem,* David married more women from Jerusalem, took more concubines, and fathered more sons and daughters: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, [15]Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, [16]Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

[17]When *David's former allies,* the Philistines, discovered that David, *whom they still considered a vassal of Gath,* was now king over *a united* Israel, they sent an army to *battle* him; but David heard they were coming and withdrew into the fortress.

[18]The Philistines spread their forces in the valley of Rephaim *southwest of Jerusalem.*

David *(to the Lord)*: [19]Should I go to war against the Philistines? Will You make me victorious over them?

Eternal One: *Yes,* go. I will certainly give you victory.

* 5:7 The city of David is below what would be the temple mount, about seven miles from Bethlehem and adjacent to Jerusalem.
* 5:9 The meaning is uncertain. Because the word literally means "filling," it could have been a terrace or a landfill, or it may be a part of the fortress or a wall.

20So David battled *the Philistines* at Baal-perazim and defeated them.

David: The Eternal has broken through my enemies in front of me like water bursting through *a dam.*

That is why the place was named Baal-perazim, *meaning "the Lord who bursts through."*

21The Philistines abandoned their idols on the field, and David and his forces carried them away.

22Yet again the Philistines came up and prepared for battle in the valley of Rephaim. 23David asked the Eternal One *what he should do.*

Eternal One: Do not directly face their forces. Circle around behind them, and array yourselves for battle in front of the balsam trees. 24When you hear the sound of *a mighty army* marching, *reverberating* in the tops of the balsam trees, come quickly *and fight,* for the Eternal has gone ahead of you *into battle* to destroy the army of the Philistines.

25David did just as the Eternal One commanded *and won a great victory.* He struck down the *fleeing* Philistines from Geba all the way to Gezer, *just before the coastal plain.*

6 Once again David gathered the elite soldiers of Israel, some 30,000, 2and they went down to Baale-judah to bring back the covenant chest of the True God, called by the Name: the Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies, who sits enthroned above the winged creatures *who protect the chest.*

3-4They carried the covenant chest of the True God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab on the hill *where it had rested,* and Abinadab's sons Uzzah and Ahio directed the new cart, with Ahio walking in front of the chest. 5David and all the Israelites were joyous before the Eternal; and they were accompanied by wooden lyres and harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

6When they came alongside the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the covenant chest. 7The Eternal burned with anger against Uzzah, and the True God struck Uzzah dead on the spot for daring to touch the covenant chest.

► The covenant chest represents something amazing—it is filled with God's presence and is supposed to be kept in the most separate, most holy of places. David knows that having the covenant chest near him as he rules is important. Therefore he begins the journey toward Jerusalem. The journey is interrupted with Uzzah's death. David leaves the covenant chest short of its final resting place, but he eventually completes the journey by bringing it into the city of Jerusalem to its final home—and bringing God's blessing with it. Although it is dangerous, it is also the most tangible symbol of God's past victories on Israel's behalf and represents God's presence.

8David was angry that the Eternal One had broken through to strike Uzzah, so the place was named Perez-uzzah, *meaning "Breech against Uzzah,"* to remember that act. 9David was also frightened of the Eternal that day.

David: How can I be responsible for the covenant chest of the Eternal One?

10So he decided he did not want to take the chest of the Eternal into the city of David, and he left it there in the care of Obed-edom, a man from *the Philistine city* Gath. 11The *covenant* chest of the Eternal One remained there for three months; and *in that time,* the Eternal One blessed the household *and farms* of Obed-edom the Gittite.

12When news was taken to King David that the Eternal had blessed Obed-edom and all his household because of the covenant chest of God, the king went down and brought the chest from Obed-edom's house up to the city of David, *again accompanying it* with rejoicing *and ceremony.* 13When the people carrying the chest of the Eternal had gone six steps, David sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf; 14and he danced before the Eternal One with all his might, clad in a priestly vest.

15-16So David and the house of Israel carried the covenant chest of the Eternal One up to the city of David with shouts and the sounding of the trumpet. When

Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked out the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Eternal *without thought for how he looked,* she hated him.

17They carried the covenant chest of the Eternal One to its place inside the tent David had pitched to house it, and the king offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings to the Eternal. 18When he had finished with the sacrifices and peace offerings, he spoke a *priestly* blessing over the people in the name of the Eternal One, the Commander of *heavenly* armies; and 19he gave all of the Israelites—every man and woman—a loaf of bread, a date roll,* and a raisin cake. Then they all returned to their homes.

20On David's return, he wanted to bestow good favor on his household, but Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet him.

Michal *(sarcastically)***:** The king has distinguished himself today in front of his servants' maids. He revealed quite a lot, just as the lowest of the low might expose himself.

David: 21It was for the Eternal One that I danced. The Lord chose me in place of your father *Saul* and all his descendants; He appointed me to rule over Israel, the Eternal's people. 22I will lower myself even further—*maybe* I will even shame myself in my own eyes—but in the eyes of those maidservants of whom you speak, I will receive honor.

23And to her dying day, Michal, the daughter of Saul, *was humbled before God and* did not bear a child. *Therefore no descendant of Saul ever regained the throne of Israel.*

► David's dancing is part of the celebration and ritual involved with bringing the covenant chest into the city, part of a sacred party where in addition to ritual sacrifice and shouts of joy and playing the trumpet, all of the people feast. As the anointed king of Israel, David could behave with reserve and dignity—which his wife, Saul's daughter Michal, apparently thinks most fitting in a king—but perhaps it is more fitting for the king God has placed on the throne to join in the worship and celebration welcoming God into their city and into their lives. David tells Michal that he doesn't care how other people react to his worship and praise of God, for in his own eyes—and in the eyes of the faithful—he has done what is right.

7 Now when the king was settled in his house and the Eternal had given him rest from battling all his enemies, 2he spoke to the prophet Nathan.

David: Look at this: I live in a *beautiful* palace made of cedar, but the covenant chest of the True God rests in a tent made of curtains.

Nathan: 3Go do whatever you're planning to do, for the Eternal One is with you.

4But that same night, the Eternal spoke to Nathan.

Eternal One: 5Go and tell My servant David this message is from the Eternal One: "Are you the person who will build a house for Me to live in? 6I have not lived in a house since I brought My people Israel up from Egypt, but have moved around all this time in a tent, even in the congregation tent. 7Wherever My travels with the people of Israel have taken Me, did I ever go to one of the tribal leaders who were the shepherds for My sheep and ask, 'Why haven't you made Me a house of cedar *to live in*?'"

8So now you shall tell David, My servant this message is from the Eternal One, the Commander of *heavenly* armies: "I took you from the pastures where you followed sheep and made you king of all My people Israel *so you now lead My sheep.* 9I have been with you wherever you journeyed and have given you victory over your enemies; and I will make you highly respected, with a name as great as any who live on earth. 10-11And I will select a place for My people Israel and plant them *firmly in that place,* a land they can call their own, a land of peace. The wicked will not bother them again as they did from the time I appointed the

* 6:19 Meaning of the manuscripts is uncertain. Possibly dates or wine. Traditionally translated "a piece of meat," but more recently "a cake made from dates."

judges to govern My people, and I will
give you rest from fighting your enemies.
More importantly, I, the Eternal swear
to you that I will raise up a dynasty
from your family. 12When you come to
the end of your days, and you *leave this
life to* lie down with your fathers, I will
raise up from you a descendant, your
own flesh and blood, and I will make his
kingdom *and family* sure. 13He will be
the one to build a temple honoring My
name, and I will establish the leadership
of his kingdom for all time. 14I will be to
him a father, and he will be to Me a son.*
When he crosses the line and acts badly,
I will teach him with a rod used by peo-
ple *for correction* and a lash *for discipline*.
15But I will not withdraw My love from
him as I did from Saul, whom I set aside
in favor of you. 16Your dynasty, your king-
dom, will stand perpetually in My sight;
your descendants will rule continually."

17Nathan did as He had told him and
related this vision to David. 18Then King
David *was strongly moved and* went into
the presence of the Eternal.

David: Who am I, O Eternal Lord, and
what is my family that You have raised
me so high? 19You have spoken of this
as though it were a tiny thing, *simple,*
O Eternal Lord. You have also talked
about *the future of* Your servant's family
and kingdom, a great future stretching
off into the distance. This, O Eternal
Lord, is Your instruction for human-
ity. 20What can I say to You? You know
Your servant *inside and out,* O Eternal
Lord. 21Because You promised it and
it pleased You, You have made these
amazing things happen, so that Your
servant might know *You are behind it.*
22So You are great, O Eternal Lord. No
one else like You exists, and there is no
god greater than You, as we should know
from everything we have heard.
23And who is like Your people, Israel?
Is there another nation on the earth
where God went to redeem them from
Egypt and to distinguish Himself with
awe-inspiring deeds of power by driving
other nations and their *false* gods out of
their path? 24You chose to take Israel as
Your people perpetually; and You, Eter-
nal One, chose to be their God.
25So yes, Eternal God, take the
words You have spoken about me, Your
servant, and my family *and kingdom,* and
make them true perpetually. Do what
You have promised. 26Then Your name
will be revered forever in the words,
"The Eternal One, the Commander of
heavenly armies, is the God over Israel,"
and the dynasty of Your servant David
will be established before You. 27For
You, O Eternal God, the Commander of
heavenly armies, the God of Israel, have
shown me what You intend, saying, "I
will establish your dynasty," and that is
why I have found the courage to pray
this prayer in Your presence. 28O Eternal
Lord, You are the True God, and Your
words are always true, and You have
made this good promise *to me,* Your ser-
vant. 29So may it please You to *continue
to* bless *me,* my family, *and my kingdom*
so that my dynasty may be continually
before Your sight. For You, O Eternal
Lord, have spoken; and with Your bless-
ing, my descendants *and kingdom* will
always be blessed.

8 Sometime later, David won a great
victory over the Philistines, gaining
superiority over them at Methegammah. 2He also defeated *the army of*
Moab; and making the captured lie down,
he determined that ⅔ of them would be
put to death while ⅓ would be allowed
to live. *As a result,* the Moabites became
servants to David and paid tribute. 3David
also defeated Hadadezer, the son of
Rehob, king of Zobah *in southern Aram,*
when Hadadezer went to restore territory
all the way to the Euphrates River. 4David
captured from him 1,700 charioteers and
20,000 foot soldiers. He retained enough
horses to drive 100 chariots and disabled
the rest, cutting their leg tendons.
5When the Arameans came from
Damascus to fight alongside King Hada-
dezer of Zobah, David killed 22,000 of
their soldiers as well. 6Then David set
up outposts among the Arameans from
Damascus, and they became servants
of David and paid tribute. The Eternal
helped David everywhere he went. 7David
brought the gold shields that had been
carried by Hadadezer's men back to Jeru-
salem; 8and he plundered a vast quantity
of bronze from Hadadezer's towns, Betah
and Berothai.
9When King Toi of Hamath *(in south-
ern Aram)* heard that David had defeated
Hadadezer's army, 10he sent his son Joram

* 7:14 2 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 1:5

to greet King David and to congratulate him *on his victories* because Toi had also defeated Hadadezer. Joram brought as gifts items of silver, gold, and bronze; 11David dedicated these to the Eternal, as he had all the silver and gold he had received from those nations he defeated: 12Aram, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek, including the spoil from Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

13David's exploits improved his reputation. After his return, he went to war with the Edomites,* killing 18,000 in the valley of Salt. 14David set up outposts throughout the land of Edom. All the Edomites became servants of David, and the Eternal One helped David wherever he went.

15So David was king over a united Israel, ruling justly and fairly. 16Joab, the son of *David's sister* Zeruiah, was his general; Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was his recorder; 17Zadok, the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, served as priests; Seraiah was his *royal* secretary; 18Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites, *foreign mercenaries loyal to David;* and *some of* David's sons served as advisors *in David's kingdom.*

9 **David:** Is anyone from Saul's family still around that I could honor for the sake of *my friend* Jonathan?

2One servant from Saul's household, Ziba, was still alive, and they brought him to King David.

David: Are you Ziba?

Ziba: At your service, *Majesty.*

David: 3Is anyone from Saul's family still alive to whom I could show the kindness of God?

Ziba: Jonathan has a son who is still alive; he is crippled, unable to use his feet.

David: 4Where is he?

Ziba: He lives with Machir, son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.

► David still remembers his deepest friendship. The loss of Jonathan haunts David, and he desires to show honor to the family of God's anointed, Saul. David promised his friend Jonathan that if he ever became king, he would treat Jonathan and his descendants with kindness. Their friendship was important to David; and although he thinks all of Saul's family has been destroyed, he wants to find out if somewhere there might be a relative of Jonathan whom he may honor in gratitude for all Jonathan did for him.

5-6David sent for *Jonathan's son* Mephibosheth and had him brought *to Jerusalem* from the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar. When he arrived, Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, grandson of Saul, laid facedown on the floor *and honored the king.*

David: Mephibosheth!

Mephibosheth: At your service, *my king.*

David: 7There's no need to be frightened. I intend to treat you kindly for the sake of your father, Jonathan, *who was my loyal friend.* I will return to you all the territory that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always be welcome at my table.

8Mephibosheth again prostrated himself *before the king.*

Mephibosheth: What am I to you that the king should look with favor on a dead dog like me? *I am as one of your servants.*

9Then the king summoned Ziba, who had been Saul's servant.

David: Everything that belonged to *his grandfather* Saul and his family I have returned to your master's descendant. 10You, your sons, and your servants will work on his farms and bring in his produce, so that he *and his household* will have food. But Mephibosheth will always eat at my table.

Ziba had 15 sons and 20 servants.

Ziba: 11I am your servant, and you are my lord and king. Whatever you command I will do.

* 8:13 Some manuscripts read, "Arameans."

From then on, Mephibosheth ate at the king's table as though he were one of David's own sons. 12Mephibosheth had a young son, Mica; and all who lived in the house of Ziba became Mephibosheth's servants *and worked for him.* 13Mephibosheth remained in Jerusalem, where he always ate at the king's table. He was lame and could not walk on either foot.

► Mephibosheth, the last surviving son of Jonathan, could escape notice in a warlike culture where physical prowess is valued. But David elevates Mephibosheth to the king's table and honors him. David's fulfillment of a promise to a long-dead friend is one of the most attractive stories about the king in the books of Samuel. While David proves too hard and even ruthless at times, his gentleness to those who are helpless is an endearing trait. It is this softness and desire to follow God against all odds that gives him special honor among the kings of Israel.

10 After a while, *Nahash,* the king of the Ammonites, died; and his son Hanun became the new king. *Remember, Nahash and Saul were enemies, but Nahash had helped David.*

David: 2I will deal fairly with Hanun, son of Nahash, because his father dealt fairly with me.

So David sent messengers to Ammon with a message of sympathy about Nahash's death. When David's emissaries arrived, 3the princes of the Ammonites spoke to Hanun their lord.

Ammonite Leaders: Do you think this means David honors your father *the king* just because he sends these men with *empty* condolences? Hasn't David ordered them to search the city, keep their eyes open, and plot how to conquer us?

4So Hanun had David's messengers seized. *He mocked the men,* shaving off half their beards, cutting off their garments at their hips, and then ordering them home.

5When David heard what had happened, he sent messengers to intercept them because they had been publicly humiliated.

David: Stay at Jericho until your beards grow back *and your shame is gone.* Then return home.

6When the Ammonites realized they had earned David's ridicule, they sent for and hired Arameans: 20,000 foot soldiers from Beth-rehob and Zobah, 1,000 *fighting men* from the king of Maacah, and 12,000 soldiers from Tob.

7When David heard *the Ammonites were preparing for war,* he sent Joab and all his fighting men. 8The Ammonites arrayed themselves in front of the gates, but *their mercenaries* (the Arameans of Zobah and of Rehob, and the men of Tob and Maacah) took up positions out in the open country.

9When Joab saw that the battle lines had been drawn both in front of and behind him, he chose some of Israel's best *fighting* men and set them against the Arameans, 10and he put his brother Abishai in charge of the rest and set them against the Ammonites.

Joab *(to Abishai)***:** 11If the Arameans are too strong for me, come and help me; and if I see that the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come and help you. 12Be strong, and let us fight bravely for the sake of our people and the cities of our True God, and may the Eternal do what seems good in His sight.

13So Joab and his soldiers moved against the Arameans, and the mercenaries fled from him. 14When the Ammonites saw that *their hired soldiers,* the Arameans, were running away, they also fled from Abishai *and his forces* and entered into *the safety of* their city. Then Joab *and the armies of Israel* stopped fighting the Ammonites and returned to Jerusalem.

15But when the Arameans saw they had been routed by Israel, they came back together *to pool all their resources.* 16Hadadezer sent for the Arameans who lived beyond the *Euphrates* River, and they gathered at Helam under Shobach, the general of all Hadadezer's army. 17When David got this news, he gathered his army, crossed over the Jordan *River,* and went

to Helam. The Arameans *came out and* arranged themselves to fight David 18and ran from Israel in defeat: David killed 700 charioteers and 40,000 horsemen,* and he mortally wounded Shobach the commander of their army, who died there.

19When all the rulers who were subject to Hadadezer learned of Israel's victories, they *gave up and* made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Arameans were afraid and would no longer help the Ammonites *against David.*

11 In the springtime of the year, the season when *most* kings took their soldiers out *to fight,* David stayed in Jerusalem and sent Joab out *as general* in charge of David's men and the whole *army of* Israel. They destroyed the Ammonites and put the city of Rabbah under siege.

2*Early* one evening, David rose from his bed and was strolling on the palace roof when he saw a woman bathing *on a roof below his.* She was very beautiful. 3David sent someone to find out who the woman was, and the answer came back that she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. *Uriah was one of David's officers who had gone to war with the rest of David's troops.*

4-5David *couldn't get her off his mind, so he* sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him. She came, and they had sexual relations. Soon after she returned home, Bathsheba realized she was pregnant, and she sent this news to David. Since their encounter occurred just after the purifying bath after her period, *her husband Uriah could not have been the father.* 6So David sent a message to *his general* Joab.

David: Send me Uriah the Hittite.

Joab sent Uriah back to David. 7There he was taken in front of the king; and David asked how Joab was doing, how the army was getting along, and how the campaign was progressing. 8When they finished *discussing the news from the front,* David suggested that Uriah go to his own house to clean up, *relax, and visit his wife.*

David: *Since I've called you back here,* why don't you go down to your house?

David sent a gift after him when he left, 9but Uriah did not go down to his own house. Instead he spent the night at the entrance of the palace with all the king's servants.

► David is frustrated by this. If Uriah doesn't have sexual relations with his wife, then everyone will know that Bathsheba has been unfaithful—and they might remember her secret trip to the palace.

Servants *(to David)***:** 10Uriah did not go home last night.

David *(to Uriah)***:** You've just come home from a long trip. Why didn't you spend the night in your own house?

Uriah: 11*The people of* Israel and Judah and the covenant chest *of the Lord* are in tents; my general, Joab, and the king's other servants are sleeping in the open fields. Do you think I would go to my home to eat and drink and sleep with my wife *while everyone else suffers*? As you live, *good king,* I will not do such a thing.

David: 12Stay here *with me* today; tomorrow I will send you back *to the battle.*

Uriah remained in Jerusalem that whole day and the next day. 13David invited him to eat and drink in the king's *royal* company, and David got him drunk. After the party, Uriah fell asleep on a bed with the servants of the king, and again he did not return to his home.

14So the next morning, *realizing Uriah would not go home to be with Bathsheba,* David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it back *to the front* with Uriah.

► David's seduction of the beautiful Bathsheba and the plot to murder her husband, Uriah, represent low points in David's life. Even when someone has a reputation for good character—and David must have one, since he is beloved of God—temptation can lead him to act totally against his

* 10:18 Some Greek manuscripts read, "foot soldiers."

own values. David takes Bathsheba because he wants her and because he has the power to do so; he orders her husband into battle to be killed because he is unable to cover his lustful advances.

David's Letter: 15Put Uriah at the front of the battle, in a place where the fighting is most intense. Then pull back and leave him *in front of the line* so that the enemy will strike him down and kill him.

16*After he received this message,* Joab laid out his attack plans and assigned Uriah to a place where he knew the enemy had put strong warriors. 17When the warriors of the city came out to fight against Joab's forces, some of David's servants were killed, and Uriah the Hittite was one of them.

18Joab sent a messenger to David with news of the battle.

Joab *(to the messenger)***:** 19Give the king all of this news about the battle. 20If he gets angry and asks you, "Why did the army go so near the city to fight? Didn't you realize that they would shoot from the walls? 21Wasn't Abimelech, Jerubbesheth's son, killed by a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall at Thebez?* Why were you so close to the wall?" then tell him, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite was also killed *in the fighting*."

22So the messenger went and told David everything Joab had instructed him to say. *But he did not wait for the king's reaction before telling him Uriah had died.*

Messenger: 23Their soldiers came out against us into the field *surrounding the city*. At first they had the advantage over us, but we drove them back to their gate. 24Then their archers fired on us from the wall; and some of your servants were killed, including your servant Uriah the Hittite.

David: 25Take this reply back to Joab: "Don't let this trouble you. The sword kills indiscriminately. Continue to push forward against the city, and capture it." And give him my encouragement.

* 11:21 Judges 9:53

26When *Bathsheba,* Uriah's wife, heard the news of his death, she went into mourning *for seven days*. 27When her appointed time of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her into his household. He made her his wife, and *in time* she bore him a son.

But the Eternal One was displeased with what David had done.

► At first glance, David seems no different than many people who are given power and who use it without regard for what is right or what is fair. In this affair, David looks like the rich and powerful leaders the Hebrew prophets elsewhere in the Old Testament are constantly condemning. He has a moral and ethical failure as most of the kings who follow him also have. He exploits a loyal servant and wreaks havoc on his house.

12 The Eternal One sent *the prophet* Nathan to visit David. Nathan came to him and told him *a story.*

Nathan: Two men lived in the same city. One was *quite* rich and the other *quite* poor; 2the rich man's wealth included *livestock with* many flocks and herds, 3but the poor man owned only one little ewe lamb. He bought it and raised it in his family, with his children, *like a pet*. It used to eat what *little* food he had, drink from his *meager* cup, and snuggle against him. It was like a daughter to him.

4Now a traveler came to *the city to visit* the rich man. *To offer a proper welcome,* the rich man knew he needed to fix a meal, but he did not want to take one of the animals from his flocks and herds. So instead he stole the poor man's ewe lamb and had it killed and cooked for his guest.

Nathan stood back, waiting for the king's verdict. 5David grew very angry at the *rich* man. *It was his royal duty to protect the poor and establish justice.*

David: As the Eternal One lives, the *rich* man who did this deserves to die. 6*At the*

least, he will restore that lamb four times over because he acted without pity.

Nathan: 7You are that man!

This is the message of the Eternal God of Israel: "I was the One who anointed you to rule over Israel, and I was the One who rescued you from the hand of Saul. 8It was I who gave you Saul's house, Saul's wives, and dominion over both Israel and Judah; and if that were not enough, I would have given you as much again.

9"So why have you despised the word of the Eternal and chosen to do evil in His sight? It was you who killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and stole his wife, even though you used the Ammonites to do the dirty work. 10Now *because he was killed with the sword,* the sword will be your constant companion. It will hang over your household, *bringing death and violence to your family,* since you have despised Me *by showing no regard for My law,* and you have taken *Bathsheba,* the *lawful* wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own wife."

11This is the message of the Eternal: "I will bring trouble on you in your own household—right under your nose. I will take your wives and give them to another, and he will *flaunt that he* sleeps with them in the light of day. 12You did your evil in secret, but I will do this out in the open, in front of all Israel."

David *(confessing to Nathan):* 13I have sinned against the Eternal One.

Nathan: Because the Eternal has put away your sin, it will not be your death. 14But because you *scorned the Lord* by these acts, giving His enemies reason to mock Him, the child you conceived *in deceit* will die.

15Then Nathan *left the king's presence and* went down to his house.

The Eternal One struck the child born to Uriah's widow and David so that he became very sick. 16So David appealed to the True God for *the life of* his son. David went without food; he lay on the ground *praying* all night. 17The elders from his household, *the most highly honored of his servants,* tried to pull him up off the ground and to make him eat, but he would not.

18After seven days of this, the child died, and David's servants were afraid to bring him the news.

Servants *(to one another):* If the king did not listen to us while his son was still alive, how can we tell him his son is dead? He may hurt himself in some way.

19When David saw his servants whispering among themselves, he immediately realized the boy was dead.

David *(to his servants):* Is my son dead?

Servants: Yes, he is dead.

20Then David stood up, washed, anointed himself *with sweet-smelling oils,* and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Eternal and worshiped. Then he returned to his house and asked for food; and when it was brought to him, he ate.

Servants *(to David):* 21We don't understand. When your son was alive, you wept and you refused to eat; now that he is dead, *it is as if nothing is wrong*—you are up *and about* and eating.

David: 22While my son was still alive,
I wept and fasted *with all my being*
because I thought *to myself,* "Who knows? There is still a chance that the Eternal One will have mercy on me and let my child live." 23But now that he is dead, why should I continue without eating? Will that bring my son back to life? *Someday when I die* I will go where he has gone, but he will never come back to me here.

24David went in to console his wife, Bathsheba. *In time* they slept together, *and she became pregnant.* When their *second* son was born, David named him Solomon. The Eternal loved the boy 25and sent word by the prophet Nathan that they should call Solomon "Jedidiah."

► The Israelites believe God punishes or rewards based on religious and ethical behavior, so David knows he deserves to be punished for the things he has done. But Nathan tells him that his punishment will come through the loss of the son conceived in adultery with Bathsheba and through the growth of conflict within his own

family. The baby does die despite David's prayer and fasting, and David's children will soon display the kind of destructive behavior that will all but tear the royal house apart.

26*During this time,* Joab was campaigning against the Ammonite city of Rabbah until he captured the royal city. 27He sent messengers *with word of the imminent victory* to David.

Joab: I have fought against Rabbah and captured its water supply. *The city is almost ours.* 28You should gather the rest of your forces and come yourself to lead the final conquest. If I take the city, then I will receive the credit for it.

29So David gathered the people, led them against Rabbah, and captured it. 30He took the crown from their king and had it placed on his own head *to show who was now reigning in the land.* It was so heavy with gold (weighing over 75 pounds) *that it could scarcely be worn,* and it had a precious stone mounted on it. He also brought home the vast treasures of the city. 31Lastly David set the people of the city to work with axes or picks or saws and built kilns for making bricks. He did the same thing to all the cities of the Ammonites, and then he and his armies went home to Jerusalem.

13 Time passed, *and David's children grew older*. David's *third* son, Absalom, had a sister, Tamar, who was so beautiful that David's *oldest* son *and heir,* Amnon, fell in love with her. 2Amnon was actually sick *with desire* for his *half* sister Tamar. Because she was a *royal* virgin, there was no chance for him to be with her.

3But Amnon had a friend, *his cousin* Jonadab (son of David's brother Shimeah), who was very shrewd.

Jonadab: 4Son of the *great* king, why do you look so tired and run-down every day? Won't you tell me?

Amnon: It's Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister. I'm in love with her.

Jonadab: 5*Listen,* lie down in your bed, and pretend that you are really sick. When your father comes to check on you, ask him, "Could my sister Tamar come and make me something to eat here, where I can see it, and could she feed it to me?"

6So Amnon *did as Jonadab had suggested. He* lay down and faked an illness, and the king came to check on him, *just as Jonadab said he would.*

Amnon: Could my sister Tamar come *take care of me*? Could she make me some cakes here, where I can watch her, and then feed them to me?

7David sent word home to Tamar.

David's Message: Come to your brother Amnon's house, and fix him something he can eat.

8Tamar came to Amnon's house, where he waited in bed. She made dough, kneaded it, formed cakes, and baked them, all so that he could watch her. 9Then she set the pan in front of him and served the food, but he would not eat.

Amnon: Send everybody away.

All the servants departed *and left the two of them alone.*

Amnon *(to Tamar)***:** 10-11Bring the food over to my bed, so you can feed me.

When Tamar brought to him the food she had made as he lay in bed, he grabbed her.

Amnon: Oh, my sister! Come into my bed; *I want to be with you.*

Tamar *(struggling against him)***:** 12No, my brother! Please don't violate me. Don't do anything so shameful. You know people don't do such things here in Israel.

13Think about me! *Do you realize what this would do to me, my prospects, my reputation?* Where could I go to hide my shame?

And think about yourself! People would say you were one of the most foolish men in Israel!

Please, speak to the king *if you want me so badly*. He *loves you and* won't keep me from you.

14But Amnon would not listen to her; and since he was stronger, he raped her.

15After he was done, he was filled with disgust and hated her; his hatred was stronger than the love that motivated him *to rape her*.

Amnon *(to Tamar)*: Now get out of my sight!

Tamar *(clinging to him)*: 16No, *my brother*. The shame you do in sending me away is even worse than the shame you brought on by raping me.

But again he would not listen to her. 17He called for his manservant.

Amnon: Throw this woman out of my sight, and lock the door when she's gone. *Make sure she can't come back inside my house.*

18Because Tamar had been a royal virgin, she wore a distinctive robe with long sleeves. When Amnon's servant threw her out *into the street* and barred her return, 19Tamar heaped ashes on her head and tore her long, beautiful robe *in mourning for what had happened to her*. Then she walked back toward her home wailing, one hand to her head, *showing everyone that tragedy and shame had fallen on her.*

20Tamar's brother Absalom found her.

Absalom: Has your brother Amnon raped you? For now, my sister, say nothing. He is your brother. Don't let it affect you so much.

Absalom had begun to make plans for revenge. So Tamar remained a broken woman living in her brother Absalom's house.

21When King David heard of what Amnon had done, he was filled with anger, *but he did nothing to punish his firstborn son.*

22For his part, Absalom would not talk to Amnon, either nicely or angrily; Absalom hated Amnon for raping his sister Tamar, *but he waited patiently*.

► Oh the shame and intrigue within David's family. The lust and deception Amnon exhibits is not greatly different from that of his father. It, in turn, poisons Absalom and David's relationship. The eventual revolt and death of David's son Absalom are the final fruits of David's sins in desiring another man's wife and sending that man to his death. Nathan has promised there would be discord in the royal household, and that discord rocks David's family, leading to death and division among his children.

23So two whole years passed. It was the time *of year* when Absalom's sheep were to be sheared, and Absalom invited all the king's sons *to feast at his estate* at Baal-hazor, near Ephraim. 24He went to *his father,* the king, *to ask for permission to invite his brothers.*

Absalom: I have gathered my men to shear the sheep. Will the king and his servants please join me, your servant, *in celebrating?*

David: 25No, my son. If we all go, we would just be a burden to you.

Absalom pressured *his father*. The king still refused to come, although he did offer his blessing. *Absalom turned to go, but he stopped with a final request.*

Absalom: 26Then send my brother Amnon to be with us.

David *(curious)*: Why would you want him to go?

27But Absalom pushed and pressed him until *finally* David was persuaded to give his permission for Amnon and all of his sons to go.

[Absalom threw a kingly feast.]*

28*But before it began,* he gave his servants *unusual* instructions.

Absalom: Watch Amnon to see when the wine makes him drunk; and when I tell you, "Strike Amnon," kill him. Don't be nervous—this is my command from my own lips. Have courage and show your bravery.

29So Absalom's servants followed his command and killed Amnon *when he became drunk,* and the other royal sons rose *from*

* 13:27 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

the feast and fled on their mules. 30While they were on the road, a *false* report reached David's ears that all of his sons had been slain by Absalom, and no one had survived. 31The king tore his clothes and fell to the ground *in mourning.* All his servants who heard this news also tore their garments.

32Then *David's nephew* Jonadab (son of David's brother Shimeah) told *the king the truth.*

Jonadab: My lord, don't worry that all your sons are dead. Only Amnon has been killed *by Absalom,* and his fate has been certain since the day he raped his sister Tamar, for Absalom has known that he would repay Amnon *for his terrible deed.* 33So, my lord, don't grieve as though your line was extinguished, for only *your son* Amnon is dead.

34Absalom fled.

When the young watchman *at the palace* looked up, he saw a group of people coming down the road behind him around the mountain.*

Jonadab *(to David)***:** 35You see, my king? Here are your sons, just as your servant said.

36When he had finished speaking, the sons of the king arrived. They shouted, they wept, and the king and all his servants joined them in bitter tears.

37-38Absalom ran for his life. He sought sanctuary with *his maternal grandfather,* the king of Geshur (Talmai, son of Ammihud), and he stayed there for three years. Every day the king mourned for his *lost* son.

39King David longed to pursue his son Absalom once he comforted himself concerning the death of his son Amnon.

14 When Joab, the son of *David's sister* Zeruiah, realized that David was preoccupied with Absalom, *he took matters into his own hands.* 2He brought a wise woman from Tekoa and instructed her.

Joab: Act like you are in mourning. Wear mourning garments, don't anoint yourself with *sweet-smelling* oils, but act like a woman who has been mourning for someone dead for a long time. 3Then ask to see the king.

And he told her what she should say.

4When this woman from Tekoa came before the king, she fell on her face, prostrate before him, *and showed the appropriate respect due the king.*

Woman of Tekoa: Help me, *great* king!

David: 5What is wrong?

Woman of Tekoa: I am a widow. My husband has been dead *for some time.* 6I, your servant, had two sons who fought with each other in the field. With no one there to stop them, one struck the other dead. 7Now the whole family has risen up against me, your *humble* servant. They demand that I give up the one who killed his brother so that he can be executed as punishment—even though that will take away my *remaining son and* only heir. So they would put out the last glowing ember of my fire and leave behind absolutely nothing of my husband *or me.*

David: 8Go home, and I will give orders that will take care of this matter.

Woman of Tekoa: 9O my lord, my king, I don't want my situation to cause you any trouble. Just blame everything on me and my family.

David: 10If anyone bothers you about this, send him to me, and he will never trouble you again.

Woman of Tekoa: 11Please, O king, ask the Eternal One, your True God, so that those seeking a blood debt will give up their vengeance and my son will live.

David: As sure as the Eternal lives, not one hair of your son's head will be damaged.

12Then the woman asked for liberty to speak freely, and David agreed.

Woman of Tekoa: 13How does your decision in my case compare with what you are doing to the people of the True God? It seems that your verdict convicts you, since you have not brought home your

* 13:34 Greek manuscripts read, "The watchman went to tell the king, 'When I look toward Horonaim, I see men on the side of the hill.'"

own banished son. 14Everyone dies—we are like water spilled in the dust that can't be reclaimed. But God will not waste a life—He won't allow the banished one to be exiled permanently from His presence.

15I say these things to you, my king, because of those who have frightened me. I thought, "Maybe if I speak to the king, he will hear my request. 16And if the king hears, he will deliver me out of the hands of those who would make my son and me exiles from the inheritance of God." 17I thought, "Please let the king's word bring me peace," because you, my lord, are like a messenger of God, discerning good and evil alike. The Eternal One, your True God, be with you!

David: 18I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to tell me the truth.

Woman of Tekoa: Ask me your question, my king.

David: 19Has Joab put you up to this?

Woman of Tekoa: Of course you are right, my king. No one can fool you. It was your servant Joab who sent me and told me what to say to you. 20He did this because he hoped to change your situation *with Absalom.* But my lord, *my king,* is wise, as wise as a heavenly messenger of God who sees all that is happening on earth.

David *(to Joab)***:** 21All right. I will do *as you advise.* You have my permission to bring young Absalom home.

22Joab lay facedown on the ground before the king and honored him.

Joab *(blessing David)***:** Today I know that *I am blessed and that* I stand approved before you, my lord and king, since you have granted my request.

23Joab traveled to Geshur, found Absalom, and brought him home to Jerusalem. *But David would not see him.*

David: 24Take him to his own house. I won't let him see my face.

So Absalom returned to his own house and did not come into the king's presence. 25Now there was no one in Israel more handsome than Absalom; from the soles of his feet to the top of his head, he was flawless. 26When he cut his long hair (which he did once a year, as he needed it), his hair weighed five pounds, according to the king's measuring system. 27Absalom was the father of three sons and a beautiful daughter he named Tamar, *after his sister.*

28Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years without seeing *his father David,* the king, 29and at last Absalom sent a message to Joab that he wanted to be brought before David. But Joab did not answer his summons. Absalom sent him a second message, and again Joab did not come. 30So Absalom gathered his servants and gave them orders.

Absalom *(to servants)***:** Joab has a barley field next to mine. Go and set it on fire.

The servants did as he ordered, *and this got Joab's attention.* 31Joab got up and confronted Absalom at his house.

Joab: Why have your servants set my field on fire?

Absalom: 32Look, I asked you to come to take this message to the king: "Why did you ask me to come here from Geshur *if you won't see me*? I'd be better off there." Let me go see *my father* the king. If I am guilty of something, let him kill me.

33So Joab brought David this message, and David sent for Absalom, who came before *his father* the king and lay facedown on the ground in honor of him. David kissed Absalom *and welcomed him back into his good graces.*

15 After this, Absalom acquired a chariot and horses, and he hired 50 men to run ahead of him. 2Now Absalom made it a practice to rise early and stand beside the road leading into *one of Jerusalem's* gates. When someone came along who wanted to petition the king, he would ask, "What is your city?" The person would answer, "Your servant is from a certain tribe of Israel."

Absalom: 3I'm sure your claims are truthful and have merit, but the king has not appointed anyone to hear your case. 4If only I were appointed the authority in the land! Then anyone with a petition could come before me, and I would give him justice!

5When people came to Absalom to show
their respects, he would embrace them
and kiss them. 6Absalom did this to every-
one who sought justice from the king; and
in this way, he made himself the favorite of
the people of Israel.

7When four* years had passed, Absa-
lom went to *his father* the king.

Absalom: *My king,* please let me go to
Hebron and satisfy the vow I made to
the Eternal One. 8I made a promise when I
lived at Geshur in Aram: "If ever the Eter-
nal will bring me back to Jerusalem, then
I will go and serve Him [in Hebron.]"*

David: 9Go in peace.

So he got up and traveled to Hebron. *But
this was all part of Absalom's plan to come
to power.* 10He had secretly planted mes-
sengers in all the tribes of Israel with these
instructions: "As soon as you hear the
trumpet play, then shout that Absalom
has been crowned king in Hebron."

Absalom is planning to follow in his father's footsteps, for Hebron is where David was first crowned king.

11Two hundred men from Jerusalem
who were ignorant of Absalom's plan were
his invited guests on the journey. 12While
Absalom was offering sacrifices *to God,*
he sent for David's counselor Ahithophel
of Giloh. The rebellion grew in power and
number, 13and at last a messenger came
to David.

Messenger: Absalom has captured the
loyalty of the people of Israel.

14David *could see now that he had been out-
maneuvered, so he* called for his advisors in
Jerusalem and instructed them.

David: *Gather your things, and* let's flee
from the city right now, or we won't
escape Absalom's *revolt.* Hurry, or he will
catch us and kill us and anyone left in
the city.

David's Advisors: 15We will do whatever
you tell us to do.

16So the king with his household, *all the
people loyal to David in Jerusalem,* left.
David left behind 10 *royal* concubines,
members of his harem, and he gave them
responsibility over the palace. 17The king's
entourage stopped at the last house *on
the edge of the city.* 18Then all those who
served him, the Cherethites, the Pelethites,
and the 600 Gittites who had followed
David since *he had been exiled in the Phi-
listine city of* Gath, went ahead. 19David
turned to Ittai the Gittite*, who had been
with David since the days of Saul.*

David: Why are you coming with us? Go
back and make friends with the *new*
king, for you are a foreigner, in exile
from your home. 20You came *to us* only
recently; why should you have to wander
with us wherever I have to go? Go back
and take your people with you, and *may
the Lord show* unfailing mercy to you and
be ever faithful.

Ittai the Gittite: 21As sure as the Eternal
One lives and as my lord the king lives,
wherever my lord the king goes, in death
or in life, I will follow him.

David: 22All right, then. Let's march.

So Ittai the Gittite went *with David,* bring-
ing all the men, women, and children
who were with him. 23The whole country
seemed to weep as David and his follow-
ers departed. The king crossed over the
Kidron stream, and they all continued
toward the *desert* wilderness.

24Abiathar, Zadok, and all the Levite
priests traveled with them, carrying the
covenant chest of God. The priests had
set the chest down *beside the road* while
everyone else departed Jerusalem.

David *(to Zadok)***:** 25Carry the covenant
chest of God back into Jerusalem. If the
Eternal looks on me with favor, then I
will come back *someday* to see it in its
place *in Jerusalem where it belongs.* 26But
if He says, "I am through with you," then
I stand ready to endure whatever He
wills.

27But as for you and your son Ahim-
aaz, and Abiathar and his son Jonathan,
can't you see that you should go back
into Jerusalem in peace? 28I will be wait-
ing in the wilderness until you send me
news.

29So Zadok and Abiathar returned the
covenant chest of God to Jerusalem, and
they remained there.

* 15:7 Hebrew manuscripts read, "40"; some manuscripts read, "40 days." * 15:8 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

30But David and all of those who
went *into exile* with him covered their
heads; and weeping, they climbed the
Mount of Olives *out of the city,* David
climbing barefoot. 31Someone told David
that *his wise counselor* Ahithophel was
conspiring with Absalom. So David
prayed.

David: O Eternal One, I ask that you turn
Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness.

32When David reached the top of the
mountain where God was worshiped,
Hushai the Archite, *who had been one of
his advisors,* joined the group *of exiles,
grieving with* his clothes torn and dirt
upon his head.

► Since the days of the exodus, Israel has always been something of a "mixed group." Now during David's flight from Jerusalem, many non-Israelites pay homage and give loyalty to their king. Hushai the Archite and Barzillai the Gileadite are just two of these.

David: 33If you go with us, you will only be
a burden to me. 34But if you return to the
city, speak to Absalom. *Gain his confi-
dence.* Tell him you will serve him as king
as you once served me, and that way
you can block Ahithophel's advice for
me. 35-36The priests Zadok and Abiathar
will be in the city with you. Tell them
what you hear in the palace; and they
and their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan
respectively, will pass the news on to me.

37So David's *counselor and* friend Hushai
returned to Jerusalem just as Absalom was
entering the city.

16 After David *and his people*
passed over the crest *of the
Mount of Olives,* the exiles met
Ziba, who served *Saul's son* Mephibosheth.
Ziba led a couple of donkeys carrying
goods: 200 loaves of bread, 100 clumps of
raisins, 100 summer fruits, and a wineskin.

David *(to Ziba, seeing that Mephibosheth
wasn't with him)***:** 2Why have you brought
these things?

Ziba: The donkeys are for members of the
king's family to ride. The bread and sum-
mer fruit are for your young men, and
the wine is for those who grow weak in
the wilderness.

David: 3Where is your master's descen-
dant?

Ziba: He is still in Jerusalem. He says,
"Now the people of Israel will give me
back my grandfather's kingdom."

David: 4Then all that belonged to
Mephibosheth is yours now.

Ziba *(bowing)***:** I am your servant. May my
lord and king look kindly on me.

5*They traveled on.* When David reached
Bahurim, one of Saul's family, Shimei, the
son of Gera, came out of his house and
cursed David constantly *there in the road,*
6throwing stones at him and at his ser-
vants even though David's soldiers were
all around, *supporting him.*

Shimei *(shouting abuse)***:** 7Go on! Get out,
you man of blood! You worthless man!
8The Eternal One has *finally* punished
you for *taking the kingdom from* Saul,
for shedding the blood of his family and
subjects and reigning in his place. That's
why the Eternal One has taken the king-
dom from your bloody hands and given
it into the hands of your son Absalom.

9Abishai, Zeruiah's son, *was offended and
amazed.*

Abishai: Why should you let this worth-
less dog curse you, my king? Say the
word, and I'll chop his head off.

David *(to Abishai)***:** 10*Why should this mat-
ter to you?* What do we, sons of Zeru-
iah, have in common? If he insults me
because the Eternal has told him to, who
are we to ask him why he does it?
11(turning to the rest) Listen,
Abishai—and all of you! My own son
seeks to kill me *today,* so why shouldn't
this man of Benjamin? Leave him alone
and let him curse me, as the Eternal One
wills it. 12Maybe the Eternal will look at
everything done against me and render
something good in its place today.

13So they traveled on their way; and
Shimei followed, too, along the hill

opposite them, shouting curses and throwing stones and flinging dust. 14David and his men were weary when they at last arrived *at the Jordan River,* and there they stopped to rest.

15Meanwhile Absalom and all his people, the men of Israel, came into Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. 16When Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, he saluted Absalom.

Hushai: Long live the king! Long live the king!

Absalom: 17Is this how you repay *my father's* friendship? Wouldn't it be better for you to have followed him?

Hushai: 18No. I will serve the one whom the Eternal One, these people, and the people of Israel have chosen. I'll serve him and remain with him. 19And why shouldn't I serve the son of my lord? Just as I served him, I will serve you.

Absalom *(to Ahithophel)*: 20Advise me. What should I do now?

Ahithophel: 21*Make the break with your father complete.* Sleep with *each woman in* your father's harem whom he left behind to mind the palace. All of Israel will hear how you've insulted your father, *and they'll know there's no turning back now.* They will have to be committed to this rebellion.

22So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof *of the palace,* and all Israel saw that Absalom had slept with his father's concubines. 23In those days, both with David and then with Absalom, Ahithophel's counsel was deemed so wise that it could have come from God Himself, *so his advice was highly prized.*

17 Ahithophel *had a strategy for victory over David and* advised Absalom.

Ahithophel: Let me choose 12,000 men, and tonight we will pursue David 2-3while he is weak and weary. We'll throw him into a panic; then all of the people will run away from him, come back to you, and be safe. I will strike down the king. If we take only the life of this one man here—*your father*—then everyone else can return to you.

4This advice appealed to Absalom and to Israel's elders.

Absalom: 5Call in Hushai the Archite, and see what he thinks.

6When Hushai arrived, Absalom told him what Ahithophel had advised.

Absalom: *What do you think?* Should we do as he suggests? If not, tell us what you'd advise.

Hushai: 7I don't think the advice from Ahithophel is good this time, *and I'll tell you why:* 8You know that your father and his men are hardened soldiers. *Right now* they're angry, like a bear that's been robbed of her cubs in the field. Also your father is *such* a wise warrior that *he'll know he's our target.* He won't sleep in the same camp with his people. 9He's probably hidden in a cave or some other hole *where he will be hard to find.* When our troops start dying in the first attack, everyone will say, "Absalom's men are being slaughtered." 10Then even the courageous warriors, the ones with the courage of lions, will disintegrate *in fear.* Everyone in Israel knows that your father is a true warrior, and those with him are hardened veterans.

11No, my counsel is to *take your time.* Gather the people of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, *so that you have a large army,* like the grains of sand on the beach, and lead them into battle yourself. 12Wherever David is, we will fall on him like the dew on the ground. We'll kill him and all who defend him. No one will remain. 13And if he slips into a *fortified* city, we'll have so many men of Israel that we could lasso that city and pull it down into the valley, so that not even a stone would be left in place.

14Absalom and his counselors decided that Hushai's plan was better than Ahithophel's, *not knowing that* the Eternal One had determined to thwart Ahithophel's good advice and bring about Absalom's destruction.

15After Hushai *advised Absalom, he* went to the priests Zadok and Abiathar. *He wasn't certain what Absalom would do, so* he told them Ahithopel's plan and his own.

Hushai: 16Quickly now, send *a messenger* to David. Tell the king to move deeper

into the wilderness, across *the river* but away from the fords! If he remains where he is tonight, then he and all his followers will be swallowed *by Absalom's forces.*

17 *The priests' sons,* Jonathan and Ahimaaz, were waiting at En-rogel *for news.* A servant girl would bring them messages because they couldn't risk being seen entering the city. *When they had something to report,* they would go tell King David. 18 But this time *they were careless, and* a boy saw them and reported it to Absalom. So the two men fled to the house of a man in Bahurim. There was a well in the courtyard, and they lowered themselves into it. 19 The man's wife put the cover over the well and spread out grain on top of it, so no one could see it was there. 20 When Absalom's soldiers arrived, they questioned her.

Soldiers: Where are *the traitors* Ahimaaz and Jonathan?

Wife: Oh, they've crossed to the other side of the stream.

The soldiers looked for them, but when they couldn't find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

21 After the soldiers left, they climbed out of the well and went to speak to King David.

Ahimaaz and Jonathan: Get ready to cross over the river *into the wilderness* quickly, because here is Ahithophel's plan of action.

22 *And knowing about the danger,* David and everyone with him crossed over the Jordan *River and moved deep into the wilderness.* By daybreak not a single man *loyal to David* was left on the near side of the Jordan.

23 When Ahithophel saw that his plan was ignored, *he knew the best hope for victory was lost.* He saddled his donkey and went home; and after setting his affairs in order, he hanged himself and died. He was buried within his father's tomb.

24 Meanwhile David went on to Mahanaim as Absalom was crossing over the Jordan with all of the men of Israel. 25 Absalom had made Amasa commander of the army, which used to be Joab's office. *Amasa was a nephew of David:* his father was Ithra the Israelite* who had married Abigail, Nahash's daughter and also a sister of *David and* Zeruiah, Joab's mother. 26 Absalom and *the army of* Israel camped on the plains of Gilead.

27 When David arrived in Mahanaim, Shobi (the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites), Machir (the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar), and Barzillai the Gileadite (from Rogelim) 28 brought beds, basins, earthenware, wheat, barley, meal, parched seeds and grain, beans, lentils, 29 honey, butter, sheep, and *local* cheese for David and his men to eat; for they knew the men were hungry, tired, and thirsty there in the wilderness.

18 Then David gathered the soldiers who were with them and divided them into units of a thousand and a hundred. He appointed leaders over each unit. 2 He divided his army *into three groups.* A third of them were commanded by Joab, a third by Abishai (Zeruiah's son, Joab's brother), and the final third by Ittai the Gittite.

David *(to his soldiers)***:** I will go out *to fight* with you.

Soldiers: 3 No, you should remain *in Mahanaim.* If we flee, the people here will not be concerned about us; or if half of us die, they will not care. But *they care about you.* You're worth 10,000 of us. It's better that you stay here and help us from the city.

David: 4 All right. I'll do what you think is best.

► David is torn between his duties as king and his duties as father. When his own son attempts to overthrow him, he is forced to flee his kingdom and is subjected to ridicule and contempt. Absalom sleeps with all the royal concubines, a deadly insult, and it looks as though David will be overthrown just as Saul was before him. Even now with Absalom leading an outright rebellion, dishonoring his father, and seeking his death, David seeks to spare his son.

* 17:25 Some manuscripts read, "Ishmaelite" or "Jezreelite."

So David stood beside the gate while his soldiers marched out *to fight against Absalom,* organized *into fighting units* by the hundreds and by the thousands. 5Then David instructed *his generals* Joab, Abishai, and Ittai.

David: For my sake, be merciful to the young man Absalom.

Now everyone had heard about David's instructions to the commanders concerning Absalom.

6Then the army went out to fight against Israel, and the battle was fought in the wooded areas of Ephraim. 7David's forces won a great victory against Absalom's men, and 20,000 men were killed in the battle that day. 8The battle spread all across the landscape, and more of his opponents were lost to the forest than to the sword.

► David takes the fight into a forested area rather than staying out in the open field. Since his army is more experienced in fighting in such terrain, there is an opportunity for a smaller force to defeat a larger one. Absalom's men (and Absalom himself, as illustrated in the following verses) die as a result of not knowing how to fight in the forest and avoid its pitfalls.

9Absalom himself encountered David's forces, and as he was riding *away* on his mule, the animal took him into the thick *overhanging* branches of a huge oak tree. There his hair was caught, and he dangled between the sky and earth as his mule fled from underneath him. 10A soldier saw this and told Joab.

Soldier: I saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree, *helpless.*

Joab: 11You saw Absalom? Then why didn't you kill him while he was hanging there? I would have given you 10 pieces of silver and a belt!

Soldier: 12If you put 1,000 pieces of silver into my hand, I wouldn't raise it against the king's son. We all heard the king say to you generals, "For my sake, protect young Absalom." 13If I had taken his life despite that, you would stand back *and watch as they strung me up*. Nothing is hidden from the king.

Joab: 14I can't stand here talking to you *all day*.

Joab took three spears, and finding Absalom still dangling *by his hair* inside the oak, he thrust them into his heart. 15Ten young men, Joab's armor bearers, surrounded Absalom then and struck him until he was dead.

16Then Joab sounded the trumpet and pulled back the soldiers from their pursuit of *the army of* Israel, *because Joab knew no good would come of further fighting.* 17They took Absalom's body and threw it in a deep hole in the forest, and then they stacked stones high over it. Meanwhile the remaining Israelites *loyal to Absalom* fled to their homes.

18Before his death, Absalom had erected a monument to himself in the King's Valley, since he had no son to keep his memory alive. He named the monument after himself, and Absalom's Monument still stands *in the King's Valley*.

19*After Absalom's death,* Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, spoke *to Joab.*

Ahimaaz: Let me hurry to the king with the *good* news that the Eternal One has given him victory over his enemies.

Joab: 20You're not going to carry news today. Maybe some other day, but not today, for today the news *that matters most* is that the king's son is dead.

21(to the Cushite) Go and tell the king what you have seen.

The Cushite bowed *in obedience* to Joab, then he began running *to bring the news to David.*

Ahimaaz: 22Whatever happens, I want to run after the Cushite.

Joab: Why would you want to follow, even though you have nothing to gain?

Ahimaaz: 23Regardless of what happens, I am going to run.

Joab: *OK, then.* Run.

Ahimaaz ran, and going by way of the plain, he outran the Cushite.

24Now David sat *waiting* between the gates. A guard went up to the roof of the gates by the wall, and he saw a man running toward them. 25He shouted to alert the king, and David responded.

David: If he is alone, he comes with good news.

As the messenger drew near, 26the guard saw a second man running.

Guard *(to the gatekeeper)*: Another man is running by himself.

David: Then he also has good news.

Guard: 27From the way he runs, I'd say the first one is Ahimaaz, Zadok's son.

David: He is a good man, and he comes bearing good news.

28And as Ahimaaz approached, he shouted to the king.

Ahimaaz: All is well!

He dropped to honor the king, his face to the ground.

Ahimaaz: Praise the Eternal One, your True God, who has given us victory over those who raised their hands against you, my lord and king.

David: 29But how is my son Absalom?

Ahimaaz: When Joab sent me, your servant, there was still an uproar; but I don't know what was happening.

David: 30Make way *for this next messenger*. Move over here.

Ahimaaz turned aside, keeping still *and quiet*. 31So the Cushite arrived *and greeted the king*.

Cushite: I have good news, my lord and king! The Eternal has today *taken your side and* delivered you from all those who rose up against you!

David: 32But what about young Absalom?

Cushite: May all your enemies and all those who wish the king harm be as that young man is now!

33Then the king was stricken with grief. He went to a chamber over the gateway and wept *as he went*.

David: O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!

► David should never be counted out. Hours before, Absalom has everything going his way, and David is run out of his kingdom. Smart and fierce, he doesn't spend all those years hiding from Saul and fighting with little or no resources for nothing. Although he orders his generals to be merciful to his son Absalom, his forces win a great victory against the rebel forces, and David's general Joab kills Absalom and removes a threat to the security of the kingdom.

But David's reaction again is tender; although his son might have killed him if he'd been given the chance, David laments his death. As king, as father, and as follower of the Lord, he knows he could have done better; but now it is too late, and all he can do is mourn the consequences of his past actions.

19 Joab heard the news that David was weeping and mourning for Absalom, 2and the mood shifted from celebration to sorrow, for all the soldiers heard that the king was grieving for his son. 3They crept back to the city as though they had lost the battle *rather than saved the kingdom*.

4The king covered his face, and he continued to cry loudly.

David: O my son Absalom. O Absalom, my son, my son!

5Then Joab came into the king's presence.

Joab: Today you have shamed the men who saved your life, who have saved the lives of your sons and daughters, and the lives of your wives and concubines, 6all because of your love for those who hated you and your hatred of those who love you! You've made it perfectly clear *where*

your affections are—that your officers and men mean nothing to you, and that you'd gladly trade our lives for Absalom's.
7Go out now, and speak with kindness *and respect* to those who have served you. *You can still save the day;* but I swear by the Eternal One, if you do not *alter this mood now,* not a single man will be with you tonight, and this will be the greatest disaster ever to wash over you.

8Then the king got up, *went outside,* and sat down inside the gate *where Absalom had acquired his allies.* When the people heard that the king had come out to them, they gathered around him.
The men of Israel *who had gone against the king,* meanwhile, had fled to their homes. 9Throughout Israel, from tribe to tribe, people were debating: "David saved us from our enemies and took us out of the hands of the Philistines, but he fled from Absalom. 10Now Absalom, whom we appointed to lead us, has fallen in battle. Why, then, haven't we moved to bring the king back *to power*?"
11David *knew about this groundswell of support, and he* sent a message to the priests Zadok and Abiathar.

David: Tell the leaders of Judah, "Why should you be the last to agree to bring the king back? Everyone in Israel is talking about it, even in the king's own house. 12And you—you are my flesh and my bones. Why should you be the last to join this movement?" 13And tell Amasa, *who joined the rebellion against me,* "Aren't you my flesh and my bone? May God bring disaster on me if I don't allow you to serve as commander of my army from now on in place of Joab."

14Amasa persuaded all of Judah to stand united *supporting David,* and they sent word that he and his servants should come back. 15So the king came back to the Jordan *River. The people of* Judah turned out to meet him at Gilgal, *and they celebrated* as he crossed back over the Jordan *into his kingdom.*
16Shimei (son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim), *who had abused David on his way into exile,* was one of those in the throngs hurrying to meet David. 17He joined 1,000 people from Benjamin. Ziba, the servant of the house of Saul *who had spoken with David on his way into exile,* and his 15 sons and 20 servants who also hurried down to the Jordan before the king, 18kept crossing the ford to assist in moving the king's household and was anxious to help in any other way. Then Shimei, the son of Gera, fell in front of the king before he crossed the Jordan.

Shimei: 19*Please,* my lord, don't hold me guilty or hold a grudge for what I did against you on the day you left Jerusalem, *cursing you and throwing stones at you.* May the king forget it ever happened! 20I, your servant, know that what I did was wrong. That's why I've come today, to be the first of all the house of Joseph to greet my king.

21Abishai, Zeruiah's son, *remembered Shimei well.*

Abishai: *My lord,* shouldn't Shimei be executed for cursing the Eternal's anointed *king* with such contempt?

David: 22What business is that of yours, sons of Zeruiah? Why should you make yourself my opponent? Will I execute anyone in Israel on a day like this? Don't I know that today I am the king of Israel? 23(to Shimei) You will not die. I swear it.

24Mephibosheth, the *lame* grandson of Saul *and son of David's dear friend Jonathan,* also made his way to meet the king. His feet had not been cared for—no, and his beard had grown long, and he had not had his clothes washed—since the king went into exile and returned in peace. 25When he met the king in Jerusalem, the king received him.

David: Why didn't you go *into exile* with me, Mephibosheth?

Mephibosheth: 26My lord, my servant *Ziba* tricked me. I asked him to saddle a donkey so that I could go with you—for you know I cannot walk. 27He has told you lies about me, but my lord is like a heavenly messenger of God. So do what seems right to you, *and I will accept it.* 28You had the right to kill everyone in my family when you became king, yet you took me to sit at your table. So it would be wrong for me to bicker over anything with you.

David: 29Let's not talk any more about this. I have decided that you and Ziba will share the land.

Mephibosheth: 30My king, let him take it all. I'm just grateful you are back safely in your own palace and kingdom.

31Barzillai from Gilead, *who had fed the king's forces,* had come down from Rogelim to escort the king across the Jordan. 32He was 80 years old and very wealthy, which is how he had been able to provide for the king while he was at Mahanaim.

David *(to Barzillai)***:** 33Cross over with me, and come to Jerusalem. I'll take care of you *and give you a place of honor at my side.*

Barzillai: 34My king, how many years do I have left, that I should *leave my home and* relocate with the king to Jerusalem? *I am too old for court life.* 35I am 80 years old today. My judgment is not as good as it used to be. I can't taste my food, enjoy my drink, or even hear the pleasant singing of men and women. So why should you burden yourself with me, my lord and king? 36I will travel a little farther with you across the Jordan, *but you don't owe me anything more for my hospitality.* Why should you, my king, offer me such a *handsome* reward? 37Please grant me your favor to return home, to die among my own people near the resting places of my parents. But do consider your servant Chimham. Let him come with you, and may you honor Chimham as you see fit.

David: 38Chimham will cross *the river* with me, and I will treat him as seems good to you. Anything you want from me, I will do for you.

39Then the king and all the people crossed over the Jordan. David kissed Barzillai and wished him well, and Barzillai returned home. 40The king, along with Chimham, went on to Gilgal, accompanied by all the people of Judah and half the people of Israel.

41Then the people of Israel came in front of the king, *indignant.*

People of Israel: Why have our kinsmen of Judah stolen you away *from us* and helped you across the Jordan? Why have they brought across your family and your subjects and all your men?

People of Judah: 42Because we are more closely related to the king than you are. Why are you upset about this? Has the king fed us at his expense? Has he given to us anything *he has not given to you*?

People of Israel: 43We have 10 shares in *the office of* the king *because there are 10 of our tribes in Israel and only 2 of yours—Judah and Benjamin.* And we have more shares in David *as the king* than you do *for the same reason.* Why were you angry with us? Weren't we the first to talk about bringing David home?

But the people of Judah were harsher than the people of Israel.

20 A worthless troublemaker, Sheba the Benjaminite, the son of Bichri, blasted a trumpet *and silenced everyone.*

Sheba: We don't have any share in David, no interest in the son of Jesse! Israel, let's go back to our tents *and show loyalty to only our own tribes*!

2So the people of Israel stopped following David and followed Sheba, son of Bichri; but the people of Judah faithfully accompanied David back from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

3David came back to his palace at Jerusalem, and he took the 10 members of his harem he had left behind to look after things—*the concubines whom Absalom had used sexually*—and put them *away in a house,* under guard. He took care of them, but he never slept with them again as long as they lived. They lived shut away as if they were widows.

David *(to Amasa)***:** 4Go and tell the men of Judah they have three days to get here, and you come with them.

5So Amasa went out to call Judah together, but he was delayed beyond his deadline.

David *(to Abishai)***:** 6Sheba, Bichri's son, will do more damage to us than Absalom *if he's left untouched.* Take my men and pursue him. If we're not careful, he'll escape into a fortified city *and continue to cause trouble.*

7So Joab took his troops with the *mercenary corps of* Cherethites and Pelethites, and all these warriors went from Jerusalem in pursuit of Sheba, Bichri's son. 8When they reached the great boulder

at Gibeon, Amasa met them. Joab was dressed for battle, with his sword strapped on at the waist; and as he went forward *to meet Amasa,* Joab's sword slipped out *of its sheath.*

Joab: [9]How are you, my brother?

With his right hand, Joab held Amasa's face to kiss him, [10]but Amasa did not see the sword in Joab's left hand. With one motion, Joab ripped open Amasa's belly; his intestines spilled onto the ground, and he died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai went off in pursuit of Sheba, Bichri's son. [11]One of Joab's men stood by Amasa's body and shouted,

Joab's Soldier: If you're for Joab and David, then follow Joab!

[12]Amasa lay agonizing in his blood on the highway, and the soldier saw that everyone was stopping to look. He dragged Amasa off the road into a field and threw a coat over him. [13]Once that distraction was removed, all the soldiers followed Joab to find Sheba, son of Bichri.

[14]Sheba marched across all the tribal lands of Israel until he came to Abel in Beth-maacah; and all *his kinsmen,* the Berites, gathered and followed him *inside the fortified city.* [15]When Joab's army arrived, they put Abel Beth-maacah under siege. They built an *earthen* rampart up onto the wall, while others with Joab tried to break the wall down. [16]Then a wise woman called out from the city.

Woman: Listen to me! Tell Joab that I want to talk to him!

[17]Joab came close enough *to hear her.*

Woman: Are you Joab?

Joab: *Yes,* I am.

Woman: I, your servant, have something to tell you.

Joab: *All right.* I am listening.

Woman: [18]In the old days, people used to say, "Let's ask for guidance at Abel," and there they would resolve their differences. [19]I am one of the many in Israel who are faithful and peaceful. Why would you destroy a city that has been a mother to Israel? Why would you knock down what the Eternal One has built?

Joab: [20]I'm certainly not here to destroy the city. [21]That's the last thing I want to do! But *we are pursuing* a man from the hill country of Ephraim: Sheba, Bichri's son, who has raised up a rebellion against David the king. If you will hand him over to us, then we will *lift the siege and* go home.

Woman: Then stay alert—we'll throw his head over the wall to you.

[22]The wise woman talked to all the people *about her plan to save the city.* They cut off Sheba's head and threw it *over the wall* for Joab. Then Joab blew the trumpet to halt his attack. The troops went to their homes, and Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

[23]*With Amasa dead,* Joab *again* commanded all the army of Israel. Benaiah, Jehoiada's son, commanded the *mercenary companies of* Cherethites and Pelethites. [24]Adoram commanded all the forced laborers. Jehoshaphat, Ahilud's son, was the recorder, [25]and Sheva was the *royal* secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were priests, [26]and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

21 After the people had suffered from a famine for three successive years, David asked the Eternal One *why the famine lingered,* and the answer came that *the nation was guilty for not making amends* for the bloodlust of *King* Saul, who slaughtered the people of Gibeon. [2](The Gibeonites were not from Israel—they were related to the Amorites. Saul tried to annihilate them in his zeal for Israel and Judah, although the people of Israel had promised to spare them *during the days of Joshua.*) So David called for *the leaders of* Gibeon.

David: [3]What can I do, what can I give you, to lift this guilt from my land so that you will honor the Eternal's chosen people?

Gibeonite Leaders: [4]Silver and gold won't make things right for us with Saul's kingdom. And it is not for us to tell you who should be subject to capital punishment in Israel.

David: I will do whatever you ask.

Gibeonite Leaders: 5Saul attacked us
and tried to destroy us, to wipe us off
the map of Israel. 6Give us seven of his
descendants, and we will hang them *on
a tree* in Gibeah before the Eternal, on
His mountain.

David: I will give them to you.

7Now the king did not give them
Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson and Jona-
than's son, because of the sacred oath
between David and Jonathan. 8But he did
take Saul's two sons by Rizpah (daughter
of Aiah), Armoni and Mephibosheth, and
the five sons of Merab (Saul's daughter)
that she had by Adriel (son of Barzillai the
Meholathite). 9David *had them seized and*
handed them over to the Gibeonites, who
executed them before the Eternal One
on the mountain. All seven of them died
together, *in the spring of the year* during
the first days of the barley harvest.

10Rizpah, Aiah's daughter, spread out
sackcloth on a rock *to make a place to
sit;* and from the time her sons died until
rain fell *in late autumn,* she refused to let
the birds or wild animals desecrate the
bodies. 11When David heard what Saul's
concubine Rizpah had done, 12he went
and gathered the bones of Saul and Jona-
than (which the people of Jabesh-gilead
had stolen from the place where they were
hanged in the Philistine public square in
Beth-shan on the day the Philistines killed
Saul on Gilboa). 13He took the bones of
Saul and Jonathan his son and gathered
the bones of those who had been impaled
in Gibeon. 14He had Saul and Jonathan
buried in the tomb of their father Kish,
in Zela in the land of Benjamin. All that
David commanded was done; and after-
ward, God answered the prayers *of the
people of Israel* for the land.

15Philistia and Israel were at war
again, and David and his soldiers fought
them *long and hard* until at last he grew
weary. 16Then Ishbi-benob (who was a
descendant of Raphah) *announced that
he* had come to kill David. He carried a
bronze spear, *the head of* which weighed
nearly 10 pounds, and he carried a new
sword. 17But Abishai, Zeruiah's son, came
to David's aid. He attacked and killed this
Philistine.

David's Men *(to David)***:** You can't go
out to fight with us any longer. If you
are killed, then the lamp of Israel will
go out.

18Later the Israelites fought the Philistines
at Gob; and Sibbecai the Hushathite killed
Saph, another *Philistine warrior* descended
from the giant. 19In another fight at Gob
with the Philistines, Elhanan (son of Jaare-
oregim of Bethlehem), killed *the brother
of* Goliath the Gittite, whose spear shaft
was *as large* as a weaver's beam. 20Then
in a battle at Gath, they fought against
another *famous warrior*. He was a huge
man with 6 fingers on each hand and 6
toes on each foot—24 in all—and he was
also descended from the giant. 21When
he insulted *the people of* Israel, Jonathan
(the son of David's brother Shimei) killed
him. 22All four of these *great warriors* were
descended from the giant of Gath, but all
of them were defeated by the skill of David
and his men.

22 David composed the following
song *of praise* to the Eternal
because He delivered him from
all of his enemies and *especially* from Saul.

► At last the day comes when David has conquered—at least, temporarily—all his enemies, and he marks this day by rejoicing. In the same way that he composed songs to lament Saul's and Jonathan's deaths, David composes a psalm of joy to the Lord who is his strong fortress and his security. He gives God the credit, but he also claims—and rightly, of course, in spite of his occasional transgressions—that he has tried to do what God asked him to do, has tried to keep the ways of God.

David: 2The Eternal is my rock, my
fortress, and my savior;
3He is my True God, my stronghold
in whom I take refuge,
My *strong* shield, my horn that calls
forth rescue,
my tall-walled tower and strong
refuge,
My savior from violence.
4I call on the Eternal, who is worthy to
be praised,
and I have been rescued from my
enemies.
5The waves of death surrounded me;
the torrents of terror tugged at me.

6The sorrows of the grave* tightly
tangled me;
the snares of death met me.
7In my time of need I called upon the
Eternal One;
I called to my True God for help.
He heard my voice from His temple,
and my cry came to His ears.

8Because of His *great* anger,
the earth shook and staggered;
the foundations of the heavens
trembled and quaked.
9Smoke billowed out from His nostrils
and devouring fire from His mouth;
glowing coals flamed from Him.
10He bent the heavens and descended;
darkness is beneath His feet.
11He rode upon a heavenly creature,*
flying;
He soared *swiftly* on the wings of
the wind.
12He placed darkness around Him like a
canopy
and made His home in dark watery
clouds of the sky.
13Out from His brightness,
hailstones and burning coals flared
forth.
14The Eternal thundered in the heavens,
the voice of the Most High
speaking.
15He shot forth His arrows and scattered
the wicked;
He flung forth His lightning and
struck them.
16Then the *deepest* channels of the seas
were revealed;
and the foundations of the world
were uncovered
At Your rebuke, O Eternal One,
at the blast of wind breathed from
Your nostrils.
17He reached down from above me, He
held me;
He pulled me from the raging
waters.
18He rescued me from my strong enemy
and from all those who hated me,
for they would have
overwhelmed me.
19When my enemies came for me on the
day of my destruction,
the Eternal stepped in to
support me.
20He led me out onto a broad plain;
He delivered me because of His
delight in me.
21The Eternal One rewarded me because
I sought righteousness;
He rewarded me because I kept my
hands clean.
22*He rewarded me* because I kept the
ways of the Eternal
and have not walked away from my
True God in wickedness.
23For all His laws were there before me,
and I did not push His statutes away.
24I made myself blameless before Him;
I kept myself from guilt *and shame*.
25That's why the Eternal has rewarded
me for seeking righteousness;
He's rewarded me because He sees I
have remained pure.
26To the good, You show Your goodness;
to the blameless, You prove to be
blameless;
27To the pure, You show Your purity;
to the crooked, You make Yourself
twisted.
28For You rescue weak people,
but the proud You bring low.
29You are the lamp *who lights my way,*
O Eternal One,
the Eternal, who lights up my
darkness.
30With Your help, I can conquer an army;
with Your help, I can vault over
walls.
31God has made an upright way;
the promise of the Eternal rings
true;
He *stands and* shields all who hide
in Him.
32Who is the True God except the
Eternal One?
Who stands like a rock except our
God?
33The True God who circled me with
strength
puts the upright on His way.
34He made me sure-footed as a deer
and placed me high up *and safe*.
35He teaches me to fight
so that my arms can bend a bronze
bow.
36You have given me the shield of Your
salvation,
and Your support has made me
strong.
37You taught me how to walk with care
so my feet would not slip.
38I pursued my enemies and defeated
them
and did not stop until all were
destroyed.

* 22:6 Hebrew, *sheol* * 22:11 Hebrew, *cherub*

39When I eliminated them, they fell
down beneath my feet
so they could not rise again.
40For You equipped me with strength for
battle,
and You made my enemies fall
beneath me.
41You made my enemies turn and run,
and all who hated me, I destroyed.
42They looked *everywhere,* but no one
came to save them;
they asked the Eternal *for help,* but
He did not answer them.
43I beat them until they were as small as
the dust of the earth;
I flung them away and beat them
down like mud in the gutters.
44You delivered me from conflict with the
peoples;
you raised me up to rule over
nations;
people whom I did not know came
to serve me.
45Strangers came to me, cringing *and
afraid*;
as soon as they heard about me,
they obeyed me.
46Strangers had their courage shrivel
before them
and came fearfully *to me* from
behind their high walls.

47The Eternal One is alive! May my Rock
be blessed;
and the True God, the Rock of my
deliverance be exalted,
48The God who avenged me
and tamed the peoples under me,
49Who rescued me from all my foes.
You raised me up above my
enemies;
You saved me from the violent
ones.
50For this, I will praise You, O Eternal
One, among the nations
and sing praises to Your name.*
51He is a tower of salvation for His
king
and shows His loyal love to His
anointed,
to David and his descendants,
continually.*

23 Here are the last words of David, son of Jesse: the words of the one raised up, the anointed one of Jacob's True God, the sweet songwriter of Israel.

David: 2The Spirit of the Eternal speaks
through me;
His voice emerges from my
mouth.
3The God of Israel has talked to me;
and the Rock of Israel said,
"One who rules people with justice
and who leads them in the fear of
God
4Is like the morning light,
the sun rising on a cloudless
morning,
and the shining grasslands brought
up from rain."

5Isn't this how God has raised up my
house?
Because He has made a perpetual
covenant with me,
well-ordered and secure,
Won't He make all things to grow *and
prosper,*
save me, and give me all I desire?
6But the wicked are like thorns *cut off
and* tossed away
that can't be picked up with your
hands;
7No, to touch them, use the iron tip
on the shaft of a spear.
They are burned up on the spot.

► David has been brought up from his position as a lowly shepherd, the youngest son in the household, to the pinnacle of success by his faith in God and his own willingness to follow God. It has been an adventure fraught with danger and intrigue, and marked with loss and heartbreak along the way. David's own failings find themselves reflected—and magnified—in his children. But here is one of the high points of the story of the people of God, united at last under a powerful and beloved king, and victorious against their enemies.

8Here is a list of the warriors who fought for David:

Josheb-basshebeth the Tahchemonite was the most powerful of David's three *most-honored warriors*; he took up his spear* and killed 800 in one battle.

* 22:50 Romans 15:9 * 22:2-51 Psalm 18 * 23:8 Hebrew is very difficult; some read, "Adino the Eznite."

9The next of David's three mighty men was Eleazar, son of Dodo of Ahohi. Eleazar stood with David when they defied the Philistines who had gathered there to fight. The Israelites retreated, 10but Eleazar stood his ground. He killed Philistine soldiers *that day* until his arm grew tired, but he never dropped his sword. The Eternal One gave them a decisive victory that day; and then the people came back, only to pillage the fallen.

11Last of these *top three* was Shammah, son of Agee of Harar. The Philistines gathered at Lehi* where there was a field full of lentils, and the Israelites fled from them. 12But Shammah stood in the center of the field and fought, killing *many* Philistines; and the Eternal gave *His people* a great victory.

13At the beginning of harvest, these *top* three of David's thirty chief warriors joined David at the cave of Adullam. A group of Philistines was camped in the valley of Rephaim, 14David was hiding in his safe place, and the main force of the Philistines was quartered in Bethlehem.

David *(with longing)*: 15I wish someone would bring me some water to drink from the well of Bethlehem by the gate!

16So these three mighty men broke through the *nearby* camp of the Philistines, drew water from the Bethlehem well that was by the gate, and brought it back for David. But he would not drink it; instead he poured it out, *although he was parched with thirst, as a drink offering* to the Eternal One.

David: 17O Eternal God, I have no right to drink this water. It would be like drinking the blood of the men who risked their lives for it!

So he did not drink it. This is the kind of thing the three mighty men did for David.

18*Besides the three highest ranking soldiers,* there was Abishai (Zeruiah's son and the brother of Joab), who was commander of the *elite force of* 30.* With his spear he killed 300 men *in battle* and won honor as the three did. 19Abishai was the most honored of the 30 and became their commander, but he did not become one of the three.

20And there was Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), son of a great man from Kabzeel, who also did great deeds. He struck down two lionhearted heroes of Moab. Benaiah also killed a lion in a pit one snowy day, 21and he killed an Egyptian who was a powerful-looking man. The Egyptian was armed with a spear while Benaiah had only his staff, but he took the spear away from him and killed the Egyptian with his own weapon. 22These were the kinds of feats Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, performed that won him a name equal to the three mighty men *for bravery*. 23He was famous among the 30, but never became one of the three. David made him the captain of his *personal* guard.

24These *are the warriors who* were counted among the 30: Asahel, Joab's brother; Elhanan, son of Dodo of Bethlehem; 25Shammah of Harod; Elika of Harod; 26Helez the Paltite; Ira, son of Ikkesh of Tekoa; 27Abiezer of Anathoth; Mebunnai the Hushathite; 28Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai of Netophah; 29Heleb, son of Baanah of Netophah; Ittai, son of Ribai of Gibeah in Benjamin; 30Benaiah of Pirathon; Hiddai of the waters of Gaash; 31Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth of Barhum; 32Eliahba of Shaalbon; Jashen *the Gimzonite*; Jonathan, son of 33Shammah of Harar; Ahiam, son of Sharar of Harar; 34Eliphelet, son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam, son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; 35Hezro of Carmel; Paarai the Arbite; 36Igal, son of Nathan of Zobah; Bani the Gadite; 37Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai of Beeroth; the armor-bearer of Joab, Zeruiah's son; 38Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; 39Uriah the Hittite—37 men in all *who were counted among the 30*.

24 Once again the Eternal grew angry with Israel; so He used David against them, telling the king to go and count the people of Israel and Judah. 2David spoke to Joab, the commander of his army who was with him.

David: Travel to all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and take a census of the people. I want to know how many there are.

3But Joab cautioned the king.

Joab: May the Eternal God increase the number of your people a hundred times while you are still alive to see it. But why *on earth* would you desire to do this, my king?

* 23:11 Or, "as a troop" * 23:18 1 Chronicles 11:20-21

4But the king's order held, and Joab and
the other leaders of the army left the king's
presence and went out to count the peo-
ple of Israel. 5*To begin,* they went over the
Jordan *River* and camped at Aroer south of
the city that is in the middle of the valley
there. *Then they moved on* toward Gad and
Jazer. 6After that, they traveled to Gilead
and to Tahtim-hodshi; then they trav-
eled on *north* to Dan-jaan, and from Dan
they went west to Sidon 7and then to the
fortified city of Tyre and to all the cities
of the Hivites and Canaanites. Then they
went south to the wilderness of Judah at
Beersheba. 8*At last,* when they had trav-
eled through all the land, they came back
to Jerusalem after 9 months and 20 days.
9Joab reported these *astonishing* numbers
to the king: Israel had 800,000 soldiers and
Judah had 500,000.

10*After he heard this,* David was over-
whelmed with guilt for counting his sub-
jects. He prayed to the Eternal One.

David: I have committed a great wrong
against You. But please, O Eternal One,
take away the guilt I feel, for I have done
a stupid thing.

11When David rose the next morning, he
was met by the prophet Gad, David's seer,
who had received a message from the
Eternal.

Gad: 12-13I am supposed to tell you this:
"The Eternal says, 'I will offer you three
choices. Pick one, and that will be what I
will do to you.'"

Do you want to have seven* years of
famine in the land? Would you rather be
on the run from your enemies for three
months? Or shall a plague rage for three
days through the land? Make a choice,
and tell me what answer to give to the
One who sent me.

David: 14This is horrible! But I would
rather fall by the hand of the Eternal,
because He is merciful, than fall into
human hands.

15So the Eternal One sent a *great* plague
that morning and for three days. It swept
through Israel from Dan *in the far north*
to Beersheba *in the desert south,* killing
70,000 people. 16But when the heavenly
messenger prepared to destroy Jerusalem,
He relented; and He commanded the
heavenly messenger who had brought the
epidemic.

Eternal One: Stop. That is enough.

The heavenly messenger then paused
beside the threshing floor of Araunah the
Jebusite; 17and when David saw him there,
the one striking the people, he spoke to
the Eternal One.

David: Look, I am the one who offended
You, the only one who has done wrong.
What have these *innocent* sheep done?
If someone is going to be punished for
what I did, it should be me and my fam-
ily. *Punish us.*

18Later that day, the prophet Gad
approached David.

Gad: Go, and build an altar to the Eternal
on the threshing floor of Araunah the
Jebusite.

19So David went to perform this task
the Eternal had given him through Gad.
20Araunah saw the king and his men com-
ing toward him, so he went out *into the
road* and bowed low before him in the dust.

Araunah: 21Why has my lord, the king,
come to see your servant?

David: I have come to buy your threshing
floor. We must build an altar to the Eter-
nal there so that this epidemic will be
lifted from the people.

Araunah: 22My lord and king, take and
offer what seems right. Here are the oxen
you need to make the burnt offering.
Take the threshing sledges and the yokes
of the oxen for firewood. 23I will give you
all these things, my king. May the Eter-
nal One your God look on your offering
with favor.

David: 24No, I will buy these things from
you. *Name your price.* I will not make
an offering to the Eternal One, my True
God, that has cost me nothing.

25David bought the threshing floor and the
oxen for 20 ounces of silver. He built an
altar there to the Eternal and made burnt
and peace offerings on it. The Eternal One
heard David's prayers for the land and
lifted the plague from Israel.

* 24:12-13 Greek manuscripts read, "three."

1 KINGS

History of the kings of Israel and Judah, from Solomon through Ahab

Compiled by Jewish scribes in exile

Faced with a future of exile, sixth-century Jewish scribes sat down and meticulously compiled all the stories of the United and Divided Monarchies of Israel, sometimes in painful detail, before Israel's interactions with God could be forgotten. The result of this collaboration is a comprehensive history chronicling about 400 years, which is divided into four books: 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.

Although Jewish tradition attributes the writing of Kings to Jeremiah the prophet, most likely the final version is the product of several scribes using three things: court records, source books, and oral traditions. Together these give details about mundane things (such as how much gold was used in the temple) and colorful stories that bring these people to life. Israel has a rich oral history; stories are carefully passed down from parents to children verbally. We may be tempted to doubt the authenticity of such stories, assuming they are embellished as they pass from generation to generation, but archaeology has corroborated much of the information. Buildings still stand where the Bible says they are; cities were destroyed when and how the Bible says they were; empires rose and fell as the Bible says they did. In addition to physical evidence of the stories' authenticity, other cultures have left writings describing their wars with Israel, giving the opponent's perspective, of course. Samuel and Kings are not just the history of a nation, but are also a window into the complex political, religious, and social situations of the ancient Near East.

Both volumes of Kings focus mostly on the slow decline of Israel. While Saul is recognized as Israel's first king, it was David who first ruled all of the tribes and clans of the Hebrews. Picking up with the death of King David, 1 Kings describes the construction of the glorious temple and palace in Jerusalem, the division of Israel into two kingdoms (Northern and Southern or Israel and Judah), the sometimes-apostasy sometimes-devotion of the Israelites themselves, and the work of God through His own actions and His prophets. The many events prove one thing: the Lord is in control of everything. He prospers Israel while David and Solomon are kings, and He punishes the Israelites when they stray from Him. Although they are fully aware of His power and His desire for faithful worship, the Israelites betray Him again and again. It may be easy to judge them; but in their struggles to follow God's laws, we can see our own struggles.

1 King David was now an old man with an epic lifetime behind him. *Lying in his bed,* he became chilled; so his servants tried to warm him with blankets. It did no good—*the years were catching up with this great king.*

Servants *(to David)*: [2]Allow us to find a *beautiful,* young woman for you, our lord and king. She can be a nurse to you and keep you warm by lying next to you.

[3]So David's servants looked throughout Israel for a beautiful, young woman. *During their search,* they found a Shunammite girl named Abishag, and they escorted her to the king. [4]Abishag possessed stunning beauty. She served the king, but the king did not have intercourse with her.

[5]Adonijah, *David and* Haggith's son, *was full of conceit and* praised himself *incessantly*.

Adonijah: I am going to be *the next* king!

Adonijah then arranged chariots with horsemen and also 50 men to run in front of his chariots.

[6]Adonijah's father, *David,* never questioned his actions. Adonijah was also a handsome man who was born after Absalom. [7]He discussed things with Joab (Zeruiah's son *and Adonijah's cousin*) and Abiathar the priest, and they became his coconspirators. [8]But Zadok the priest, Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the fierce and loyal men who were devoted to David, were against Adonijah.

Adonijah is so emboldened by desire that he has a sacrificial gathering.

[9]He sacrificed sheep, oxen, and cattle *that had been prepared for slaughter*. He did this near the stone of Zoheleth, which is next to En-rogel. Adonijah sent out invitations to all of his brothers, sons of the king, and also to all the men in Judah, who were all in service of the king. [10]Adonijah did not send an invitation to Nathan the prophet, to Benaiah, to any of the fierce and loyal men *devoted to David,* or to his brother Solomon.

Nathan *(to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother)*: [11]Do you not know the news? Adonijah (Haggith's son) is now king, and David our lord does not know it yet. [12]Come quickly, and let me help save your life and the life of your son, Solomon.

Adonijah is certain to kill anyone who challenges his throne, and Solomon is his greatest threat since King David selected him as the successor instead.

[13]Go this very instant to King David, and tell him, "My dear king and lord, did you not swear to me, your maidservant, 'Your son, Solomon, will certainly be king after me. My throne will belong to him'? If so, then tell me why Adonijah is now king."

[14]While you are still conversing with the king in his chambers, I will come in and confirm everything you have told him.

[15]Bathsheba rushed to the king's chambers, where an elderly David was being served by his Shunammite *nurse,* Abishag. [16]Bathsheba bowed before the king and put her face to the floor.

King David: What is it you want?

Bathsheba: [17]My lord, in the name of your God, the Eternal, you made this promise to me, your servant: "Your son, Solomon, will certainly be king after me. My throne will belong to him." [18]But what's this? Adonijah is now king, and you are completely unaware of it. [19]Adonijah has sacrificed many sheep, oxen, and cattle that were prepared for slaughter. He sent invitations to all of the king's sons and to Abiathar the priest and to Joab the commander of the military; but he did not send an invitation to Solomon, who is your *loyal* servant. [20]My lord the king, everyone in Israel is looking to you and waiting for your word. Who will rule from the throne after you? [21]If you do not give instruction before you *leave this world to* sleep with your fathers, then my son, Solomon, and I will be guilty *before Adonijah.*

[22]While Bathsheba was still talking to the king, Nathan the prophet came into the room.

Servants *(to the king)*: [23]Nathan the prophet is here.

When Nathan entered the king's chambers, he humbled himself to the ground

before the king and put his face to the floor.

Nathan: 24My king, did you give the instruction, "Adonijah is to be the next king. My throne will belong to him *after I am gone*"? 25He has hosted a sacrificial gathering today. He sacrificed many sheep, oxen, and cattle that were prepared for slaughter. He sent invitations to all of the king's sons and all the military leaders and to Abiathar the priest, and they are all eating and drinking with him *this very moment*. They are even chanting, "May King Adonijah have a long life!" 26I, your servant, was not invited, nor was Zadok the priest, Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), or your *loyal* servant, Solomon. 27Did you, my lord and king, give this instruction and not tell *all of* us, your *devoted* servants, who would receive your throne after you *are gone*?

King David: 28Tell Bathsheba to come here.

So Bathsheba entered the king's chambers and stood in front of him.

King David *(swearing)***:** 29As certain as the life of the Eternal One, the One who rescued me from all trouble, 30today I will uphold what I promised to you by the Eternal, the God of Israel, when I said, "Your son, Solomon, will reign as king after me. He will inherit my throne."

31Bathsheba *was overwhelmed with gratefulness, and she* bowed down before King David, putting her face to the floor.

Bathsheba: May you live forever, my lord, King David.

King David: 32Tell Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah (Jehoiada's son) to come here.

They entered the king's chambers.

King David: 33Lead my servants and my son, Solomon, down to Gihon. Give Solomon one of my own mules to ride.
34Zadok and Nathan, *listen*. When you arrive at Gihon, anoint Solomon as Israel's king. Sound the trumpet, and proclaim, "May King Solomon have a long life!" 35Then follow after him, for he will then sit on my throne and replace me as king. I have named him ruler over Israel and Judah *even though he is not my oldest son*.

Benaiah *(Jehoiada's son)***:** 36So be it! May the Eternal One, the True God of my lord and king, agree *and bless Solomon*. 37Just as the Eternal One has been *a friend* to my lord, King David, may He be so to Solomon. May He make Solomon's reign even greater than David's!

38So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), *and David's mercenary guards*—the Cherethites and the Pelethites—journeyed together to Gihon; and Solomon rode on the back of one of David's mules.
39Zadok the priest anointed Solomon with the horn of oil from the congregation tent. Then the trumpet was sounded, and everyone proclaimed, "May King Solomon have a long life!" 40Everyone then followed after Solomon. They played their wind instruments and joyfully celebrated until the sound shook the earth.
41As they were finishing their feast, Adonijah and all those who were attending his gathering heard the celebration *of Solomon's followers*. Joab heard the trumpet.

Joab: What is the meaning *of this jamboree*? Why does the city celebrate?

42While he was questioning *the celebration,* Jonathan (son of Abiathar the priest) arrived.

Adonijah *(welcoming Jonathan)***:** Please come join us. *Make yourself at home.* You are a good man; surely you bring us good news.

Jonathan: 43You are wrong! Our lord, King David, has appointed Solomon as king. 44By David's instruction, Solomon is with Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), the Cherethites, and the Pelethites. Furthermore, the king gave Solomon a mule to ride. 45When they got to Gihon, Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon as the *new* king. They are celebrating now, and that is the reason for the city's festivities you are hearing; 46Solomon already sits on the throne of the kingdom. 47All the servants of the king went to our lord, King David, to congratulate him: "Bless you! May your God make Solomon's reign, his name, and his throne even greater than yours!"

Then the king bowed down *to Solomon* on his bed.

Although King David is too sick to leave his bed, he blesses Solomon's coronation by putting his face toward the floor.

King David: [48]Praise be to the Eternal One, Israel's God! He has allowed me to live long enough to see the day when another sits on my throne.

[49]All those attending Adonijah's gathering were terrified *by this news*. They all gathered their things and departed. [50]Even Adonijah was *completely* terrified of Solomon. He stood up and rushed to the altar *seeking sanctuary*. He grabbed hold of the horns *expecting Solomon to spare his life, as was the custom.*

► Inside the congregation tent, priests make daily sacrifices to the Lord on the great horned altar. By touching the bloodstained horns of the altar, an innocent man can immediately grab God's attention and be granted divine absolution. That absolution then has to come from the court as well, since no man can overrule God. It is Adonijah's plan to save himself when he grabs the horns, but he is not an innocent man. Because Adonijah abuses this custom, Solomon is not required to forgive his brother just because he is at the altar.

[51]Solomon received the news.

Messenger: Adonijah is terrified of King Solomon. He is gripping the horns of the altar and pleading, "Today I beg King Solomon to promise me, his servant *Adonijah,* that he will not execute me."

Solomon: [52]If Adonijah will be a man of integrity and honor, then not a single hair on his head will be harmed. But if he is an evil man, then he shall die.

[53]King Solomon called *for Adonijah,* and he was led down from the altar. Adonijah entered the king's presence and fell down before him, putting his face to the floor.

Solomon *(to Adonijah)***:** *Leave me, and* return to your house.

2 David was close to dying, so he gave direction to his son, Solomon.

King David: [2]I am about to go the way all earthly things go. Be strong; demonstrate your maturity. [3]Honor the laws of the Eternal your God, and live by His truth. Be faithful to His laws, commands, judgments, and precepts—the ones written for us in the instructions of Moses. If you follow this path, you will be successful in everything you do no matter where you are, [4]for the Eternal will be faithful to His promise to me *throughout your life*. He promised me, "For as long as your sons are devoted to Me and live by My truth and embrace it with all their being, your offspring will always sit upon Israel's throne."*

[5]You, too, remember what trouble Joab (Zeruiah's son) sent toward me—how he killed the armies of Israel's two commanders, Abner (Ner's son) and Amasa (Jether's son), *when I was close to striking a treaty with them*. He brought the horror of war during a time of peace. He covered his belt and sandals with blood, *so his offspring and family are judged*. [6]Act wisely, and *take revenge on Joab*. Do not allow a *single* gray hair on his head to descend into the grave peacefully. [7]Be loving toward the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite. Invite them to feast at your table because they were good friends to me when I ran from your brother, Absalom.* [8]There is also Shimei (Gera's son) the Benjaminite of Bahurim. He cursed me with terrible words when I went to Mahanaim, but when we met again at the Jordan *River,* I made him a promise in the sight of the Eternal. I told him, "I am not going to kill you."* [9]*However your actions are not bound by my oath to him;* you must not let him go without retribution. You are wise, and you will know *in your heart* exactly what punishment you should give him. You will bloody every gray hair on his head before sending him down to the grave.

[10]After *he spoke these words to his son, Solomon,* David *left this world to* sleep with

* 2:4 2 Samuel 7:13, 25 * 2:7 2 Samuel 19:32 * 2:8 2 Samuel 19:23

his fathers. His body was laid to rest in the city of David. 11David ruled Israel 40 years. He ruled in Hebron 7 years and in Jerusalem 33 years. 12Solomon inherited David's throne, and his kingdom was strong and healthy.

13Adonijah (Haggith's son) approached Bathsheba (Solomon's mother).

Bathsheba: Do you come *to visit me* in peace?

Adonijah: Yes. 14I have something to tell you.

Bathsheba: Go on.

Adonijah: 15You are aware that all the kingdom was in my possession and that everyone in Israel believed I was going to be king; but instead, my brother Solomon has received the kingdom from the Eternal One. 16I have one thing to ask you, and I beg you not to ignore it.

Bathsheba: Go on.

Adonijah: 17Please, *I ask that you* go to King Solomon, for he *adores you and* will not ignore your request. Ask him to give me Abishag the Shunammite, *the young woman who nursed my father before he died*. I want her as my wife.

Bathsheba: 18All right. I will speak to the king on your behalf.

19Bathsheba approached King Solomon about Adonijah's request. *When she entered the king's presence,* he stood up and bowed to her, then sat on his throne. He arranged for a throne to be brought for his mother, so she sat to the right of him *in a place of honor and authority*.

Bathsheba: 20I have something to ask of you, and please do not deny me.

Solomon: Go on and ask it, Mother. Of course I will not deny you.

Bathsheba: 21Give Abishag the Shunammite to your brother, Adonijah, so that she can be his wife.

Solomon: 22Why do you wish Abishag the Shunammite to be Adonijah's wife? While you're at it, why don't you ask me to hand the *entire* kingdom over to Adonijah? He is the eldest son. *I might as well hand it over* to him, Abiathar the priest, and Joab (Zeruiah's son)!

► Adonijah already has a claim to the throne, since he is the next in line of David's sons. If he takes one of his father's intimate acquaintances as a wife, then his claim to succeed David will be strengthened.

Solomon *(vowing by the Eternal)***:** 23God do so to me and worse if Adonijah has not condemned himself by this request! 24As certain as the life of the Eternal One, who has given me the inheritance of my father David's throne and given me the kingdom and family He promised, Adonijah will certainly be executed today.

25King Solomon dispatched Benaiah (Jehoiada's son), who met up with Adonijah and executed him.

Solomon *(to Abiathar the priest)***:** 26Return to your own fields in Anathoth. You deserve the penalty of death, but I will not execute you now because you transported the sacred chest of the Eternal before *King* David, my father, and because you suffered all the same troubles and burdens my father suffered.

27Solomon stripped Abiathar of his priesthood to the Eternal One. He did this so that the Eternal's word in Shiloh would be honored: the house of Eli *would not be able to atone for their wickedness through sacrifices and offerings.**

28News of all this arrived to Joab, who had been a follower of Adonijah but not of Absalom. Joab rushed to the altar in the tent of the Eternal and gripped the horns, *hoping for sanctuary as Adonijah had.* 29King Solomon received word that Joab had rushed to the tent of the Eternal and that he was at the altar *that very moment.* Solomon again dispatched Benaiah (Jehoiada's son) with the instructions, "Execute Joab."

30Benaiah arrived at the tent of the Eternal, *but he could not enter to kill Joab.*

* 2:27 1 Samuel 2:30-33

Benaiah *(calling out to Joab)*: It is the king's command that you come out *at once*.

Joab: No. *If you are going to kill me,* then kill me here *at the altar*.

Benaiah went back to the king and relayed his conversation with Joab. *Joab did not expect Solomon to violate the rules of sanctuary*.

Solomon: 31Do as he wishes. Kill him *at the altar,* then bury him. This will cleanse me and my father's house from *all blame concerning* the blood Joab has recklessly spilled. 32The Eternal will do to him that which he did to others, for he murdered two men with his sword who were more honorable and better than he was. He kept this secret from my father. He killed Abner (Ner's son) who was the leader of Israel's army and also Amasa (Jether's son) who was the leader of Judah's army.* 33Their blood will come back to haunt Joab and all his progeny forever. But there will be peace from the Eternal in the house of David and on his throne forever.

34Benaiah (Jehoiada's son) killed Joab and buried him on his own land in the wilderness.

35King Solomon then designated Benaiah (Jehoiada's son) to lead the army in Joab's stead, and the king designated Zadok the priest to take on Abiathar's responsibilities.

36The king summoned Shimei, *intending to fulfill his promise to David and subdue this political enemy*.

Solomon *(to Shimei)*: Go now, and build yourself a house in Jerusalem. You are to stay there *indefinitely.* Do not leave for any reason. 37*You would be wise to heed my warning* because, *mark my words,* whenever you cross the Kidron stream *toward your ancestral home,* you will meet your death. And it will be your own fault.

Shimei: 38Thank you for the good advice, my lord. I am your servant; and I will do exactly as you, my king, have instructed me to do.

Shimei *departed from the king and* lived in Jerusalem for a very long time.

39After three years, two of Shimei's servants fled *west to their home in Philistia* to find Achish (son of Maacah, Gath's king). They sent word to Shimei: "We, your servants, are in Gath." 40Shimei prepared his donkey and traveled to Gath to find Achish with hopes of finding his servants. Shimei found his servants and took them away from Gath.

► Shimei, a known traitor, is allowed to live as long as he doesn't leave Jerusalem and return home to Benjamin where he can muster an army. After years of supposed obedience, that same traitor tests his limits by running in the opposite direction of Benjamin to visit Philistia, Israel's greatest enemy at the time. Even if Solomon hadn't promised David that he would take revenge on Shimei, the man gives Solomon ample reason himself. First and foremost, he breaks his oath to Solomon and God by leaving Jerusalem; second, he has the opportunity to threaten Solomon's new reign by fraternizing with Achish, the king whom David abandoned the last time Israel and Philistia fought. He is guilty by both deed and association.

41Solomon received word that Shimei had traveled from Jerusalem to Gath and was back in Jerusalem. 42King Solomon had Shimei brought to him and questioned him.

Solomon: Do you not remember the warning I gave you? Did you not swear an oath to me in the name of the Eternal that you would not leave *Jerusalem* or else you would most certainly die? Were you not glad at my warning? 43So why have you broken your promise to the Eternal One? Why did you go against *my warning and* my instruction?

44You are fully aware of the evil inside your heart, the evil you did to my father, David. The Eternal One is sending all the evil you have done *to others* back upon you. 45But I, King Solomon, will be honored by the Lord, and David's throne will stand in His presence forever.

* 2:32 2 Samuel 3:30; 20:10

46King Solomon instructed Benaiah
(Jehoiada's son) to execute Shimei, and
Benaiah did *what Solomon asked him to do.*

And that is how the kingdom was
secured under Solomon's rule.

3 Solomon then arranged a marriage
alliance with Pharaoh, Egypt's king.
He married Pharaoh's daughter and
brought her to the city of David. *He kept
her there* while he constructed his own
house and the Eternal One's temple and
completed the wall surrounding Jerusa-
lem. 2However the people were still offer-
ing sacrifices at the high places because a
temple had not been constructed for the
Eternal until then.

3Solomon's heart belonged to the
Eternal. Solomon abided by the same
laws as his father, David. The only differ-
ence was that Solomon offered sacrifices
and incense at the high places. 4Solomon
went to Gibeon—the great high place—
and presented 1,000 burnt offerings at the
altar.

► Before Israel united as one nation under David, the countryside was inhabited by people who worship other gods. As Solomon prepares to build the temple and centralize worship of the one God—the Lord—in one place—Jerusalem—he finds it necessary to visit the former shrines of local gods and convert them to shrines to God. While this may have worked in the short term by introducing the people outside of Jerusalem to the worship practices of the Eternal, those shrines, called "high places," will be the undoing of the entire country. By allowing people to worship at local shrines instead of only in Jerusalem, where the priests meticulously follow God's laws, Solomon and future kings are opening the door to the blending of God worship and pagan worship.

5The Eternal revealed Himself to Solomon
in a dream while he was still in Gibeon.

Eternal One: Tell me, what is your request
of Me?

Solomon: 6You have already revealed
Your loyal love to my father, David, for
he lived by Your truth and righteousness
and honor *during the days of his life.* You
have continued to show this loyal love to
him by giving him a son who now reigns
upon his throne. 7Eternal One, my God,
You have allowed me to serve as my
father David served, but I am still young
and inexperienced. I don't know much
about anything, 8yet I am supposed to
lead Your chosen people who are innu-
merable and even uncountable. 9Please
give Your servant a listening heart for
judging Your people and for knowing
the difference between what is good and
what is evil. Who is capable of judging
Your *chosen* ones, a great people?

10The Lord was delighted by Solomon's
request.

Eternal One: 11Since you have asked
for wisdom and not for an extended
lifetime or for personal wealth or for
the annihilation of your enemies, since
you have instead asked for the ability
to understand justice, 12I will honor
your request. I have planted the deepest
human wisdom into your heart. There
has never been nor will there ever be a
man like you.

13I have also given you the things for
which you have not asked—wealth and
an honorable reputation. There will be
no other kings like you for as long as
you live. 14If you live a life devoted to
Me, if you remain loyal to My laws and
commands just as your father David did,
then I will add days to your life.

15Solomon woke up from his dream. He
then returned to Jerusalem and visited the
Eternal's covenant chest and presented
burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then
he prepared a great feast for all those who
were in his service.

16Two prostitutes visited Solomon
asking for a judgment.

First Woman *(indicating the other)***:** 17My
lord, she and I live under the same roof.
She was in the house when my child was
born. 18Three days after my child was
born, she had her own child. She and I
were alone in the house *with our new-
borns.* 19One night her baby died because
she lay on it during her sleep. 20She woke
up, and *after seeing her dead baby,* she
stole my baby out of my arms while I

was sleeping and placed her dead baby
in my arms. 21When I woke up the next
morning to feed my son, I found him
dead. When I took a closer look at him,
I saw that it was not the same child who
came from my womb.

Second Woman: 22She lies! My son is
alive, and her son is dead!

First Woman: She lies! Her son is dead,
and my son is alive!

Solomon: 23This woman says, "My son is
alive, and your son is dead." The other
woman says, "My son is alive, and your
son is dead." 24Bring me a sword.
25(receiving a sword) Cut the living
child in half, and give each woman one
of the halves.

26The woman who truly was the mother of the living child was overcome with compassion and pleaded with the king.

First Woman: Please *don't cut the child in half!* Just give the whole child to her! Please do not kill him!

Second Woman: *Nonsense!* The child will belong to neither one of us! Cut him in half!

Solomon: 27The living child belongs to the first woman. Give the boy to her, and do not harm him. She is the true mother.

28When the news of the king's wise judgment spread throughout Israel, they all feared him. *They respected him* because they perceived God's wisdom in his just judgment.

4 King Solomon reigned over Israel, *and these are the men who helped him do so.* 2The following were his officers and administrators: The priest was Azariah (Zadok's son); 3the secretaries were Elihoreph and Ahijah (Shisha's sons); the recorder was Jehoshaphat (Ahilud's son); 4the commander of the army was Benaiah (Jehoiada's son); the priests were Zadok and Abiathar; 5the commander of all the administrators was Azariah (Nathan's son); the king's confidant and priest was Zabud (Nathan's son); 6the household manager was Ahishar; the commander of the compulsory labor force was Adoniram (Abda's son).

7Solomon commissioned 12 administrators over the entire community of Israel. They each gave provisions for the king and his house. Each administrator provided supplies for one month out of every year. 8The following were his administrators: Ben-hur from the hills of Ephraim; 9Ben-deker from Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-shemesh, and Elonbeth-hanan; 10Ben-hesed from Arubboth (he possessed Socoh and all of Hepher); 11Ben-abinadab from the height of Dor (he was married to Taphath, Solomon's daughter); 12Baana (Ahilud's son) from Taanach, Megiddo, and Beth-shean, which is next to Zarethan below Jezreel (from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah) all the way to the far end of Jokmeam; 13Ben-geber (Manasseh's son) from Ramoth-gilead, which is the whole of all the towns of Jair, the towns in Gilead, the sector of Argob in Bashan, and 60 large cities which were fortified by walls and bronze bars; 14Ahinadab (Iddo's son) from Mahanaim; 15Ahimaaz from Naphtali (Ahimaaz was married to Basemath, Solomon's daughter); 16Baana (Hushai's son) from Asher and Bealoth; 17Jehoshaphat (Paruah's son) from Issachar; 18Shimei (Ela's son) from Benjamin; 19and finally Geber (Uri's son) from Gilead (the land of Sihon the Amorite king, and the land of Og, Bashan's king). Geber was the only administrator who lived in the country.

20*The people of* Judah and Israel were innumerable, like the grains of sand on the beach. They ate and drank and celebrated.

21Solomon reigned over all the countries from the *Euphrates* River to Philistia and to Egypt's border. These countries honored Solomon with gifts and remained in Solomon's service for his entire life. 22Solomon's provisions *for his house* for one day were just over 195 bushels of the best flour and about 391 bushels of meal, 2310 fattened oxen, 20 pastured oxen, 100 sheep, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened birds.

24Solomon reigned over all places and people and kings to the west of the *Euphrates* River, from Tiphsah all the way to Gaza *on the Mediterranean.* Solomon's reign had peace on all sides: 25Judah and Israel lived in peace from Dan to Beersheba, with each man under his vine and beneath his fig tree, for Solomon's entire life.

26Solomon owned 40,000* horse stalls for the chariot horses, and he had 12,000

* 4:26 Some Greek manuscripts read, "4,000."

horsemen *under his command.* [27]The *12* administrators made provisions for King Solomon and all who sat at King's Solomon's table. Each *agent was responsible* for one month *out of the year,* and not one of them ever did an insufficient job. [28]They also provided barley and straw for the *chariot* horses and war horses in their specified stalls *throughout the kingdom.* Each agent fulfilled his responsibilities *for his appointed month.*

[29]God gave Solomon wisdom and discernment: his mind was as expansive as the sands of the beach; [30]his wisdom was far beyond that of the *wise* men of the East and of Egypt. [31]He was the wisest of any other man. *He was even wiser* than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, and Calcol and Darda (Mahol's sons). Solomon was immensely famous in all the nearby countries. [32]He also wrote 3,000 proverbs and composed 1,005 songs. [33]He reflected upon trees, from Lebanon's cedars to the hyssop that blankets the walls. He reflected upon animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. [34]People came from every corner of the earth—sent by kings who were fascinated by Solomon's wise reputation—to listen to Solomon's wisdom.

5 News of Solomon's succession of David reached the ears of Hiram, king of Tyre. Because Hiram was a friend of David,* he sent a group of his servants to visit Solomon. [2]Solomon gave a message *to Hiram's servants,* which they took back to Hiram.

Solomon's Message: [3]You remember that David did not have the opportunity to construct a temple honoring the reputation of the Eternal his God, because of *my father's involvement* in the warfare which plagued him until the Eternal suppressed all of his enemies under his feet. [4]But the Eternal One my God now grants me rest everywhere. We are not plagued by enemies or troubles. [5]Therefore, I am going to construct a temple for the name of the Eternal my God. It will be just as He told David, my father: "Your son, whom I will put upon your throne after you are gone, will construct a temple honoring Me."* [6]So tell your people to start cutting down Lebanon's cedars for my project. My servants will work alongside your servants, and I will pay you whatever you ask for your servants' work. It is no secret that the best timber cutters around are the Sidonians *who are at your command.*

[7]When Hiram received this message from Solomon, he celebrated.

Hiram: Blessed is the Eternal today! *Praise Him* for giving David *Solomon,* the wise son who rules a great people!

[8](replying to Solomon) I have received your message, and I will do exactly as you have asked. *We will start the timberwork* with the cedars and cypress *immediately.* [9]Those who serve me will transport them from Lebanon to the sea. I will make rafts out of the timber and float the logs to the place of your choosing. There I will have them break apart *the rafts,* and you can carry the logs to wherever it is that you want them. Then all I ask is that you feed my house *and my servants.*

[10]Hiram sent all the cedar and cypress trees Solomon had requested. [11]In return, Solomon presented Hiram with food for his house *and servants*: 130,000 bushels of wheat and 1,200 gallons of purified oil. Solomon gave this same amount to Hiram every year.

[12]The Eternal One upheld His promise to Solomon and granted him much wisdom. Hiram and Solomon were at peace with each other, and they entered into a covenant.

[13]King Solomon assembled forced laborers from all over Israel—30,000 men in all. [14]He sent them to Lebanon in cycles—10,000 men per month. They stayed in Lebanon for an entire month, then they were able to return home for two months. Adoniram was the head administrator of the workers.

[15]Solomon enlisted 70,000 men to transport *the materials* and 80,000 stonecutters *to quarry, carve, and dress stone* from the mountains. [16]These numbers do not include Solomon's 3,300* agents who were head administrators over the project and the workers. [17]The king gave instructions, and the workers laid the giant, expensive stones to form the foundation of the temple. [18]Both Solomon's construction workers and Hiram's skilled workers, along with the Gebalites, cut the materials to make the timber and stones ready for the temple.

* 5:1 2 Samuel 5:11 * 5:5 2 Samuel 7:13 * 5:16 2 Chronicles 2:18, "3,600"

6 During the second month called Ziv in the 4th year of Solomon's reign, 480 years after the Israelites had departed from Egypt, Solomon began constructing the Eternal's temple.

► The timing of the construction of the temple reveals the incredible importance of this event. First, by connecting its construction to the exodus, the writer recognizes this as the culminating event of Israel's journey from slavery to an autonomous, God-led nation. God is completing His promise to give Israel a nation. Second, by beginning construction in the spring, Solomon uses his resources for a peaceful endeavor instead of war. Kings have always attacked in the spring because of the favorable weather, so Solomon is putting his devotion to God over his desire for more power. This choice of peace over war fits with Solomon's name, which means "peace," and characterizes his reign.

2The Eternal's temple was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. 3The front porch of the temple was 30 feet long (the same measurement as the width) and 15 feet deep at the front. 4Solomon made windows that had artistic frames. 5-6He built the structure surrounding the central sanctuary of the temple that supported the sanctuary's walls *and served as storehouses*. The lower level *of the structure* was 7½ feet wide, the middle level was 9 feet wide, and the top level was 10½ feet wide. He constructed coffers in the temple so that the ceiling beams would not intersect with the temple walls.

7The temple was constructed out of rocks that had been finished *and polished* at the quarry. Not a single hammer, hatchet, or other iron tool was heard inside the temple during construction. 8The entrance into the lowest* level was on the right side of the temple. From there a winding staircase led up to the middle level, and from there, to the top level.

9Solomon completed the temple, and he roofed it with beams and cedar boards. 10He constructed the structure on the outside of the temple as well. Each level was 7½ feet high and was connected to the temple by cedar beams.

11The voice of the Eternal One spoke to Solomon.

Eternal One: 12Regarding the temple which you are building: if you live by My laws and enforce My ways, if you honor My instructions by keeping them, then I will honor the promise I made to your father, David, *and establish that promise with you.* 13I will live among the Israelites, and I will not abandon *the community of* Israel, My people.

14Solomon built the temple, and he completed the task. 15He covered the inner walls with cedar boards, overlaying the *stone* inner walls with wood from the floor to the ceiling, and he laid the floor with cypress boards. 16He covered 30 feet of the back end of the temple with cedar boards that reached from the floor to the ceiling. He made this inner place the most holy sanctuary. 17The part of the temple in front of the inner sanctuary was 60 feet long. 18The cedar paneling inside of the temple was carved with gourds and flowers. There was no stone showing *between the wood panels*. Only the cedar boards could be seen.

19Solomon then prepared the inner sanctuary in the temple specifically to hold the Eternal's covenant chest. 20This inner sanctuary was 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 30 feet high. The walls were gilded, and the altar was paneled with cedar. 21Solomon covered the inside of the temple with the purest gold. He stretched gold chains in front of the inner sanctuary and covered it in gold. 22He gilded the entire temple as the finishing touch *to his work*. The altar beside the inner sanctuary was covered with gold as well.

23Solomon made two 15-foot-high winged creatures out of olive wood, and these *guarded* the inner sanctuary. 24Each wing of one creature was 7½ feet long. The entire wingspan was 15 feet. 25-26The other creature had the same measurements and shape: *a wingspan* 15 feet *across* and 15 feet high. 27Solomon set up the creatures inside the inner sanctuary. Both of their wings were stretched out so that one creature's *left* wing reached all the way to one wall, and the other creature's *right*

* 6:8 Hebrew manuscripts read, "middle."

wing reached all the way to the other wall. Their other wings touched each other at the very center of the temple. 28Solomon gilded both creatures.

► Composed of the parts of various animals, these monstrous winged creatures, called *cherubim* in Hebrew, serve several purposes in the Bible. They are symbols of divine power, presence, and mobility. They first appear in Genesis, guarding the entrance to Eden (3:24); as part of the throne of mercy, they are God's footstool in the congregation tent and the temple, and God occasionally takes a ride on them (2 Samuel 22:11; Psalm 18:10; Ezekiel 1). Wherever their images appear—on walls, in tapestries, on the covenant chest—they signify God's presence and protection.

29He decorated the temple walls with carvings of the winged guardian creatures, palm trees, and flowers. He did this for both the inner *sanctuary* and outer *rooms*. 30He covered the temple floor with gold as well—both the inner sanctuary and outer *rooms*.

31He crafted olive wood doors, a lintel, and five-sided doorposts for the entryway into the inner sanctuary. 32He crafted two olive wood doors, and he decorated them with engravings of winged guardian creatures, palm trees, and flowers. He also gilded the doors, winged creatures, and palm trees.

33He crafted olive wood doorposts for the entryway into the square central hall. 34He also made two cypress doors *for the entryway*. Two of the leaves on one of the doors rotated on an axle, and two leaves of the other door also rotated on an axle. 35He carved winged guardian creatures, palm trees, and flowers into them; and he gilded the doors and engravings carefully. 36He constructed the interior court with three rows of cut stones and one row of cedar boards.

37The foundation of the Eternal's temple was completed during the *spring of the* fourth year *of Solomon's reign,* in the month of Ziv. 38The temple was finally completed as planned in all its fine details during the autumn of the eleventh year, in the eighth month of Bul. It took seven years in all to complete construction.

7 It took Solomon 13 years to complete his own house. 2He constructed the house of the forest of Lebanon, and it was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was built on top of cedar beams supported by 4 rows of cedar columns. 3The space above the side rooms (which were on top of the 45 columns, 15 columns in each row) was paneled with cedar. 4There were 3 rows of window frames directly opposite each other—3 on each side. 5The doorways and doorposts were square, and the openings were directly opposite each other: 3 on each side.

6Solomon then constructed the hall of pillars. It was 75 feet long and 45 feet wide. There was a porch with pillars and a canopy as an entryway before them. 7Then he made the hall for the throne. This is where he would give judgment; *thus it was called* the hall of judgment. The entire room was paneled from floor to floor* with cedar.

8His own residence, the interior court behind the hall *of judgment,* was made the same way. For his wife, Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon constructed another house like the hall *of judgment*. 9They were all decorated inside and out, top to bottom, with costly stones, *rare* rocks perfectly cut with saws. 10The foundation *of the house* was made out of *rare,* expensive stones. There were some gigantic stones, 12 and 15 feet *long*. 11The elevation *of the house* was also made of large, costly stones; and they were trimmed to perfection, along with the cedar. 12The courtyard had 3 rows of trimmed stones; and it also had 1 row of cedar beams, just like the porch and the central hall of the Eternal's temple.

13King Solomon sent for Hiram, *the master craftsman* from Tyre. 14Hiram was the son of a widow from the Naphtali tribe. His father was a craftsman from Tyre who was wise, educated, and skilled enough to do anything with bronze. Hiram did all the *bronze* work for King Solomon. 15He crafted the 2 bronze columns. Each one of them was 27 feet high, and the circumference of both was 18 feet. 16He cast 2 capitals out of molten bronze for the columns. Each of the capitals was 7½ feet

* 7:7 Latin manuscripts read, "ceiling," because the floor above is the ceiling of the first floor.

high. 17There was an intricate network of twisted threads and chain on the capitals of the columns. There were 7 networks on each capital. 18Hiram crafted the columns and 2 rows around one network in order to hide the capitals that were over the pomegranates.* He did the same thing for the other capital. 19The capitals on the porch columns were crafted to look like 6-foot-high lilies. 20There were capitals on top of both columns, and above the round sun face beside the network were 200 pomegranates in rows around both capitals. 21He raised the columns on the porch of the central hall. After he raised the column on the right, he named it Jachin, *meaning "he will establish."* He raised the column on the left and named it Boaz, *meaning "in it is strength."* 22There were lily designs at the top of both columns.

When he had finished casting the columns, 23Hiram cast the sea. It was in the shape of a circle: 15 feet in diameter, 7½ feet deep, and 45 feet in circumference. 24Gourds surrounded the sea underneath the brim: 10 gourds for every foot and a half. They were in 2 rows and had been cast as part of the sea. 25Its pedestal was 12 oxen: 3 *of the oxen* faced north, 3 faced west, 3 faced south, and 3 faced east so that the back ends of the oxen were all on the inside. 26The sea was as thick as a hand is wide. The edge of it was designed like the edge of a cup, *curved back* like the blossom of a lily. The sea had a water capacity of 12,000 gallons.*

27Hiram then crafted 10 bronze *moveable* stands. Each *water* stand was 6 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 4½ feet high. 28The stands had side panels and panels between the crossbars. 29On the panels between the crossbars there were lions, oxen, and winged creatures. There was a pedestal over the crossbars *that would support the basin,* and there were garlands of ornaments below the lions and oxen. 30There were 4 bronze wheels and *4* bronze axles for each stand. The 4 legs of each stand also had *4* bases. There were bases with garlands on all sides below the basin. 31The opening at the crown *of the cart* was 1½ feet wide, in the shape of a circle, and like the pedestal, 27 inches. There were carvings on the opening, and the ends were straight, not rounded. 32The 4 wheels were beneath the panels, and the wheel axles were on the base. Each wheel was 27 inches tall. 33The wheels were crafted like the wheels of a chariot. Their axles, rims, spokes, and hubs were all cast. 34There were 4 braces on the 4 corners of each base that were part of the stand. 35There was a circular form 18 inches high above the base *that the basin would rest in*. It remained above the base, connected to the perimeter. 36Hiram carved winged creatures, lions, and palm trees onto the braces wherever he found space, and he surrounded them with garlands. 37All 10 of the stands were cast from the same mold, giving them all the same measurements and shape.

38He crafted 10 bronze basins. Each basin had a capacity of 240 gallons and was 6 feet *tall*. There was 1 basin on each of the 10 stands. 39He put 5 of the stands on the right side of the temple and the other 5 on the left side. He placed the sea on the right end of the temple, toward the southeast.

40Hiram cast the basins, shovels, and bowls. He finally completed all his work for King Solomon in the Eternal's temple: 41 2 columns and 2 bowls for the capitals (which were placed on top of the columns), 2 networks that were placed over the bowls of the capitals, 42400 pomegranates for the 2 networks, 2 rows of pomegranates for each network to go over the 2 bowls of the capitals which sat on top of the columns, 4310 stands, 10 basins for the stands, 44the sea, the 12 oxen beneath the sea, 45buckets, shovels, bowls, *and everything else,* including the objects Hiram crafted for Solomon in the Eternal's temple. All were made out of burnished bronze. 46The king molded the clay *into forms* in the plain of the Jordan and cast them there, between Succoth and Zarethan.

47Solomon did not weigh any of the utensils because there were so many of them. It was impossible to get an accurate weight of the bronze.

48Solomon had crafted all the furniture in the Eternal's temple: the golden altar; the golden table that held the bread of the Presence; 495 golden lampstands on the right and 5 on the left in front of the inner sanctuary; the golden flowers, lamps, and tongs; 50the golden cups, snuffers, bowls, spoons, and coal pans; the door hinges of the inner sanctuary (which was the most holy place); and *the door hinges* for the central hall of the temple that were crafted out of the purest gold.

* 7:18 Some Hebrew manuscripts read, "columns." * 7:26 2 Chronicles 4:5, "18,000 gallons"

51Solomon's work in the Eternal's
temple was complete. Solomon moved the
sacred things his father had sanctified—
the silver, gold, and utensils—into the
treasuries in the Eternal's temple.

► The construction of the temple is the most important accomplishment of Solomon's reign. This building both establishes and symbolizes Israel's connection to God. Once the covenant chest is placed there, it is literally the meeting point between them, and the sheer opulence of the temple reveals the priorities of the government. So much of Solomon's wealth is put into this building instead of being used to build an empire, as his neighbors would do, because he trusts God with the fate of Israel. Nothing demonstrates that more clearly than the storage of the nation's weapons in the temple. God is their guardian in every way.

8 To transport the Eternal's covenant
chest out of Zion, the city of David,
Solomon assembled all *the most
important people of* Israel before him in
Jerusalem: the elders and all the heads
of the Israelite tribes—the chiefs of the
patriarchs' families. 2Every man in Israel
gathered with King Solomon at the great
feast during the 7th month (which is
called Ethanim), *11 months after the temple
was finished.* 3Israel's elders all attended as
well, and the priests transported the cov-
enant chest. 4The Levites who were priests
transported the chest of the Eternal One,
the congregation tent, and all the sacred
objects that were inside the tent.

5King Solomon stood before the cov-
enant chest with the entire community
of Israel who had gathered with him, and
they sacrificed countless and innumerable
sheep and oxen.

6The *Levitical* priests transported
the Eternal's covenant chest to its *rightful*
place in the inner sanctuary of the temple,
which was the most holy place *within the
temple. They set the covenant chest down*
beneath the wings of the guardian crea-
tures. 7The creatures' wings were spread
above the chest, forming a sort of canopy
over the chest and its carrying rods. 8The
carrying rods were long enough that they
poked through the curtains and could be
seen from the sacred place in front of the
inner sanctuary, but a person could not
see them from outside. The carrying rods
are still there today.

9The only things inside the covenant
chest were the two stone tablets Moses
placed there in Horeb, where the Eternal
One entered into a covenant with the Isra-
elites after they had departed from Egypt.

10When the priests departed from the
most holy place, a cloud filled the Eternal's
temple. 11The cloud was so *powerful* that
the priests could not remain standing to
serve. His glory filled the temple.

Solomon: 12The Eternal dwells in this
thick cloud.
He said so Himself.
13Surely this means I have built a worthy
dwelling place
for Him forever.

14-15(then facing the standing assem-
bly of Israelites) Praise be to the Eternal
One, Israel's God, who made promises
with His mouth to my father, David; and
who today has fulfilled His promises
with His actions and said, 16"When I led
My people Israel out of Egypt, I did not
look to the tribes of Israel and appoint
a city to build a temple for My name.
Instead, I appointed David to reign over
My people Israel."

17My father desired to build a temple
honoring the reputation of the Eternal
One, Israel's God; 18but He told my father,
David, "It was good enough that this
desire was in your heart to build such a
temple for My name. 19However you will
not be the one to build this place; but
your son who is yet to be born will build
your vision, this temple, for My name."

20The Eternal has kept this promise. I
now sit upon my father David's throne—
the throne of Israel—just as He said, and
I have constructed the temple honoring
the reputation of the Eternal One, Israel's
God. 21There I have made a *sacred* space
for the covenant chest. Inside the chest
is the covenant of the Eternal which He
entered into with our ancestors after He
led them out of Egypt.

22Solomon was standing in front of the
Eternal's altar before the entire commu-
nity of Israel, and he lifted his hands up
toward heaven.

Solomon: 23O Eternal One, Israel's God,
there is no other God who compares
to You in heaven or on earth. You have
guarded Your covenant and revealed
Your loyal love to those who serve You
with all their being. 24You have kept Your
word to Your servant, my father, David.
You have promised with Your mouth and
fulfilled Your promise with Your actions
as it is today. 25Eternal One, Israel's God,
preserve that which You have promised
my father, David, when You told him,
"Your descendants will sit upon Israel's
throne for as long as your sons walk the
way you have walked before Me."* 26Israel's God, fulfill what You have promised
to my father, David, who served You.

27Is it true that God will live upon the
earth? The heavens and even the highest heaven are not big enough for You,
so how will You live in the house I have
raised? 28Please listen to the prayer and
humble request of Your servant today,
Eternal One my God, 29that Your gaze
might fall upon this temple all night and
day, that You might look upon the place
about which You said, "My name will
be there," and hear the humble request
of Your servant when he prays in the
direction of this place. 30And hear the
prayer of Your servant and Your people
Israel when they pray in the direction of
this place. Hear them from heaven, Your
dwelling place. Hear them, and forgive
them.

31If a man does evil against his
neighbor, and he is instructed to make
a promise at the altar of Your temple,
32then hear him from heaven and act.
Judge those who serve You. Denounce
the evil man by returning his evil to him,
and redeem the righteous man by blessing him according to his righteousness.

33When Your people Israel are
defeated by an enemy because they have
acted against You and wronged You, if
they come back to You and praise Your
name and send their requests to You in
this temple; 34then hear them in heaven,
forgive them for their sins, and lead
them back to the *promised* land You gave
to their ancestors.

35When the heavens are dried up and
no rain *is given to the earth* because Your
people sinned against You, if they *turn
and* pray in the direction of this place
and praise Your name and turn away
from their sins after You afflict them,
36then hear them in heaven and forgive
the sins of those who serve You and of
Your people Israel. Show them *the best
path,* the good path, upon which to walk.
Give them rain for *the portion of* Your
earth which You have given to them as
an inheritance.

37If there is food shortage, epidemic,
plant disease, mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, enemies surrounding the land
of their cities, plagues, or any other
sickness; 38whatever it is that is prayed
or requested by any one person or all
of Your people Israel who expresses the
suffering of his own being and lifts his
hands in the direction of this temple;
39then hear him in heaven where You
live. Grant forgiveness according to each
person's heart, for You know the heart
of every man. You, and only You, know
every heart 40so that all people might
live in *awe and* fear of You for as long as
they live in the land You gave to their
ancestors.

41Whenever a foreigner, a person
who is not a part of Your community
of Israel, comes from a distant land in
honor of Your name 42(for everyone will
hear about Your great reputation, mighty
actions, and outstretched strength),
when he prays in the direction of this
temple; 43then You will hear in heaven
where You dwell and grant the foreigner's requests. This is so Your reputation
will spread all throughout the earth and
so all may live in *awe and* fear of You,
just as Your people Israel do, and so all
will know that this temple I raised honors Your reputation.

44When Your people enter the battlefield to face their enemies along the path
You have sent them, when they pray to
the Eternal in the direction of the city
You have appointed and the temple I
have raised in honor of Your reputation;
45hear their prayers and requests in
heaven, and You will do justice on their
behalf.

46When they sin against You (for there
is not one person who will not sin), and
in Your anger You hand them over to
their enemies who take them away to
enemy territory, whether it is near or far
away, 47if they repent from their wrongdoings during their captivity, confess to
You that they have been sinful and acted
wickedly, 48give their hearts back to You,
offer You their entire beings while being

* 8:25 2 Samuel 7:13, 25

held captive by their enemies, and send their prayers to You in the direction of the land You gave to their ancestors (the city you appointed *to be sacred*) in the direction of the temple I have raised in honor of Your name; 49then hear their prayers and requests in heaven where You live and do justice on their behalf, 50forgive Your people who have wronged You, erase all their sins, and transform them into examples of compassion in the sight of their captors so that their enemies might be compassionate toward them.

51These are Your people, *the vessels of* Your earthly legacy, whom You led out of Egypt and away from the iron furnace *of slavery* 52so that Your eyes may be open to the requests of those who serve You—Your people Israel—and hear them whenever they call out to You. 53You have set them apart from all other people on the earth; You have chosen them as *vessels of* Your *earthly* legacy. *You revealed this to us* when You chose Your servant Moses to be Your mouthpiece. *It all began* when You led our ancestors out of Egypt, Eternal, our True God.

54After Solomon had finished praying to the Eternal, he stood up before the Eternal's altar where he had been kneeling and lifting up his hands toward heaven. 55With a booming voice, he blessed the entire community of Israel.

Solomon: 56Blessed is the Eternal One who has given rest to His people Israel and who has fulfilled all His promises. He has been true to every last word of the promise He gave through His servant Moses. 57May the Eternal our God live among us, just as He lived with our ancestors. May He never abandon or neglect us 58so that He can make us desire and walk in His ways, keeping all the commands, laws, and judgments He gave to our ancestors. 59May my words and everything I have requested of the Eternal our God be close to His heart continuously, both day and night, so that He will support His servant and His people Israel according to the needs of each day as it is today. 60Then all the people of the world will understand for themselves that He is the only True God. 61Give your entire heart to the Eternal our God. Walk the path He has intended for us, and keep His laws as you do today.

62King Solomon and the entire community of Israel sacrificed to the Eternal. 63For the peace offerings, Solomon sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Solomon and the Israelites made these sacrifices for the dedication of the Eternal's temple.

64That day King Solomon blessed the center of the court that was in front of the Eternal's temple by giving a burnt offering, grain offering, and all the fat of the peace offering. But the bronze altar that was set before the Eternal was not big enough to support the burnt offering, grain offering, and the fat of the peace offering. 65So Solomon and the entire community of Israel feasted together. It was a large gathering that stretched from the entrance of Hamath *(the Aramean city in the north) all the way* to the stream of Egypt—*the boundaries of Solomon's kingdom. This all took place* before the Eternal our God, and it lasted for seven days and then another seven days—fourteen days in all.

66On *the next day* (the eighth day), Solomon told everyone it was time to leave. They praised their king and joyfully made their way back to their tents, their hearts overflowing with gladness for all the good the Eternal had revealed to His servant David and to His people Israel.

9 After Solomon had constructed the Eternal's temple, his own palace, and many other building projects that he desired, 2the Eternal came to Solomon again just as He had at Gibeon.

Eternal One: 3I have received all the prayers and requests you have prayed to Me, *and I have honored what you have asked of Me.* I have consecrated this temple, which you have raised, by putting My name there forever. My eyes and heart will be there continuously. 4If you live before Me just as your father David did—with honor and righteousness, abiding by all that I have commanded you, keeping My laws and judgments—5I will sustain your throne over Israel forever as I promised your father David that I would when I said, "Your descendants will never fail to sit upon Israel's throne."*

6But if you or your offspring stray from Me, break My commands and laws that I have given you, and serve and worship other gods, 7then *there will be definite consequences to your actions:* I

* 9:5 2 Samuel 7:16

will cut Israel out of the land I gave to them, I will remove the temple I consecrated in honor of My name from My sight, and Israel will become the object of jokes for all people *of the world*. 8Know that this temple *which is now honored* will be nothing more than a pile of rubble. All who walk by will shake their heads and ask, "What has driven the Eternal One to do this to our land and temple?" 9The answer will come, "*He did this* because they turned their backs on Him—their God who led their ancestors out of Egypt—and gave their hearts to other gods, worshiping and serving them. That is why the Eternal One has done all this misery to them."

10Twenty years passed, and Solomon had constructed the two houses: the temple of the Eternal and the palace of the king. 11Tyre's king, Hiram, had given Solomon all the cedar, cypress, and gold he desired *for those projects,* so Solomon granted Hiram twenty cities in Galilee.

12Hiram traveled from Tyre to view the cities Solomon was giving to him, but he was not satisfied.

Hiram: 13What is this, my brother? Do you call these cities?

People still refer to these cities as the land of Cabul, *meaning "worthless,"* even today.

14Hiram gave approximately 9,000 pounds* of gold to Solomon.

15King Solomon used *foreign* slave laborers, *taken from cities he conquered,* for the construction of the Eternal's temple, the king's palace, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. What follows is the report of it:

► Solomon is easily the greatest builder of all the Israelite kings. Certainly Jerusalem is impressive, with its beautiful temple and palace and its strong fortifications. But Solomon doesn't stop with his capital. Millennia later the remnants of his work at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer will remain. These cities are of strategic importance to Israel because they are on the borders of the nation near waterways or trade routes. At these sites, Solomon uses many top-of-the-line defenses, specifically the six-chambered gate in the city walls that adds greater security, but he does not neglect daily function. Within the chambers of those gates, the elders hold court and tradesmen sell their merchandise. By dedicating some of his wealth to the development of these cities, Solomon guarantees himself a secure nation because he is equipped against invasion and he is satisfying the daily needs of his people.

16Pharaoh, Egypt's king, had captured Gezer, set it on fire, killed the Canaanites who were dwelling there, and then given the entire city as a dowry for his daughter who married Solomon. 17Solomon restored *the border areas of* Gezer, the lower part of Beth-horon, 18Baalath and Tamar in Judah's desert country, 19all the cities he used for storage, as well as the cities he used for his chariots and horsemen. Solomon also built whatever he desired in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and all lands he reigned over. 20All the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites who still remained *in his territories* even though *they* were not Israelites, 21the Israelites sought to annihilate; but from those who remained, Solomon assembled his conscripted labor force. This is still done today. 22Solomon did not turn the Israelites into slaves. The Israelites were soldiers, servants, princes, captains, charioteers, and cavalrymen. 23All these men—550 in all—were the most important officials involved in Solomon's work, controlling all the workers.

24Pharaoh's daughter traveled from the city of David to visit the house which Solomon had raised for her. Solomon then constructed the Millo.

The Millo is a massive stepped-stone structure that defends the city of David by raising it above the surrounding land and supporting the foundations of the outer buildings there.

25Three times a year, Solomon presented burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar he constructed in honor

* 9:14 120 talents

of the Eternal One. He burned incense on this altar which stood before the Eternal. His work on the temple was finished.

[26]King Solomon constructed a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, which is in the land of Edom near Eloth on the Red Sea. [27]Hiram commanded some of his most experienced sailors to be the crew of the fleet. These sailors were in the company of Solomon's servants. [28]They traveled to Ophir. When they got there, they gathered 16 tons of gold and transported it back to King Solomon.

10 The queen of Sheba *was fascinated when she* heard about the famous Solomon and his devotion to the name of the Eternal One. She traveled *a long way to meet him and* to challenge him with her difficult questions. [2]She arrived in Jerusalem accompanied by many advisors, assistants, and camels carrying spices and a lot of gold and rare jewels. When she met Solomon, she asked him about everything she could think of.

[3]Solomon gave her an answer to every question. The king knew all the answers, and he explained all she asked. [4]When the queen recognized Solomon's wisdom and observed the palace he had *envisioned and* constructed, [5]the food on his table, the *orderly* arrangement of his servants, the attentive service and *fine* dress of his waiters, his wine servers, and the *beautiful* stairway* that led up to the Eternal's temple, she was in complete awe.

Queen of Sheba *(to the king)*: [6]So it is true, everything I've heard about you in my land. Your words and wisdom *are beyond extraordinary*. [7]I confess that when I first heard of your renown, I did not believe *such a man could really be alive on the earth.* But I have witnessed *your greatness* with my own eyes, *and I believe*. You are twice as wise and wealthy as is reported *in faraway lands.* [8]Your people have been blessed *as a result of living under your reign*. Those who serve you continually are richly blessed to hear your wisdom *day in and day out*. [9]Praise the Eternal One your God, who believed in you enough to give you Israel's throne. He is devoted to Israel forever; that is why He has made *such a great man as* you king. He knows you will dispense righteousness and justice *fairly and wisely*.

[10]The queen then presented Solomon with 9,000 pounds* of gold and a large gift of spices and rare jewels. No other gift of spices given *to the king* ever compared to the gift the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. [13]King Solomon granted the queen of Sheba everything her heart desired (besides the usual royal gift). She then departed and returned to her own country with all those who were in her service.*

[11]Hiram's ships—the ones that transported all the gold from Ophir—also transported a large amount of almug trees and rare jewels. [12]The king transformed the almug trees into steps for the Eternal's temple and the palace. He also made lyres and harps for the musicians. Almug trees like these had never before entered *Israel,* and they never have since.

[14]Solomon received 25 tons of gold each year. [15]This amount does not include the amount *of gold* received through *taxation of explorers,* traders, and merchants and revenue from the Arab kings and provincial governors. [16]King Solomon crafted 200 large shields, each made from 7½ pounds of hammered gold. [17]Then he crafted 300 shields made from 60 ounces of hammered gold. He kept them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. [18]He also crafted an ivory throne and covered it with the purest gold. [19]There were 6 steps leading up to the throne. The back of the throne was rounded, and a lion stood next to each armrest. [20]There were 12 lions on the 6 steps: *6* lions on one side and *6* on the other. Nothing anywhere in the world compared to it. [21]All of King Solomon's cups were made out of gold, and all the cups in the house of the forest of Lebanon were made out of the purest gold as well. Nothing was crafted out of silver because silver was worthless during that time. [22]Tarshish's ships and Hiram's ships were out at sea under the rule of Solomon. Tarshish's ships brought gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks* to Solomon once every 3 years.

[23]King Solomon became mightier than any other king in the entire world. He was wealthy in material and in wisdom. [24]People from around the world wanted to meet *the famous* Solomon. They desired to learn the wisdom God had planted in his heart. [25]They brought gifts—silver, gold, clothing, weapons, spices, horses, and mules. The gifts accumulated as the years passed.

* 10:5 Difficult reading, possibly "offerings." * 10:10 120 talents * 10:13 Verse 13 has been moved before verse 11 to help the reader understand the continuity of the passage. * 10:22 Difficult reading, possibly "baboons" or "monkeys."

[26]Solomon summoned his chariots and cavalrymen. He commanded 1,400 chariots and 12,000 cavalrymen, and he sent them to the appointed cities *(known as chariot cities)* or to guard Jerusalem's king. [27]The king had made silver as common as stones are in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as common as sycamore trees are in the foothills. [28]Solomon brought his horses from Egypt* and Kue, and the king's businessmen paid the people of Kue for the horses. [29]One chariot was bought from Egypt for 15 pounds of silver, and one horse was bought for 60 ounces *of silver*. Some chariots and horses were then exported to the Hittite and Aramean kings *along the route from Kue back to Israel.*

11 King Solomon loved countless women from other countries—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites—as well as Pharaoh's daughter.

Marrying women from these foreign nations helps Solomon solidify Israel politically, but it will be the religious undoing of his nation.

[2]All the countries *of the king's lovers* were *heathen* countries that the Eternal One had warned the Israelites about: "Do not mingle with them, and do not allow them to mingle with you. *They will corrupt you and lead you away from Me.* They will seduce your hearts to follow their own gods."* But Solomon clung to these lovers. [3]He had 700 royal wives, as well as 300 mistresses. And his wives *and mistresses* seduced his heart away *from God.*

[4]*Solomon followed the Lord during youth and middle age,* but when Solomon was an old man, these women seduced him into following other gods. His heart *was led astray and* no longer completely belonged to the Eternal One, his True God, as his father David's heart did. [5]Solomon pursued Ashtoreth (the Sidonian goddess) and Milcom (the abomination of the Ammonites). [6]Solomon *abandoned his lifelong integrity and* committed evil in the eyes of the Eternal. He did not follow Him completely, as his father David had. [7]Instead Solomon constructed a high place on the mountain east of Jerusalem for Chemosh (Moab's horrific idol) and for Molech (the Ammonites' abhorrence). [8]He constructed such sites for all his wives from other countries, so that they would have a place to burn incense and offer sacrifices to their *many* gods.

[9]The Eternal boiled with anger toward Solomon because he had allowed his heart to be seduced away from the Eternal One, Israel's True God, who had appeared to Solomon twice [10]and had warned him about this very act *of faithlessness.* But Solomon did not heed His command.

Eternal One *(to Solomon)*: [11]You have *been unfaithful to Me and have* broken My covenant and laws; therefore, I will remove the kingdom from your rule and hand it over to your servant. [12]But in honor of your father, David, *who was always faithful to me,* I will not remove the kingdom from you while you are alive; however, I will take it from your son. [13]I will not take away the entire kingdom *from your bloodline.* In honor of your father and for Jerusalem which I have chosen, I will grant your son one tribe *to rule.*

► That "one tribe" promised by the Lord is Solomon's own tribe, Judah. But by the time this is written several centuries later, Judah is the common name for the Southern Kingdom, which is ruled by Solomon's descendants and actually composed of two tribes: Judah and Benjamin. Ironically Benjamin and Judah were historically enemies. As the tribe of Saul, Benjamin was predisposed against David when he became king, and they continued their animosity toward him by supporting Absalom during his rebellion. All of those bad feelings will change when Judah and Israel split. Benjamin will decide to follow Rehoboam along with Judah, while the other ten tribes will follow Jeroboam.

[14]The Eternal brought an enemy against him—Hadad the Edomite, who was a descendant of Edom's king.

[15]While David was in Edom, Joab, the head of the army, was burying the dead

* 10:28 Literally, Musri, a nation on the Cappadocian seacoast of Asia Minor * 11:2 Exodus 34:16

after he had killed every male in Edom.
16(Joab and all of Israel had remained
in Edom for six months until Joab had
killed every male in Edom.) 17But Hadad
ran away to Egypt. Some of the Edomites
who guarded Hadad's father traveled with
Hadad *in order to look after him* because
he was only a boy at the time. 18They trav-
eled from Midian and arrived at Paran.
They gathered men from Paran to journey
with them, and they arrived in Egypt. They
went to Pharaoh, Egypt's king, and he pro-
vided Hadad with a place to stay and with
food. Pharaoh also gave him his own land;
he treated Hadad as family. 19Pharaoh liked
Hadad so much that he offered his sister-
in-law to Hadad to marry. She was the
sister of the queen, Tahpenes. 20Tahpenes'
sister gave birth to Hadad's son, whom
they called Genubath. Tahpenes weaned
Genubath in Pharaoh's house where he
stayed and grew up with Pharaoh's sons.
21When Hadad received word in Egypt
that David *had left this world to* sleep with
his fathers and that Joab, the head of the
army, was also dead, he made a *special*
request to Pharaoh.

Hadad: Please let me go back to my native country.

Pharaoh: 22*Why would you need or want to return* to your native country? Have I not provided you with all that you could ever desire? So why do you ask to return?

Hadad: *What you say is true, Pharaoh.* There is nothing *more I could desire,* but you still must allow me to return *to my native country*.

23The True God brought another enemy
against Solomon—Rezon (Eliada's son)
who ran away from his lord Hadadezer
(Zobah's king). 24After David killed the
people of Zobah, Rezon formed a band of
thieves and acted as its leader. The band
of thieves traveled to Damascus, *the capi-
tal of Aram,* and ruled there. 25Rezon was
Israel's perpetual enemy during Solomon's
reign, in addition to all that Hadad did.
Rezon despised Israel and ruled Aram.

26Solomon had a servant named
Jeroboam whose mother, Zeruah, was
a widow. His father was Nebat (an
Ephraimite from Zeredah). Jeroboam *grew
resentful and* rebelled against his king,
Solomon, and became one of his enemies.

27This is the reason Jeroboam rebelled
against the king: Solomon constructed
the Millo and sealed up the gap in the
wall of his father's city—the city of David.
28Jeroboam was a strong *and fierce* war-
rior. Solomon recognized that Jeroboam
was a hard worker and put him in charge
of all the workers from Joseph's tribes,
Ephraim and Manasseh.

29When Jeroboam was traveling
outside of Jerusalem, he encountered the
prophet, Ahijah the Shilonite, on the road.
Ahijah was dressed in a new robe, and
there was no one else anywhere around
except for him and Jeroboam. 30Ahijah
then did something unexpected. He pulled
his new robe off his body and tore it into a
dozen pieces.

Ahijah *(to Jeroboam)***:** 31Take ten pieces,
because the Eternal One, Israel's True
God, has said, "I am going to rip the king-
dom out from under Solomon's *corrupted*
reign and grant you ten tribes. 32Solomon
will still reign over one tribe. *I will allow
this for two reasons only:* for Jerusalem
(the city I chose from all of Israel's tribes)
and for the honor of David who served
Me *during his lifetime*. 33*I am giving you
these ten tribes* because Solomon and his
people have turned away from Me *and
given themselves to other gods besides Me*.
They now offer their worship to Ashto-
reth (the Sidonians' goddess), Chemosh
(Moab's god), and Milcom (the Ammo-
nites' god). They have strayed from My
path, are no longer concerned with what
I see as right, and have forgotten My laws
and judgments. *Solomon and his people
are* not like David, who followed My path.

34"But I am not going to take the
entire kingdom away from Solomon;
he will be prince his entire life because
of *My promise to* My servant David,
whom I handpicked *from the pastures*
and who lived by My commands and
laws. 35Instead I will take the kingdom
away from his son's power and give ten
tribes over to you. 36I will leave one tribe
for his son so that David, the lamp of
Israel,* will always have a place with Me
in Jerusalem, the city I have appointed
as My city."

► The preservation of Judah as the home of God's temple demonstrates

* 11:36 2 Samuel 21:17

the centrality of David in His plan. As "the lamp of Israel," David represents the hope of Judah. In Israel, lamps are so central to daily life that when a new building is founded, often a perfectly formed, unused lamp is buried beneath the floors in the corner of a room. These ancient "cornerstones" signify the builder's hope for light and life in the house. Likewise everything in Israel is founded on David; the idea of his perfect reign is the hope and cornerstone of the nation.

Ahijah *(to Jeroboam with the Eternal's message)*: 37"I will allow you to rule over anything you want, and you will be Israel's new king. 38If you then give yourself to Me and heed all My commands, honor My laws, and live by My way just as My servant David did, then I will be near to you and will build you a great dynasty like the one I built for David. Israel will be yours; I will hand it over to you. 39I will afflict David's offspring because of what Solomon has done, but I won't cause this suffering forever."

40Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam because of this, but Jeroboam ran away to Egypt *to seek shelter* with Shishak, Egypt's king. Jeroboam remained in Egypt until Solomon died.

41Is not the rest of Solomon's story—his actions and his wisdom—documented in the book of the acts of Solomon?

► The Book of Kings is not the only historical record of Judah's and Israel's monarchies. This book is based on several source materials, including the book of the acts of Solomon, the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings, and the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings. Although these books and the stories they tell are lost, the simple citation of these sources reveals a lot about Kings: the editor of this book is writing at the end of Judah's time as an independent nation, the memory of the monarchy is important enough to have been recorded by several independent sources, and the editor is keenly concerned with narrating the stories that occurred centuries before he lived.

42In all Solomon ruled over Jerusalem for 40 years. 43Solomon *left this world to* sleep with his fathers. He was laid to rest in his father's city, the city of David. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, then inherited the throne.

12 Rehoboam traveled to Shechem, *a border city between Ephraim and Manasseh,* because the entire community of Israel had gathered there to install him as the new king. 2Jeroboam (Nebat's son) received word of this while he was living in Egypt, hiding from King Solomon. 3Then the people *of the northern tribes* called for Jeroboam, and with him the entire community of Israel spoke to *Solomon's son,* Rehoboam.

Jeroboam and Israel: 4During your father's time, he weighed us down with heavy workloads *and caused us much suffering.* We *have come here to* ask you to lighten the load your father laid upon us. If you do so, we will be your *willing* servants.

Rehoboam: 5Go away for three days, then come back to me. *I need to think this over.*

The people left.

6King Rehoboam then went to talk with the elders who had been in the service of his father, Solomon, when he was alive. *He asked for their advice on this matter.*

Rehoboam *(to the elders)*: *I have come here for your wisdom.* What guidance do you have for me? What should I say to these people *who are asking me to lighten their workload*?

Elders: 7Serve your people today; do exactly as they ask, and offer them kind words *and encouragement.* If you serve them *in this way today,* then they will *be devoted to you and will* serve you forever.

8But Rehoboam ignored the advice of the elders. Instead he went to consult *his childhood friends*—the young men with whom he had grown up and who served him.

Rehoboam: 9What guidance do you have
for me? What should I say to these peo-
ple who have made this request to me:
"Lighten our load, the one your father
has placed upon us"?

Young Men: 10*When you meet again*
with these people who have made this
request to you: "Your father weighed us
down with heavy workloads *and caused*
us much suffering. We ask you to lighten
the load your father laid upon us," speak
firmly: "*You think my father was hard on*
you? My little finger is more potent than
my father's loins! 11My father weighed
you down with a heavy load, but I will
make your load even heavier. My father
used whips to command you, *and you*
thought that was harsh. I will use a
scourge *with the sting* of scorpions.

12Jeroboam and all the people *of Israel*
came back to meet with Rehoboam
after they had been away for three days.
They did this because Rehoboam had
given them this instruction: "Go away
for three days, then come back to me."
13So Rehoboam spoke to the people in a
tyrannical tone and completely ignored
the advice of the *experienced* elders.
14Rehoboam instead heeded the advice
of the young men *with whom he had*
grown up.

Rehoboam: My father weighed you down
with a heavy load, but I will make your
load even heavier. My father used whips
to command you, *and you thought that*
was harsh. I will use a scourge *with the*
sting of scorpions.

15*After King Rehoboam had finished speak-*
ing to Jeroboam and the Israelites, the
king did not listen to them as the Eternal
intended. Thus *Rehoboam* fulfilled the
promise the Eternal One gave through *the*
prophet, Ahijah the Shilonite, to Jeroboam
(Nebat's son). 16The people of Israel real-
ized the king had not listened to them.

Israelites: What lot of David's belongs
to us?
We have no inheritance in Jesse's
son;
Go back to your tents, Israel!
Take care of your own house, David!
There is no good news for us!

The Israelites left and went back to their
homes. 17But Rehoboam ruled over all the
Israelites who lived in the cities that were
a part of Judah. 18Rehoboam sent Adoram
(commander over the forced workers) *to*
compel the Israelites to end their rebellion,
but the entire community of Israel killed
him with stones. *Afraid for his life,* King
Rehoboam quickly got into his chariot to
run back to Jerusalem. 19Israel has been in
conflict with David's house ever since.

20Now when the entire community
of Israel received word that Jeroboam had
returned, they invited him to the assembly
where they made him king over the entire
Kingdom of Israel. Only the tribe of Judah
was still devoted to David's house.

21When Rehoboam arrived in Jeru-
salem, he gathered together the tribes of
Judah and Benjamin. There were 180,000
handpicked warriors gathered together *in*
a plot to battle against Israel in order to
get the kingdom back under the rule of
Rehoboam, Solomon's son. 22But the word
of the True God visited Shemaiah, the
man of God.

Eternal One: 23Go talk to Rehoboam,
Solomon's son, who is *now* Judah's king.
Give *Rehoboam,* the house of Judah, the
tribe of Benjamin, and all the people
24this message of the Eternal: "Do not
wage war against your brothers, the
Israelites. Every warrior should *put down*
his sword and spear without further delay
and return to his home. This change in
power is from Me."

They honored the message *of warning*
from the Eternal, returned *to their homes,*
and did exactly as He had instructed them
to do.

25*In Israel* Jeroboam fortified
Shechem in the hilly land of Ephraim.
He lived there for a time, then he *took on*
another project and fortified Penuel.

Jeroboam *(in his heart)***:** 26*It is possible*
that the kingdom might return to the
house of David. 27If these people make
sacrifices in the Eternal's temple in Jeru-
salem, then their hearts will go back to
their lord, even to Rehoboam, Judah's
king. They will surely execute me and go
back to Rehoboam, Judah's king.

28The king sought out advice and then
cast two calves out of gold.

Jeroboam *(to Israel)***:** It's too difficult for
you to travel all the way to Jerusalem
to make your sacrifices. These are your
gods, Israel, who led you out of Egypt.

[29]Jeroboam placed one *of the golden calves* in Bethel and the other in Dan. [30]This was a *horribly* wicked sin. People even traveled with the golden calf *in a religious procession when it was placed* in Dan. [31]Jeroboam constructed temples on high places, and he appointed men to be priests who were not descendants of Levi.

[32]Jeroboam instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. It was similar to the Feast *of Booths that is celebrated in the seventh month* in Judah.* He then approached the altar in Bethel and offered sacrifices to the golden calves he had crafted. *While he was doing this,* he instructed the priests of the country's high places to serve in Bethel. [33]Jeroboam then approached the altar in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month to make sacrifices according to a plan he had devised. There, he instituted this festival for all the Israelites. Then he approached the altar and burned incense.

► In his zeal to solidify the worship of the Lord in the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam inadvertently dooms the Israelites' relationship with God by making changes to God's laws. Instead of worshiping no idols, the Northern Kingdom has two golden calves. Instead of worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem, the Israelites worship at various shrines like the one at Bethel. Instead of relying on the Levites, others can become priests and approach the altar. Finally, instead of following God's calendar, Jeroboam brings with him the Egyptian calendar from his time in exile, thus altering the observance date of every sacred festival in the Northern Kingdom. The unwillingness to conform to God's worship requirements will devolve into outright rebellion on the part of Israel.

13 A man of God from Judah arrived in Bethel because the Eternal One had told him to go there *for a divine purpose. He arrived in the city* while Jeroboam was burning incense at the altar. [2]The prophet proclaimed the message of the Eternal against the altar.

Man of God: Altar, altar, *listen closely!* This is the message of the Eternal: "A boy named Josiah will be born of David's *royal* bloodline, and he will sacrifice the priests of the high places upon your back. *O what irony:* the bones *of the priests* will burn at the very spot where, *just the day before,* the priests burned incense."

[3]The prophet offered a sign that day.

Man of God: The Eternal One has revealed what the sign will be: "The altar will split in two, and the *countless* ashes *of fat* will fall out."

[4]The king heard the *threatening* message that the man of God *boldly* proclaimed against the altar in Bethel.

Jeroboam *(raising his hand)***:** Grab hold of him! *He's dangerous!*

When Jeroboam raised his hand from the altar, it shriveled up *instantaneously,* and he could not bring it back to his body. [5]The altar broke apart, and the ashes *of fat* fell out of the altar. This sign occurred exactly as the man of God said it would in the message he gave from the Eternal One.

Jeroboam *(to the man of God)***:** [6]I beg you to intercede *quickly* with the Eternal, your True God, and ask Him to make my hand normal again.

So the man of God called upon the Eternal, and Jeroboam's hand became normal again, as if it had never changed.

Jeroboam: [7]Now accompany me to my house for refreshment, and I will give you something in return *for the good you have done me.*

Man of God: [8]Even if you offered to give me half of your estate, I would not accompany you. I would not eat a crumb or drink water from your table. [9]The Eternal gave me *clear* instructions. He said, "*While you are there,* do not eat a crumb or drink water. Do not travel back the way you came."

Certainly God's requirements seem to be unreasonable. In fact, they are! Only by requiring something so arbitrary can God test the man's dedication to Him.

* 12:32 Leviticus 23:34

10So the man of God took a different path from the one he had originally traveled to Bethel.

11There was an old prophet who lived in Bethel. The old prophet's sons heard about the sign the man of God had performed and about the words he spoke to the king, and they relayed these things to their father.

Prophet *(to his sons)*: 12Where did the man of God go? *I would like to see him.*

The old prophet's sons had seen which way the man of God from Judah had gone, *so they told their father which direction to take.*

Prophet *(to his sons)*: 13Get the donkey ready. *I'm going to find the man of God.*

The old prophet's sons saddled the donkey, and the father got on it and went *to find the man of God.* 14Along his journey, he found the man of God resting beneath an oak tree.

Prophet *(to the man of God)*: There's been talk of a man of God from Judah *who performed a sign for Jeroboam.* Are you that man?

Man of God: *Yes,* I am.

Prophet: 15Accompany me back to my house, and eat my bread. *Surely you must be hungry.*

Man of God: 16I will not accompany you to your house, and I will not eat your bread or drink your water here. 17The Eternal One gave me *clear* instructions when He said, "While you are there, do not eat a crumb or drink water. Do not travel back the way you came."

Prophet: 18*But you see,* I, too, am a prophet, just as you are. One of the *Eternal's* heavenly messengers brought me this word of the Eternal: "Escort the man of God back to your house, feed him your bread, and let him drink your water."

But the old prophet lied. 19The man of God *trusted the old prophet and* accompanied him back to his house, where he ate bread and drank water.

20While they were sitting at the *prophet's* table, the Eternal gave a *grim* message to the prophet who brought the man of God *to his house.* 21He spoke it to the man of God who was from Judah.

Prophet: This is the *urgent* message of the Eternal One: You have strayed from His *strict* instructions. You have not honored the command of the Eternal, your True God. 22Instead, you have eaten bread and drunk water *here,* even after He gave you this instruction: "Do not eat a crumb or drink water while you are there." Therefore you will not be buried in the place of your fathers.

► To be buried away from one's family is the ultimate curse. In ancient Israel, a connection is retained between the living and the dead. The ancestors are to be buried somewhere on the family land, legally securing forever the land for the living family members. The living family members, by taking care of that land, care for their ancestors in the afterlife. If someone is buried away from his ancestral home, then the quality of his afterlife is in question.

23After having a *sobering* meal and some water, the prophet prepared his donkey for the man of God. 24While the man of God was traveling *on the donkey,* he was killed by a lion and his body fell *to the ground,* right in *the middle of* the road. 25*It was the strangest sight,* for the donkey and the lion both remained standing beside the man's body. People walked by on the road and saw the body *of the man of God* with the lion standing beside it. The people brought word of this *strange sight* to the city of the old prophet.

Prophet *(hearing the news)*: 26The dead body is that of the man of God. He strayed from the Eternal's *strict* directions so He has sent the lion to tear him *to pieces* and kill him, just as He said would happen.

27(to his sons) Prepare the donkey so that I can ride it. *I must go retrieve the body of the man of God.*

And so his sons saddled the donkey *for him.* 28The prophet traveled to the body *of the man of God.* The donkey and the

lion remained standing beside it on the road. *The strange thing is that* the lion had not tried to eat any of the dead body or kill the donkey. 29The prophet gathered up the *lifeless* body of the man of God and placed it on the donkey, then he led the donkey back to the old prophet's city where he grieved for the man of God and gave him a *proper* burial. 30The prophet buried the man of God in his own grave; and everyone grieved for him, crying out, "I'm so sorry, brother!" 31After the prophet had buried the man of God, he spoke to his sons.

Prophet: When death takes me *someday,* I want you to bury me in the same grave as the man of God, so that my bones rest next to his bones. *This will be an honor for me.* 32The words he cried out against the altar in Bethel and against the high places in the Samaritan towns will surely happen, for those words were the Eternal's message.

33Even after all of this, Jeroboam still did not repent from his wickedness. He continued to choose priests for the high places out of anyone and everyone. Any man who was willing *to be a priest,* Jeroboam ordained him so that the man could act as a priest of the high places. 34This was wicked enough to annihilate Jeroboam's entire house *and reign* from the history of the world.

14 About this same time, Abijah (Jeroboam's son) became *very* ill.

Jeroboam *(to his wife)***:** 2Get up *quickly,* and dress in a disguise so that no one will know you are my wife. Then travel *as fast as you can* to Shiloh, where the prophet Ahijah is dwelling. He is the one who prophesied that I would be king of these people. 3Pack 10 loaves *of bread,* a few cakes, and a honey jar. Go find him *quickly*; he should be able to prophesy the boy's fate.

4Jeroboam's wife did this *urgent* thing. She traveled *quickly* to Shiloh and found the dwelling place of Ahijah. Ahijah was blind in his old age and could not see a thing. 5The Eternal One had already told Ahijah, "Jeroboam's wife is on her way to ask you to prophesy the fate of her boy who is ill. This is what you are to say to her. *But beware,* when she comes to your house, she will pretend to be someone else."

6Ahijah heard her footsteps come into his house, and he called out to her.

Ahijah: Come inside. You are Jeroboam's wife, but why do you wear a disguise? I have an *urgent and* severe message for you *from the Eternal One.*

7Go back to Jeroboam *right now,* and tell him this is the message of the Eternal One, the God of Israel: "I appointed you from the community and granted you leadership over My people Israel. 8-9I stripped the kingdom out from under the house of David, and I handed it over to you. But you have committed evil which exceeds those before you; and you have not been an *honorable* servant like David, for he honored My laws and gave his entire heart to Me. *Unlike you,* he sought to do My will. You have made yourself other gods and cast false idols *in their honor*. You have aroused My wrath by putting Me behind you. 10Therefore, beware.

"I will bring destruction to Jeroboam's house; and I will keep every Israelite man—both free and slave—away from him. I will wipe out Jeroboam's house, just as one burns the dung *from animals, so his house will be burned up and wiped out*. There will be nothing left *of his house.* 11All who remain devoted to Jeroboam, if they die in the city, will be devoured by dogs. If they die in the fields, they will be devoured by birds of the heavens." The Eternal One has already said that is what will happen.

12Get up *quickly,* and go back to your home. As soon as you set foot in the city, your son will die. 13All of Israel will grieve for him and bury him. He is the only member of Jeroboam's family who will have a proper burial, for he was the only one within Jeroboam's house in whom the Eternal God of Israel found something good.

14The Eternal will appoint for Himself a *new* king over Israel, and this *new* king will separate the kingdom from Jeroboam's house from this day and beyond. 15The Eternal One will strike Israel, *and Israel will be rattled* just as water rattles a reed. The Eternal One will tear out Israel from this promised land given to their ancestors, and He will scatter them beyond the Euphrates River. *He will do this* because they have crafted their sacred poles and aroused the *fiery* wrath of the Eternal One. 16He will abandon Israel because of

Jeroboam's wickedness, which caused all of Israel to be wicked as well.

17Jeroboam's wife then got up and traveled to Tirzah. As soon as she stepped into the house, her son died. 18All Israel buried him and grieved for him, just as the Eternal One said they would in the message He gave through the prophet Ahijah.

19Is not the rest of Jeroboam's story—how he caused war, as well as the general history of his *actions and* reign—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

20Jeroboam ruled *over Israel* for 22 years, then he *left this world to* sleep with his fathers. Jeroboam's son, Nadab, then inherited the throne.

21Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ruled over Judah. He was granted kingship when he was 41 years old, and he ruled 17 years. *He lived out his reign* in Jerusalem, the city which the Eternal chose from all of Israel's tribes as the dwelling place for His name. His mother was Naamah the Ammonitess, *one of Solomon's foreign wives.*

22Judah was also wicked in the Eternal's eyes. Their wickedness aroused His jealousy more than the wickedness of all their ancestors combined. 23They constructed high places and crafted holy pillars. *They infected the pure earth with their* sacred poles on every mountain and beneath every beautiful tree. 24There were also temple prostitutes who worked throughout the land. They followed the examples of the nations and were wicked just as the nations were before the arrival of the Israelites.

25During the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, Egypt's king, waged war against Jerusalem. 26He stole all the treasures from the Eternal's temple and from the palace. He stole everything, even the golden shields Solomon had crafted.

► Paying tribute to the powerful Egyptian pharaoh, who is also known as Shoshenq I, may have saved Judah from destruction, but Jeroboam and Israel are not so safe. This record describes what happens to Israel, but Shishak records another perspective in a relief at the temple at Karnak. In the relief, Shishak's god is shown pulling a rope with 120 slaves attached to it. Each slave carries the name of a town Shishak claims to have conquered. Even if the information in the relief is embellished, history does agree that Shishak has control of Judah and Israel in the eighth century.

27King Rehoboam crafted bronze shields to replace the golden shields. He put the shields in the hands of the leaders of the guard who stood guard at the entrance of the palace. 28*On ceremonial occasions,* such as when the king entered the Eternal's temple, the guards carried the shields. They would then return the shields to their room.

29Is not the rest of Rehoboam's story documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 30There were always wars taking place between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. 31Rehoboam *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest with his ancestors in the city of David. His mother was called Naamah the Ammonitess. Then his son, Abijam, inherited the throne.

15 During the 18th year of Jeroboam's reign (*Jeroboam was* Nebat's son), Abijam* took over the throne of Judah. 2Abijam reigned 3 years in Jerusalem. His mother was Maacah* (Abishalom's daughter). 3Abijam indulged in the same wicked things as his father did. His heart did not wholly belong to the Eternal One his God, as his ancestor David's heart had. 4Nevertheless, the Eternal One his God left the lamp *of His presence* in Jerusalem for David's sake, so that He might allow his son to grow up there and to make a strong foundation for Jerusalem. 5David did what was good in the eyes of the Eternal, for he did not abandon the commands of the Eternal during his lifetime, with the exception of the incident with Uriah the Hittite.* 6The war between Rehoboam's and Jeroboam's *people* continued during Abijam's entire lifetime.

7Is not the rest of Abijam's story documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? How war continued between Abijam and Jeroboam? 8Abijam *left this world to* sleep with his fathers, and they laid him to rest in the city of David,

* 15:1 2 Chronicles 13:1-22 reads, "Abijah." * 15:2 2 Chronicles 13:2 reads "Micaiah (daughter of Uriel of Gibeah)."
* 15:5 2 Samuel 11

as was the tradition. His son, Asa, then inherited the throne.

► In ancient Israel, people are typically buried in family tombs that are either in natural caves on the family property or are cut out of rock. Initially, the body is laid in the center of the tomb on a stone bench. Later, when the flesh has rotted off the bones and more space is needed in the tomb, a family member will push the bones off the bench into the corners of the tomb or into holes in the walls intended to hold the bones. In this way, everyone "slept with his fathers" before being literally "gathered to his ancestors."

9During the 20th year of Israel's king, Jeroboam, Asa took over the throne in Judah. 10He ruled for 41 years in Jerusalem. His mother was Maacah* (Abishalom's daughter).

11Asa did what was good in the Eternal's eyes, just as his ancestor David had. 12He eliminated cult prostitution throughout the land, and he destroyed every idol his fathers had crafted. 13He also took away his mother's position as queen mother because she, Maacah, had made a *corrupt and* vile image honoring *the goddess* Asherah. Asa stripped down the goddess's image and set fire to it *in the trash heap* beside the Kidron stream. 14The high places were left alone. *Asa did not touch them,* but his heart belonged wholly to the Eternal One for his entire life. 15He transported silver and gold and objects into the Eternal's temple, *replacing those that Shishak had taken.* He dedicated *old* things of his father's, as well as his own *new* things.

16There was war continually between Asa and Baasha (Israel's king *who took the throne in a coup against Nadab*) during their reigns. 17Baasha, Israel's king, challenged Judah and fortified Ramah. *He built up the region* so that no one could approach or leave Asa, Judah's king.

Ramah is about five miles north of Jerusalem and astride the road leading to the northern tribes.

18Asa then gathered up all the silver and gold from the treasuries in the Eternal's temple and in the king's house. He handed it all over to those who were in his service. King Asa told them to go see Ben-hadad (son of Tabrimmon and grandson of Hezion, Aram's king) in Damascus.

Asa *(to Ben-hadad)***:** 19Let us make an agreement, just as my father and your father did. I offer you gifts of silver and gold and request that you break your agreement with Baasha, Israel's king. Then he will leave me alone, *and both you and I will benefit from the deal.*

20Ben-hadad heard King Asa's request and *immediately* dispatched military leaders *to wage war* against Israel's cities. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, all of Chinneroth, and all of Naphtali. 21Baasha received word of this, and he *immediately* stopped fortifying Ramah *as an outpost against Asa.* Then he stayed in Tirzah.

22When King Asa heard it, he made a declaration to Judah. There was not a single citizen or foreigner who did not hear *his words.* Everyone tore down the fortifications around Ramah; Baasha had been using large rocks and timber. King Asa then fortified his own cities of Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah with those rocks and timbers.

23Is not the rest of Asa's story—his actions, strengths, and records of cities built—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? When he was an old man, his feet were struck with a *horrible* disease. 24Asa *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid with them to rest in the city of David. His son, Jehoshaphat, then inherited the throne.

25Jeroboam's son, Nadab, took over Israel's throne during the second year of Asa's reign over Judah. Nadab ruled Israel for two years. 26He committed evil in the eyes of the Eternal One, walking the wicked path of his father and causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

27Baasha (Ahijah's son) of the house of Issachar plotted against him. Baasha killed *his own anointed king,* Nadab, at Gibbethon in Philistia. He did this while Nadab was leading Israel in a siege against Gibbethon. 28Baasha struck Nadab down during the third year of Asa's reign over Judah, and Baasha took Nadab's place on the throne. 29As soon as he gained the

* 15:10 Abijam's mother was Maacah (verse 2), so Asa's mother may have died, leaving Maacah, his grandmother, to raise him.

power of the throne, he killed the entire family of Jeroboam. He did not allow a single person to live; *no one remained to challenge his throne.* He annihilated them all, just as the Eternal had instructed through His servant, Ahijah the Shilonite. 30He did this because of Jeroboam's *abhorrent* wickedness that caused the Israelites to live sinful lives and that incurred the wrath of the Eternal God of Israel.

31Is not the rest of Nadab's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

32Asa and Baasha, Israel's king, warred against each other for their entire reigns. 33During the 3rd year of Asa's reign over Judah, Baasha (Ahijah's son) became Israel's king. He ruled from Tirzah for 24 years. 34He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes, walking the wicked path of Jeroboam and causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

16 The Eternal's message came to Jehu (Hanani's son) against Baasha.

Eternal One: 2*I gave you an amazing opportunity, Baasha.* I lifted you up from the dirt *of the ground* and appointed you to lead My people Israel; but you *have been foolish,* have embraced the same path as Jeroboam, and have caused My people Israel to live sinful lives. You have provoked My wrath against their wickedness. 3Therefore I will devour you and all who *serve you and* belong to you. I will do to your house what I did to the house of Jeroboam (Nebat's son). 4The *hungry* dogs will devour *the remains of* all those who belong to you if they die within the city walls. The birds in the sky will *swoop down and* eat up *the remains of* all those who belong to you if they die in the fields.

5Is not the rest of Baasha's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 6Baasha *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest in Tirzah. His son, Elah, then inherited the throne. 7So *that is how it happened*—the Eternal's message, which He gave through the prophet Jehu (Hanani's son), challenged Baasha and all those who belonged to him *and served him.* This took place because of the *abhorrent* wickedness he committed in the Eternal's eyes. By his wicked deeds and by embracing the same wickedness as Jeroboam, Baasha provoked the anger of the Eternal.

8During the 26th year of King Asa's reign, Elah (Baasha's son) took over the throne of Israel in Tirzah. He ruled two years. 9Zimri, Elah's servant who was in charge of half his chariots, plotted against Elah. Elah was drinking excessively in Tirzah at Arza's house. (Tirzah was in Arza's control.) 10Zimri murdered Elah during the 27th year of Asa's reign over Judah, and he inherited the throne.

11As soon as Zimri *became king and* gained the power of the throne, he killed every male in Baasha's family. He did not leave a single survivor—no family or friends *or servants to challenge his claim to the throne.* 12Zimri demolished Baasha's entire household, just as the Eternal had said in His message against Baasha that He gave through the prophet Jehu. 13*He did this* because of all the *abhorrent* wickedness committed by Baasha and by his son, Elah, which caused the Israelites to live sinful lives. *This wickedness* with their idols invoked the wrath of the Eternal God of Israel. 14Is not the rest of Elah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

15During the 27th year of Asa's reign over Judah, Zimri ruled for seven days in Tirzah. Everyone was encamped around Gibbethon, which was in the possession of the Philistines, *preparing to lay siege.* 16All those camped out heard the rumor, "Zimri plotted to kill the king, and he has succeeded in his scheme." So that day the entire community of Israel appointed Omri, the military leader *and Zimri's commander,* to be Israel's king *until a permanent king was given power.* 17Omri and the entire community of Israel abandoned their plans in Gibbethon and laid siege on Tirzah. 18When Zimri perceived that the city had been taken over, he *panicked and* ran into the highest fortress in the king's house and set fire to the house around him. He burned himself alive *in the house* 19because of the *abhorrent* wickedness he had committed in the Eternal's eyes. He had walked the wicked path of Jeroboam, causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. 20Is not the rest of Zimri's story—his actions and the record of his secret plot—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

21The community of Israel was split up into two *separate* groups. One group embraced Tibni (Ginath's son) as king. The

other group embraced Omri *as king*. 22The group that followed Omri *as king was more powerful and* defeated the people who followed Tibni (Ginath's son) *as king*. Tibni died, and Omri inherited the throne.

23During the 31st year of Asa's reign over Judah, Omri took over Israel's throne. He reigned 12 years—6 of those years were in Tirzah. 24He purchased Samaria Hill from Shemer for 150 pounds of silver. He developed *a city on* the hill and named the city Samaria after Shemer, the man from whom he had purchased the hill.

25Omri committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He was more wicked than any *wicked king* who had lived before him, *and there were a lot of wicked kings who lived before him*. 26He embraced the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son), causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. Their worthless gods caused the wrath of the Eternal God of Israel *to boil*.

27Is not the rest of Omri's story—his actions demonstrating his might *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 28Omri *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest in Samaria. His son, Ahab, then inherited the throne.

► Nations often have several names. The Northern Kingdom is called "Israel" after the tribes who settled there, "Samaria" after its capital city, and the "House of Omri" after its founder. Omri is considered the founder of the Northern Kingdom, even though he isn't the first king, because he establishes its capital in Samaria and is the first king buried there. In the ancient patriarchal system, the king is seen as the father of the country, so the entire nation is his household. He sees to the protection, nourishment, and advancement of his people, just as a father cares for his children. As long as the Northern Kingdom survives, it is called the "House of Omri" by many in honor of its first, and therefore greatest father.

29Omri's son, Ahab, took over Israel's throne during the 38th year of Asa's reign over Judah. Ahab (Omri's son) ruled Israel in Samaria 22 years.

30Ahab (Omri's son) committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He was more wicked than all *the wicked kings* who lived before him. 31Ahab was not content to commit the wickedness that Jeroboam (Nebat's son) had. *He went even further,* marrying *the Sidonian princess* Jezebel and offering his loyalties and worship to Baal. Jezebel was King Ethbaal's daughter, and Ethbaal was the king of the Sidonians.

32He constructed an altar in honor of Baal in Baal's temple in Samaria. 33Ahab crafted a sacred pole there as well. Ahab incited the wrath of the Eternal God of Israel more than any king who had lived before him.

34During Ahab's reign, Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho. As he put down its foundations, he buried his firstborn, Abiram, *beneath them*.

Following the common pagan practice of burying children beneath cities to ensure favor from the gods, Hiel fulfills the expectation set by Joshua for anyone who rebuilds Jericho.

As he raised its gates, he buried his youngest son, Segub, beneath them, *thinking this would ward off evil.* This all happened just as the Eternal One said it would through the message he gave through Joshua, Nun's son.*

17 Elijah the Tishbite, one of the Gilead settlers, spoke to Ahab.

► Slowly the Israelite kings are drifting further and further away from God's laws. Hoping to remedy this, the Lord sends a prophet to guide the kings. That prophet, Elijah, certainly lives up to his name, proclaiming his God (Eli) is the Eternal (jah)—Eli-jah. He uses many methods: demonstrating God's power through miracles, reminding of God's purpose through oracles, and acting out God's will through his appearance. While his guidance sometimes reminds kings of the correct path and helps them return to it,

* 16:34 Joshua 6:26

ultimately nothing he can do will stop the Northern Kingdom's destruction.

Elijah: As the Eternal lives—the True God *who gives life* to the Israelites, the God whom I serve—no rain or dew will touch the earth unless I give word.

► The Baal cult is prominent both with the monarchy and with the general populace, so Elijah's claims are extraordinary to people who believe Baal is the deity who provides or withholds rain.

2The Eternal One gave him this message:

Eternal One: 3*I want you to* travel away from this place and go east. Keep yourself hidden near the Cherith stream, east of the Jordan. 4You will have water from the stream *during this drought,* and I will tell the birds to take care of you *while you are hiding* there.

5Elijah did just as the Eternal had instructed him to do. He lived near the Cherith stream, east of the Jordan. 6The ravens *did take care of him while he was there, just as the Lord said,* bringing him a meal of bread and meat at sunrise and *another meal of* bread and meat at sunset. He *satisfied his thirst by* drinking from the stream. 7Soon the stream became dry because of the drought.

8The Eternal One gave him this message:

Eternal One: 9Get up, and travel to Zarephath. It is in the possession of Sidon, *which is outside Israel.* Remain there, *and do not leave for any reason.* There is a widow in Zarephath whom I have told to take care of you.

10Elijah got up and *immediately* traveled to Zarephath. He arrived at the city gate, and at that moment, a widow was picking up sticks nearby.

Elijah: Please bring me some water in a jar to quench my thirst.

11(as she fetched the water) Also, could you please bring me a piece of bread?

Woman: 12As certain as the Eternal One, your True God lives, I don't have any bread. *In fact, I am starving.* I don't have anything except for a bit of flour in a bowl and a few drops of oil in a jar. I was gathering sticks *when you arrived to make a fire* so that my son and I could eat one last bite of food and then die. *It's all over for us.*

Elijah: 13*I assure you that it's not over for you yet.* Don't be afraid. Continue what you were doing, but make a small bread cake for me first, and bring it here to me. Then you and your son may eat your own bread cakes. 14This is the message of the Eternal God of Israel: "The flour and the oil will not run out until the moment when the Eternal showers the earth with rain."

15She did exactly as Elijah had instructed her to do, and everyone who lived in her house had food for days. 16The bowl of flour and the jar of oil did not run out, just as the Eternal had said through Elijah.

17A little while later, the son of the woman, the house's mistress, grew *fatally* ill. His illness grew so intense that eventually he stopped breathing; *he was dead.*

Woman *(to Elijah)***:** 18*Why did this happen?* What wickedness have I committed against you, man of God? Are you here as a reminder of past sin? Is that why my son died?

Elijah: 19Bring your son to me.

Elijah then took the dead boy out of her arms, carried him upstairs to his own room, and laid him on his own bed.

Elijah: 20O, my True God, the Eternal, have You brought this tragic death upon the son of the widow who is looking after me? *If so, why would You do this to a woman who is serving You?*

21Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three different times, and he cried out to the Eternal again.

Elijah: O my True God, the Eternal, I beg you to bring this boy back to life.

► This incredible act by the Eternal One is not only for the benefit of giving back the woman's son so he could help with the support of the family, but it is also to demonstrate God's powerful hand on Elijah.

22The Eternal heard Elijah's plea, and the boy was brought back to life. 23Elijah brought the boy back down to his mother *who was waiting anxiously* in the house.

Elijah: Your son lives again.

Woman *(rejoicing)*: 24I now *fully* trust that you are a man of God and that the truth of the word of the Eternal dwells in your mouth.

18 Many days passed, and the word of the Eternal visited Elijah during the third year *of the drought*.

Eternal One: Go now, and reveal yourself to Ahab. *When you do,* I will bring rain on the earth.

2Elijah then went to reveal himself to Ahab.

During this time, there was a dangerous shortage of food in Samaria, 3and Ahab had summoned Obadiah *to come to him.* Obadiah was the coordinator of Ahab's palace and was wholly devoted to the Eternal. 4Back when Jezebel was murdering all the prophets of the Eternal, Obadiah had given 100 prophets refuge. There were *two* caves in which he hid the prophets—50 *prophets* in each cave. He provided them with food and water *during this time*.

Ahab *(to Obadiah)*: 5Search through the land, and visit all the springs *and streams* that run through the ravines; see if you can find any grass on which we can allow our horses and mules to *graze,* so that they may stay alive *for as long as possible.* Do this so that we don't have to kill our own beasts.

6Ahab and Obadiah split up the regions they were going to explore, and they both traveled in different directions *to save time.*

7While Obadiah was exploring the land, suddenly Elijah came upon him. Obadiah knew who he was—*a prophet*—and he fell on his face *before Elijah.*

Obadiah: I can't believe it's really you, master Elijah.

Elijah: 8*Yes,* it is I. Go *now, and* give this message to your king: "Elijah has arrived."

Obadiah: 9*What is the purpose of this?* Have I wronged *you or God*? Why do you put your servant in a dangerous spot with Ahab? Ahab will most certainly kill me. 10As surely as your True God, the Eternal lives, there is not a single country or kingdom that Ahab has not searched for you. Whenever a country said that you were not there, Ahab made them swear *an oath* that you were nowhere to be found. 11Now you are asking me to give him your message: "Look, Elijah has arrived." 12I don't know where the Spirit of the Eternal is going to lead you after I depart from you. In fact, I am certain if I tell Ahab *that you have arrived, He will take you somewhere else;* and if you are nowhere to be found, then I will be put to death. Since I, your servant, was young, all of my worship and devotion has gone to the Eternal One. 13Don't you know, my master, what I did during the time that Jezebel was murdering all the Eternal One's prophets? I gave 100 prophets refuge. I hid them away in *2* caves—50 *prophets* in each cave—and I provided them with food and water. 14Even after *all that I have done for the Eternal One,* you ask me to give my king the message, "Look, Elijah has arrived." He will surely kill me!

Elijah: *Do not fear for your life.* 15As certain as the life of the Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies, whom I serve, I will reveal myself to Ahab on this *very* day. *You have nothing to worry about.*

16Obadiah approached Ahab and gave him Elijah's message. Ahab *immediately* went to find Elijah.

Ahab *(seeing Elijah)*: 17There you are. *I thought I perceived* a troublemaker in Israel.

Elijah: 18*Hypocrite!* I have caused no mischief in Israel. It is you and your family who are guilty *of the very thing you accuse me of.* You have turned your back

on the laws of the Eternal *and abandoned your devotion to Him. Instead* you have given yourselves to the Baals, *the masters of pagan nations.* 19Now I want you to gather the entire community of Israel and send them to Mount Carmel to meet with me. *I have a message for them.* Be sure to gather the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of *the goddess* Asherah—the ones who fill their mouths *and stomachs* with food from Jezebel's table.

20Ahab *did as Elijah asked,* sent word throughout the entire community of Israel, and gathered all the prophets atop Mount Carmel.

Elijah *(approaching the people)***:** 21How much longer will you sit on the fence, refusing to make a decision *between the Lord and Baal*? If *you believe* the Eternal One is the True God, then devote yourselves entirely to Him. If *you believe* Baal is your master, then devote yourselves entirely to him.

All the people *who were gathered together atop Mount Carmel* were completely silent. *They didn't know what to say to this.*

Elijah: 22I am the last remaining prophet of the Eternal. Baal has 450 prophets. *Let us do a test to reveal the true quality of our deities.* 23Bring us two young bulls, *the common sacrifice to your master whom you depict as a bull.* The prophets of Baal may choose *first* which bull they want. They will *kill it,* chop it up, and *prepare it for a fire* by placing it above wood; but they will not light it. I will do the same with the other bull and prepare it *for fire* and place it above wood, but I will not light it. 24Then you call upon your god, *Baal,* and I will call upon the Eternal. The God who answers with fire is the one True God.

Everyone *liked this idea and* said, "This sounds like a worthy plan."

Elijah *(to the prophets of Baal)***:** 25You have the pick of the bulls. Take the one you want, and prepare it first because there are many of you. Call upon your god, but do not set fire to the wood.

26The prophets of Baal picked out their bull and prepared it. They called upon Baal from dawn till noon, crying out, "Baal, answer us *with fire*!" But there was no voice, no reply. *Nothing happened.* All they did was dance around the altar they had built *and cry out to an elusive god.*

27At about midday, Elijah began provoking them.

Elijah: You have to shout louder than that! The one to whom you cry out certainly must be a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming or napping or away from his *heavenly* throne. Perhaps he is in a deep sleep, and you must wake him up. *Shout louder!*

28So all the prophets of Baal began to shout at the top of their lungs *pleading with all their might.* They cut themselves with knives and swords *and spears* until they were covered in their own blood. 29Midday passed by, and the prophets of Baal kept on with their antics until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But *still,* there was no voice, no reply. No god heard them.

Elijah *(to the people)***:** 30Gather around me.

So all the people gathered around him, and he fixed the Eternal's altar that had been torn down. 31Elijah gathered 12 stones, one for each of Jacob's tribes. Jacob was the one who *wrestled with God and whom* the word of the Eternal One visited, saying, "Your name will be Israel."

32Elijah took the *12* stones and constructed an altar in honor of the Eternal One and carved a ditch out around it large enough to hold 13 quarts of seed. 33He set up the wood, chopped up the bull, and placed it on top of the wood.

Elijah *(to the people)***:** Go get four big jars, and fill them all up with water. Then pour the water out over the burnt offering and the wood. 34*Now,* do the same thing again.

And so they did it a second time.

Elijah: *All right,* now do the same thing a third time.

And so they did it a third time. 35The water covered the altar and even filled up the ditch. 36When it was time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah called out *to the Eternal.*

Elijah *(praying)***:** Eternal One—God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—reveal

Yourself on this day as Israel's God. Make it known that I serve You and have done all this because You commanded it *of me*. 37Answer me, Eternal One. Reveal Yourself so that everyone here will know that You, Eternal One, are the True God—*the only God. Do it so that everyone knows* You are turning the gaze of their hearts back *to You* again.

38Right then the Eternal One's fire landed *upon the altar*. The flames consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the ground. The flames even drank up all the water in the ditch. 39When everyone witnessed this *extraordinary power,* they all put their faces to the ground *in fear and awe and wonder*.

People: The Eternal One is the True God! The Eternal One is the True God!

Elijah: 40Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one of them escape!

So everyone grabbed hold of the prophets of Baal, and Elijah gave instruction for them to be taken to the Kishon Valley and killed immediately—*no exceptions*.

Elijah *(to Ahab)*: 41You should go fill your belly with food and water. I hear a heavy rain coming.

42Ahab *did as Elijah instructed and* went to eat and drink. Elijah journeyed to the peak of *Mount* Carmel. *There* he bowed down on the ground and placed his head between his knees.

Elijah *(to his servant)*: 43Go now, and look in the direction of the sea.

Servant *(returning to Elijah)*: *I did as you asked, and* there is nothing *in the direction of the sea.*

Elijah gave him the same instruction seven times, "Go back, *and look in the direction of the sea.*" 44*The servant did as Elijah requested each time;* and on the seventh time, he told Elijah, "A *minuscule* cloud, as tiny as the hand of a man, is ascending from the sea."

Elijah: Go *quickly,* and give a message to Ahab *for me*: "Prepare your chariot, and leave *quickly* before the rain *gets torrential and* keeps you from traveling."

45The sky became filled with dark monstrous clouds, the wind grew *wild,* the heavy rain fell, and Ahab traveled *quickly* in his chariot to Jezreel. 46The strength of the Eternal filled Elijah. The prophet pulled up his garment around his thighs and sprinted ahead of Ahab *the entire way* to Jezreel.

19 W*hen* Ahab *arrived in Jezreel, he* told Jezebel about everything that had taken place. He told her how Elijah had executed all the prophets *of Baal* with a sword, *and she became furious.* 2Jezebel sent an *urgent* message to Elijah.

Jezebel's Message: May the gods kill me and worse, if I haven't killed you the way you killed their priests by this time tomorrow. *Your end is near, Elijah.*

3Terrified, Elijah quickly ran for his life. *He traveled the length of Israel in one day* and finally arrived at Beersheba, *the southern point of God's territory,* which is in Judah. *When he arrived,* he instructed his servant to remain there *while he sought solitude*. 4He journeyed into the desert for one day and then decided to rest beneath *the limbs of* a broom tree. There he prayed *that his life would be over quickly and* that he would die *there beneath the tree*.

Elijah: I'm finished, Eternal One. *Please* end my life *here and now, even though I have failed, and* I am no better than my ancestors.

5Elijah then laid himself down under the broom tree and entered into a *deep* sleep. While he was sleeping, a heavenly messenger came and touched him and gave him instructions.

Messenger: Get up, and eat.

6Elijah looked and found a breadcake sitting over charcoal near his head. There was also a jar of water. He ate *the food* and drank *the water,* and then he lay back down.

► Often the only thing growing in the desert, the small broom tree has enough substance to save Elijah. This bush, whose limbs grow straight

up like a broom standing on its end, offers meager shade; but its oil-rich branches and roots make excellent fuel and charcoal; the thick roots travel deep into the ground and offer both water and fire. God provides for Elijah's needs—nothing more, and nothing less.

7The Eternal's messenger visited him again, touched him, and gave him more instructions.

Heavenly Messenger: Get up, and eat. Your journey ahead is great, *and you need plenty of nourishment.*

8Elijah got up and ate *the food* and drank *the water*. His body felt strong again, and he journeyed for 40 more days and 40 more nights to Horeb, God's mountain *where Moses received the Ten Directives.* 9When he arrived *at Horeb,* he walked into a cave and rested for the night.

Eternal One *(to Elijah)***:** Why are you here, Elijah? *What is it that you desire?*

Elijah: 10*As you know,* all my passion has been devoted to the Eternal One, the God of *heavenly* armies. The Israelites have abandoned Your covenant with them, they have torn down *every single one of* Your altars, and they have executed by the sword all those who prophesy in Your name. I am the last *remaining prophet,* and they now seek to execute me as well.

Eternal One: 11Leave this cave, and go stand on the mountainside in My presence.

The Eternal passed by him. The mighty wind separated the mountains and crumbled every stone before the Eternal. *This was not a divine wind, for* the Eternal was not within this wind. After the wind *passed through,* an earthquake *shook the earth. This was not a divine quake, for* the Eternal was not within this earthquake. 12-13After the earthquake was over, there was a fire. *This was not a divine fire, for* the Eternal was not within this fire.

After the fire *died out,* there was *nothing but* the sound of a calm breeze. *And through this breeze* a *gentle, quiet* voice entered into Elijah's ears. He covered his face with his cloak and went to the mouth of the cave. Suddenly, *Elijah was surprised.*

Eternal One: Why are you here, Elijah? *What is it that you desire?*

Elijah: 14*As you know,* all my passion has been devoted to the Eternal God of *heavenly* armies. The Israelites have abandoned Your covenant *with them,* they have torn down *every one of* Your altars, and they have executed all who prophesy in Your name by the sword. I am the last *remaining prophet,* and they now seek to execute me as well. *They won't stop.*

Eternal One: 15Travel back the same way you traveled here, but continue *north* to the desert of Damascus. There, I want you to anoint Hazael as Aram's king, 16Jehu (Nimshi's son) as Israel's king, and Elisha (Shaphat's son from Abel-meholah) to replace you as prophet. 17Jehu will execute anyone who escapes from Hazael, and Elisha will execute all who escape from Jehu. 18I will keep for Myself the 7,000 Israelites who have not bowed down to Baal or offered him kisses.

19Elijah journeyed to find Elisha (Shaphat's son). He found Elisha in the field where 12 pairs of oxen were being worked. Elisha was with the last pair. Elijah wrapped his cloak, *his token of spiritual power,* around Elisha, 20and Elisha abandoned his oxen and chased after Elijah.

Elisha: *Before I leave,* allow me to tell my parents goodbye, and then I will journey with you.

Elijah: Go then. *Tell them goodbye.* What have I done to you?

Elisha realizes that Elijah is questioning his devotion—will he stay with his parents or become a prophet? Elisha demonstrates his devotion to God by destroying his livelihood.

21Elisha returned, *but not to his parents.* He killed his oxen, then he used the equipment *(harness, yoke, and reigns)* to prepare a fire and cook all the ox meat. He offered the food to everyone, and they feasted.

Elisha then joined Elijah and became his apprentice.

► Elijah and Elisha are not the only prophets demonstrating God's will in Israel. At all times, but especially during wars, kings seek the advice of prophets and men of God. The messages delivered may not always guarantee God's favor, but the words are always reliable and true.

20 Meanwhile, Ben-hadad, Aram's king, gathered his entire army to lay siege to Samaria. He was accompanied by 32 other kings as well as *a large group of* horses and chariots. He waged war against Samaria. 2Ben-hadad then instructed his messengers to travel to see Ahab, Israel's king, inside the city.

Messengers *(to Ahab)*: This is a message from Ben-hadad: 3"*All of your treasures*—your silver and your gold—belong to me. Your finest wives and *healthiest* children belong to me as well."

Ahab's Response: 4It is exactly as you say, my lord and king. My life and everything that belongs to me are in your possession.

5The messengers came back to Ahab *and gave him a new message.*

Messengers: This is the reply from Ben-hadad *to your submission:* "Did I *or did I not* tell you to give me *all your treasures*—your silver and gold and your *finest* wives and *healthiest* children? *None of it belongs to you. It's all mine.* 6Now I am sending some of my servants to do a search of your house and the houses of your servants. They will be there in about 24 hours, and they will take everything that catches their eyes."

7Israel's king gathered up all the elders of Israel *and explained the situation to them.*

Ahab: I need your help figuring out what to do. King Ben-hadad is trying to cause problems. He demanded that my *finest* wives and *healthiest* children and all my silver and gold become his possession, and I submitted to his wish.

Elders and Israelites: 8Don't do what he says. Ignore him.

9Ahab then gave a new message for the messengers to take back to Ben-hadad.

Ahab's Message: Tell my lord the king, "Everything you asked at the beginning I will do, but I cannot do this *new* thing you ask of me; *it is too much.*"

The messengers left and gave Ahab's message to Ben-hadad.

Ben-hadad's Response: 10I will forfeit my life to the gods (to do whatever they please with me) if I leave even enough of the dirt on the ground of Samaria to support those who *serve and* follow me.

Ahab: 11Give Ben-hadad this message: "It is foolish for a man who is putting on armor to brag like a man who *has won a battle and* is taking off his armor."

12When Ben-hadad received this message, he was drinking with other kings in the camp. He gave *urgent* instructions to his servants: "Get *the army* ready *immediately. I've had enough of Ahab.*" The army prepared *for battle* against the city. 13About this time, a prophet entered into the presence of Ahab, who was Israel's king.

Prophet: This is the Eternal's message: "Have you laid eyes upon the great army *that has risen up against you*? *They look like an impossible opponent, but* observe what is about to take place. I am going to give you victory over them on this day. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One."

Ahab: 14*I can't comprehend how such a victory could occur. Their army is massive.* How is this going to happen?

Prophet: This is the Eternal's message: "The young officers of the provincial leaders *will do it for you.*"

Ahab: Who is going to begin the fight *and lead us into battle*?

Prophet: You are.

15Ahab then gathered up all the young officers of the provincial leaders, and there were 232 *in all*. Then he gathered together everyone else, including the Israelites. There were 7,000 in all. 16They set out at noon. While they did this, Ben-hadad was drinking alcohol excessively in the camp with the other 32 kings who served him. 17The young officers of the provincial leaders approached first. When a patrol *of scouts* Ben-hadad had sent out came back, they reported to him.

Scouts: Men have traveled here from Samaria.

Ben-hadad: 18I don't care whether they come in peace or with motives of war. Take them all *as captives,* and keep them alive!

19The young officers of the provincial leaders had left the city with their army following them. 20They proceeded to crush each man they faced. All the Arameans ran for their lives, and the Israelites went after them. Ben-hadad, Aram's king, escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. 21Israel's king pursued *the Arameans,* defeating their horses and chariots, crushing many Arameans.

22The prophet approached Israel's king.

Prophet: Go, and keep yourself fit because at the end of the year, Aram's king is going to *come back and* wage war against you. Prepare for what is to come.

Ben-hadad's Servants: 23*When we fought them in the mountains,* they won because their gods are the mountain gods. But if we fight them on flat land, then we are sure to win. 24Therefore evacuate the royal leaders, place all the *civilian* military leaders in place of the *ineffectual* royalty, 25and assemble an army exactly like the one you lost. Replace every lost horse with a new horse and every lost chariot with a new chariot. We will battle on flat land, and *we are sure to win because* we will be stronger than they will be.

Ben-hadad listened to his servants and did everything they said to do, *dismissing the royal leaders and rebuilding the army*.

26In the spring of the year, Ben-hadad assembled the Arameans and waged war against Israel at Aphek. 27All the Israelites assembled and prepared and went out to meet the Arameans *for battle*. The camp of the Israelites looked like two tiny herds of goats compared to the Aramean army which filled the entire land. 28A man of God approached Israel's king.

Man of God: This is the Eternal's message: "The Arameans have proclaimed that the Eternal is only a mountain god and not a god of the flat land; therefore I am going to give you a great victory over them. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One."

► Just as the prophets of Baal in Israel think that only their god controls the rain, the Arameans think that the Lord is only a god of the mountains. Among their pagan neighbors, where different gods control different things, it is unthinkable that there can be one God who controls everything, such as climate and land. It is exactly this misconception that God is aiming to debunk through Israel's victories. He is the One; He controls all.

29They camped out across from each other for seven days; and when the seventh day arrived, the battle began. The Israelites crushed 100,000 Aramean warriors in a single day. 30All those who escaped ran into the city of Aphek. A *great* wall collapsed on them and killed 27,000 men. Ben-hadad escaped to the city and hid himself in a secret chamber.

Ben-hadad's Servants: 31The kings of Israel have a reputation for being merciful. *Allow us to dress ourselves appropriately for surrender:* We will put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads; then we will go to meet Israel's king and hopefully salvage your life.

32*The servants dressed accordingly*. They put sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads; then they approached Israel's king.

Ben-hadad's Servants: This is a message from Ben-hadad who proclaims he is in your service: "I beg you to leave my life untouched."

Ahab: Ben-hadad is not yet dead? *I thought he had surely been killed.* He is my brother.

33The servants watched carefully and perceived this to be a sign, and they replied with surprise.

Ben-hadad's Servants: Yes*, that's right.* Your brother, Ben-hadad.

Ahab: Bring Ben-hadad *to me*.

Ben-hadad came *out of the city* to Israel's king, and Ahab allowed him to come up into the *royal* chariot.

Ben-hadad *(to Ahab)*: 34I will return all the cities that my father took from your father. Lay your own streets in Damascus, *so you may market your goods there,* just like the ones my father laid in Samaria.

Ahab: Under this covenant, I will release you.

So Ahab and Ben-hadad entered into a covenant with one another; then Ahab released Ben-hadad.

► Remember that God has given Ben-hadad to Ahab. By orchestrating Ahab's victory, the Lord reduces the power of the Arameans, whom He has used to discipline Israel, and now trusts Israel to keep Aram in check. Unfortunately, Ahab is easily bribed, tempted by Ben-hadad's offer of land and trade opportunities in exchange for his freedom. Once again it is a prophet who shows Ahab his error in abandoning God's plan by physically demonstrating how Ahab abused God.

35By the word of the Eternal, one of the prophets' sons made a request to another man.

Prophet's Son: Hit me.

Man: No.

Prophet's Son: 36Because you have denied a command of the Eternal, you will be killed by a lion the moment you leave my presence.

Sure enough, the moment the man walked away, a lion killed him.

Prophet's Son *(to another man)*: 37Hit me.

This man did as he was asked, and he bruised the prophet's son. 38The prophet left and waited on the side of the road for the king to come by. The prophet bandaged his eyes *with a cloth,* so that the king would not recognize him. 39As soon as the king was near, the prophet shouted.

Prophet: Your servant entered into the heart of war, and someone gave a man over to my possession and said, "You are the guard of this man. If he escapes, then your life will replace his life. Or you may pay 75 pounds of silver *instead*." 40Your servant became busy *with other work*—doing this and doing that—and meanwhile, the prisoner disappeared.

Ahab: You have decided upon your own judgment, and so it shall be.

41The prophet then removed the cloth from his eyes, and Israel's king recognized him as one of the prophets.

Prophet: 42This is the Eternal's message: "You have allowed the man whom I was going to kill to escape. Your life will replace his life, and your people will take the place of his people."

43Israel's king, frustrated and bad-tempered, returned to his house in Samaria.

21 After all this took place, Ahab, the king of Samaria, 2made a request to Naboth, the Jezreelite, who owned a vineyard in Jezreel right next to Ahab's palace.

Ahab: Your vineyard is near my house. *Why don't you* hand it over to me so I can make a vegetable garden out of it? I will trade you a better vineyard for it, or I can pay you, if you prefer.

Naboth: 3*I'm sorry,* the Eternal forbids that I give away any of my ancestors' inheritance, *even to you*.*

* 21:3 Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 36:7

4Ahab, frustrated and upset by Naboth's reply, went back into his house. Naboth the Jezreelite had replied, "I will not hand over my ancestors' inheritance to you." Ahab went to bed that night without eating anything. 5Jezebel, his wife, noticed this.

Jezebel: What is wrong with you? Why are you not eating anything? *This isn't like you.*

Ahab: 6I made a request to Naboth the Jezreelite: "Hand over your vineyard to me, and I will pay you for it. Or I can trade you an *even better* vineyard for it." But he said, "I will not hand over my vineyard to you. *The Lord forbids it.*"

Jezebel: 7Are you not the king of all Israel? *You can have anything you want.* Get up, and eat some bread. Let your heart be glad, for I will get Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard for you.

8Jezebel composed letters, *signed them* with Ahab's name, and pressed his seal on them. She sent all these letters to the leaders and noblemen who lived in the city with Naboth.

Jezebel's Letters: 9Declare a time of fasting *for all the people.* Put Naboth before all the people, 10and have two worthless men *with questionable morals* sit before him. Instruct these two base men to give testimony against Naboth by saying, "You, *Naboth,* blasphemed both God and the king." After *this testimony has been given,* take Naboth outside and kill him with stones.

11The leaders and noblemen of the city did just as Jezebel instructed them in the letters. 12They declared a time of fasting *for all the people* and they seated Naboth before all the people. 13The two worthless men sat in front of Naboth and bore witness against him by saying, "Naboth blasphemed both God and the king." Then they brought him outside and killed him with stones.

Two Men *(to Jezebel)***:** 14Naboth has been executed by stoning.

Jezebel *(hearing the news)***:** 15Get up, Ahab. Go and take Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard as your own—the one he would not give you for money. *It is now yours for the taking,* for Naboth is now dead.

16When Ahab learned Naboth was no longer alive, Ahab got up and made his way down to Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard to take it as his own.

► Ahab's willingness to sell himself cheaply for things outside of God's will strikes again. But this time, the true source of Ahab's wickedness is revealed. God knows that it is Jezebel, Ahab's foreign wife, who is the root of the evil. Intending to regain Ahab's devotion once and for all, God sends Elijah with His message instead of an unknown prophet. Although God's mission is successful, Elijah is left with a powerful enemy.

17Meanwhile, the word of the Eternal One visited Elijah the Tishbite.

Eternal One: 18Get up, and go find Ahab (Israel's king) in Samaria. *Naboth has been killed because of the work of Jezebel.* Right now, Ahab is in Naboth's vineyard, claiming it as his own. 19Tell him, "This is the message of the Eternal One: 'Are you a murderer and a thief?'" Tell him, "This is the message of the Eternal One: '*Beware.* The dogs will slurp up your blood in the very spot where they licked up Naboth's blood.'"

Ahab *(replying to Elijah)***:** 20Have you discovered what I have done, my enemy?

Elijah: I have only discovered what you have done because you have sold your soul to wickedness in the Eternal's eyes. 21*He says,* "I will send evil against you and blow you away. I will also separate you from every man in Israel—both free and enslaved. *You will be all alone.* 22I will destroy your house just as I did Jeroboam's house (Nebat's son) and Baasha's house (Ahijah's son). *I will do this* because your wickedness has provoked My wrath and because you have caused the Israelites to live sinful lives."

23The Eternal also has said a word about Jezebel. He has said, "Jezebel will

be devoured by dogs at the wall* in Jezreel." 24Any of Ahab's servants who die in the city will be devoured by *ravenous* dogs, and any *of Ahab's servants* who die in the fields will be devoured by *ravenous* birds of heaven.

25There was no one *in Israel* like Ahab who sold himself and decided to commit evil in the Eternal's eyes because his wife, Jezebel, manipulated him *to evil.* 26Ahab was incredibly wicked, giving his life over to idols as the Amorites (whom the Eternal handed to the Israelites) had done. 27When Ahab heard all of this, he ripped off his clothing, dressed himself in sackcloth, and entered into a time of fasting. He rested in depression, wearing only sackcloth.

28The word of the Eternal One visited Elijah the Tishbite.

Eternal One: 29Have you witnessed Ahab's repentance? He has *shed his pride and wickedness and* humbled his heart before Me. Therefore I will not send evil against his house while he is still alive; instead I will send it during the lifetime of his son.

22 Three years went by without Aram and Israel fighting at all. 2During the third year, Jehoshaphat, Judah's king, approached Israel's king.

Ahab *(to his servants)***:** 3Don't you remember that Ramoth-gilead is ours? But we have done nothing to take it back from Aram's king.

4(to Jehoshaphat) I am going to wage war against Ramoth-gilead. Will you join me?

Jehoshaphat: *I am with you.* I will do what you do. My troops will be your troops; my horses will be your horses. 5But first, ask the Eternal *for His wisdom and guidance* in this matter.

6Israel's king assembled the 400 prophets.

Ahab: Should I wage war against Ramoth-gilead or not?

Prophets: Yes, you should. The Lord will give the king victory in this matter.

Jehoshaphat: 7*I need counsel.* Is there a prophet of the Eternal present whom we can ask for advice?

Ahab: 8There is one prophet of the Eternal, but I despise him. He prophesies terrible things about me instead of good things. His name is Micaiah (Imlah's son).

Jehoshaphat: The king shouldn't speak as such; *he is the Lord's prophet.*

9Israel's king summoned a commander and gave him instructions to find Micaiah (Imlah's son) quickly.

10At the threshing floor inside the gate of Samaria, Israel's king and Jehoshaphat (Judah's king) were both sitting on their own thrones wearing *ornate royal* robes *holding court* while all the prophets were spouting out prophesies in their presence. 11Zedekiah (Chenaanah's son) had crafted iron horns for himself and spoke.

Zedekiah: This is the Eternal's message: "Take these *horns* to gore the Arameans until they are destroyed."

Prophets: 12Travel to Ramoth-gilead, and flourish. The Eternal One will hand it over to the king.

Commander *(to Micaiah)***:** 13The prophets' message is pleasing to the king. May your message be as pleasing as theirs.

Micaiah: 14As certain as the Eternal, I will say only what He commands me to say—*nothing more and nothing less.*

Ahab *(as Micaiah approached him)***:** 15Micaiah, should we or should we not wage war against Ramoth-gilead? *We need your final say either way.*

Micaiah: Do as you say, and be successful. The Eternal One will give it to the king.

Ahab: 16How many times are you going to make me ask you to give me a true message from the Eternal?

Micaiah: 17I saw *a vision of Israel. In it,* Israel was spread all throughout the mountains*, wandering aimlessly*. They were like lost sheep without a shepherd *to guide them. In the vision,* the Eternal said, "These *sheep* have no shepherd. May they all go back to their own homes *and live* in peace."

* 21:23 Some manuscripts read, "plot of land."

Ahab *(to Jehoshaphat)*: 18*Didn't I warn you?* Didn't I say that he would give unfavorable prophecies toward me?

Micaiah: 19You should heed the Eternal's message. I saw a vision of the Eternal One sitting on His throne with the heavenly army surrounding Him on all sides. 20*In the vision,* the Eternal said, "Who will be the one to entice Ahab into battle at Ramoth-gilead so he may die there?" Everyone had a different opinion *about who should do the task.*

21Right then, a spirit revealed itself to the Eternal and said, "*I will do it.* I will draw Ahab *into battle*."

22The Eternal One asked, "How *do you plan on doing this*?"

The spirit answered, "I will become a spirit of deception within the words of his prophets."

The Eternal spoke again, "*I like this idea.* You will succeed at drawing him *into battle*. Proceed *quickly*." 23Therefore, the Eternal has placed a spirit of deception in the mouths of all your prophets, and He has sent destruction upon you. *You will lose.*

24Zedekiah (Chenaanah's son) hit Micaiah on the cheek.

Zedekiah: *That's impossible.* How is it that the Eternal's Spirit communicated to you without me knowing about it?

Micaiah: 25You will understand when the time comes for you to hide in a secret chamber.

Ahab: 26*In the meantime,* take Micaiah back to Amon, the city's governor, and to Joash, the king's son. 27Give them this message: "This is the command of *Israel's* king: 'Lock this man behind bars, and give him only crumbs of bread and drops of water until I come back safely *from battle.*'"

Micaiah: 28*All right.* If you come back *alive and* in one piece, you will know that the Eternal did not communicate His message through me. All you people listen *carefully*.

29Israel's king and Jehoshaphat, Judah's king, waged war against Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab *(to Jehoshaphat)*: 30*Here's what I am going to do.* I am going to put on a disguise and enter into battle, but you are going to dress in your *normal* robes.

Fearing that Micaiah might be right, Israel's king put on a disguise and entered battle.

31Aram's king commanded the 32 captains in charge of all the chariots.

King of Aram *(to his captains)*: Don't *waste your time* fighting with any important or unimportant person. Fight only with Israel's king. *He's the one we want dead.*

32When the chariot captains laid eyes upon Jehoshaphat *and saw the robes he was wearing,* they said *to themselves,* "This must be Israel's king. *Only a king wears such robes.*" They engaged in battle with him, and Jehoshaphat screamed *for his life.* 33*To Jehoshaphat's immense relief,* when the chariot captains realized that this was not Israel's king, they left him alone. 34*In the meantime,* one warrior shot a random arrow from his bow *up into the air,* and the arrow happened to strike inside a joint of Israel's king's armor.

Ahab *(to his charioteer)*: Get me out of this battle quickly! I am hurt *badly.*

35The fighting continued throughout that entire day. *Meanwhile,* the king was propped up inside his chariot before all the Arameans, *so they would think he still led Israel,* and he died that night. Blood dripped out from where the arrow had pierced him, and it stained the bottom of the chariot. 36At sunset, word spread throughout the *entire* army: "*Israel's king is dead. Go back to where you came from.* Return to your native cities and countries."

37*Israel's* king died and was transported to Samaria where he was laid to rest. 38They cleaned the blood out of his chariot at the Samaritan pool, where all the prostitutes and promiscuous women bathed *in the blood-stained water* and the dogs licked up his blood, just as the Eternal said they would.

39Is not the rest of Ahab's story—all his actions and the ivory house and cities he constructed—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 40Ahab *left this world to* sleep with his fathers; and his son, Ahaziah, then inherited the throne.

41Jehoshaphat (Asa's son) became Judah's king during the 4th year of Ahab's reign in Israel. 42Jehoshaphat was 35 years

old when he received the throne. His reign lasted 25 years in Jerusalem. His mother was Azubah (Shilhi's daughter).
43Jehoshaphat was devoted *to the Eternal* just as his father, Asa, was. He walked the good path and did what was good in the eyes of the Eternal One. But the high places were not torn down, and everyone still offered sacrifices and burned incense there. *This wickedness still took place under Jehoshaphat's reign, though he did not inspire it.* 44Jehoshaphat also made peace between himself and Israel's king.

45Is not the rest of Jehoshaphat's story—his mighty actions and how he waged war—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 46He threw out of the country all the prostitutes who remained from his father Asa's time.

47At that time, there was no king *sitting on the throne* in Edom, only a deputy.

48Jehoshaphat crafted ships modeled after those *trading ships* in Tarshish to travel to Ophir to gather gold, but the ships never made the trip because they wrecked at Ezion-geber. 49Ahaziah (Ahab's son) made a request to Jehoshaphat: "Allow my servants to accompany your servants on the ships." Jehoshaphat refused this request.

50Jeshoshaphat *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest with his ancestors in his father's city, the city of David. Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, then inherited the throne.

51Ahaziah, Ahab's son, took over the throne of Israel in Samaria during the 17th year of Jehoshaphat's reign over Judah. Ahaziah's reign over Israel lasted two years. 52Ahaziah committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the *wicked* path of his father and mother and Jeroboam (Nebat's son) who caused the Israelites to live sinful lives. 53He gave *his heart and life* to Baal and offered his services and worship to him. This caused the Eternal God of Israel's wrath to be provoked just as *it had at the wickedness of* his father.

2 KINGS

History of the kings of Israel and Judah, from Ahaziah through Jehoiachin

Compiled by Jewish scribes in exile

01 02 03 04 05 06

Picking up right where 1 Kings left off, in the middle of Ahaziah's reign, 2 Kings continues the story of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms' on-again, off-again relationship with God. David and Solomon's United Monarchy has been divided into two nations: Judah and Benjamin in the south and the other ten tribes in the north. Both nations have a history of responding to God followed by a period of rebellion and then returning to Him. This book describes the end of that cycle, when God allows foreign powers to conquer both countries and scatter His people. The ten tribes are lost to the Assyrian Empire and disappear from record; Judah and Benjamin are taken captive by the Babylonian Empire but ultimately return to the land of Israel.

Compiled around the time of the exile that began in the sixth century before the coming of the Anointed One, this book is intended to remind future generations of the consequences of abandoning the instruction God provides in the law. The Israelites are a unique community in the ancient Near East because they believe in one God. Surrounding nations have many gods, the most famous of which are the Canaanite god Baal and his consort Asherah. As Israel becomes interconnected with its neighbors politically, they trade more than resources; pagan rituals begin to creep into Israelite life, violating God's law and angering Him. Some worship God in addition to other gods, some worship God improperly (with temple prostitution and child sacrifice), and some just abandon Him altogether. Through His prophets, and sometimes directly, God reminds Israel again and again to follow His laws, as their ancestors promised they would in exchange for His guidance and protection.

There are two great transitions in 2 Kings. First the prophetic ministry of Elijah in 1 Kings transfers to Elisha in this second volume of the book of Kings. Elisha receives a greater portion of his predecessor's influence and power. Second, both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fall to foreign armies. The Northern Kingdom finally falls to the Assyrian armies in 722 B.C. Then the Southern Kingdom falls to the Babylonian armies in 586 B.C. The obedient kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah, and the faithful prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, cannot steer the two kingdoms back to God's laws. This means the complete loss of the ten northern tribes and the exile of the two southern tribes.

1 After Ahab died, Moab *grew rebellious and* revolted against Israel.
2 *One day, King* Ahaziah *had an accident in Israel's capital city,* Samaria. He tumbled through the network shading *and decorating* his upper room and fell ill. *While he was bedridden,* he called for his messengers and sent them *on an errand to Philistia.*

Ahaziah: Ask Baal-zebub, Ekron's god, if my health is going to return after this injury.

3 *Elsewhere,* the Eternal One's messenger spoke to Elijah the Tishbite.

Eternal One's Messenger: Get up, and intercept Ahaziah's messengers. *When you meet them,* ask them, "Why are you going to ask Baal-zebub, Ekron's god, *about the king's healing?* Do you carry this message because *you believe* Israel has no God *of its own*?" 4 This is the message of the Eternal *to Ahaziah*: "*You have made your bed, and you will lie in it.* You will never leave your bed in your upper room; it will become your grave."

So Elijah went *on his way just as the Lord instructed, and he delivered this message to Ahaziah's messengers.* 5 They turned back *without completing their mission.*

Ahaziah: Why are you back *so soon*?

Samaritan Messengers: 6 A *strange* man met us *during our journey* and said, "Go back to the king whose message you carry, and give him this message from the Eternal: 'Why are you going to ask Baal-zebub, Ekron's god, *about healing?* Do you ask for this message because *you believe* Israel has no God *of its own*? *You have made your bed, and you will lie in it.* You will never leave your bed in your upper room; it will become your grave.'"

Ahaziah: 7 Tell me more about this *strange* man who met you and gave you this message. What was he like?

Samaritan Messengers: 8 The man was hairy and wore a leather belt.

Ahaziah: *I know who* this man is—Elijah the Tishbite!

9 King Ahaziah then dispatched 50 soldiers and their commander to confront Elijah. The commander approached Elijah, who was resting on a hilltop.

Commander: *Hello there,* O man of God! The king has a message for you. He says, "Come down from there!"

Elijah: 10 If I truly am a man of God, then *I'll prove it:* may a fiery blaze storm down from heaven and devour you and your 50 *soldiers.*

And *as the words were leaving his mouth,* fire rained down; and they were all burned up *just as Elijah said.*
11 Ahaziah then dispatched another 50 *soldiers* and their commander to confront Elijah.

Second Commander: O man of God! The king orders you, "Come down from there now!"

Elijah: 12 If I truly am a man of God, then *as proof* may a fiery blaze storm down from heaven and devour you and your 50 *soldiers.*

Once again a fiery blaze rained down from heaven and devoured the 50 *soldiers* and their commander.
13 Yet again, King Ahaziah dispatched another 50 *soldiers* and a third commander *to confront Elijah.* When this third commander approached Elijah, he bowed on his knees, *humbled himself* before Elijah, and begged *for mercy upon their lives.*

Third Commander: O man of God, I beg you to cherish my life and the lives of these 50 *soldiers.* May your eyes perceive something worth treasuring *rather than destroying,* for we are all at your service. 14 A heavenly fire devoured the first two commanders and their 50 *men who confronted you,* but please do not invoke the same fate for my life.

Eternal One's Messenger *(to Elijah)*: 15 Follow this man down *the mountain,* and do not fear him.

Elijah did *as the messenger had instructed,* and he followed the commander down *the mountain* to where the king was waiting.

Elijah *(to Ahaziah)*: 16 This is the message of the Eternal: "You dispatched messengers to appeal to Baal-zebub, Ekron's god, *about your healing.* Is it because *you*

believe Israel has no God *of its own* to whom you can appeal? Because you did this, you will never leave your bed in your upper room; it will become your grave."

17Ahaziah met his death just as Elijah reported in the message from the Eternal. Ahaziah did not have a son, so Jehoram inherited the throne during the second year of the reign of Jehoram (Jehoshaphat's son) in Judah.

► In this record, the compiler constantly switches back and forth between Judah and Israel, telling the history of both simultaneously. Nowhere is that more confusing than here, when both nations' kings have the same name. But the format serves two purposes: the reader gets a picture of what is happening in both regions at the same time, and the response of each nation to one event may be compared and contrasted. Who will prove to be the more faithful kingdom—the North or the South?

18Is not the rest of Ahaziah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

2 Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal when the Eternal One planned to snatch Elijah up into the heavens by *the power of* a fierce dancing wind.

Elijah *(to Elisha)*: 2I ask you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to go all the way to Bethel.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men traveled down to Bethel together, 3where Elisha was approached by the prophets' disciples who lived there.

Prophets' Disciples: Are you aware that the Eternal One is going to snatch *Elijah,* your mentor, away from you today?

Elisha: Yes, I am aware *of this. I want you to* keep quiet about it.

Elijah *(to Elisha)*: 4I beg you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to travel to Jericho.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

The two men then traveled to Jericho together, 5where the prophets' disciples living in Jericho approached Elisha.

Prophets' Disciples: Are you aware that the Eternal One is going to snatch your mentor away from you today?

Elisha: Yes, I am aware *of this. I want you to* keep quiet about it.

Elijah *(to Elisha)*: 6I beg you to remain here. The Eternal One has commanded me to travel to the Jordan *River*.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men then traveled *to the Jordan River* together.

7While Elijah and Elisha were standing near the Jordan *River,* 50 of the prophets' disciples *from that area* stood at a distance from them on the other side. 8Elijah removed his cloak and rolled it up; then he struck the water with it, and the water divided. Elijah and Elisha then walked across on dry land. 9After the two had made it to the other side *of the Jordan,* Elijah spoke to Elisha.

Elijah: Tell me what it is you would like me to do for you before I am taken away from you.

Elisha: Please, I wish to receive a double portion of your spirit. *As your successor, I want to have twice the portion of your power.*

Elijah: 10What you have requested of me is challenging, but it will be done if you witness my departure. But if you do not watch, then you will not have your double portion.

11Now as the two continued walking along and talking *as they normally did, something incredible happened.* A blazing chariot pulled by blazing horses *stormed down from the heavens and* came between Elijah

and Elisha. Then Elijah was swept up into heaven by the *fiery* storm. 12Elisha witnessed this *amazing spectacle.*

Elisha: My father, O my father! The chariots and riders of Israel!

► Elijah and Enoch (Genesis 5:24) are the only two men in the Bible to leave earth while they are still alive. Although they are separated by centuries of time, both men are inseparable from God, and both leave quite a legacy: Elijah's successor, Elisha, continues his mentor's work, even calling out Elijah's name for help. Enoch's son, Methuselah, lives longer than anyone else ever has, which is proof that he, too, lives properly.

Elisha never saw Elijah again. Elisha grabbed the clothes he was wearing, and he ripped them in half. 13-14He picked up Elijah's cloak, which had dropped *to the ground when he was taken up into heaven,* and then he went back to the Jordan riverbank and stood. He struck the water with the cloak.

Elisha: Where is the Eternal One? Where is Elijah's True God?

After Elisha struck the water, the *Jordan* River divided, *just as when Elijah had struck the waters.* Elisha then walked across *on dry land.*

15The prophets' disciples at Jericho standing on the opposite shore were watching this.

Prophets' Disciples: Elijah's *powerful* spirit now rests upon Elisha. *Elijah's cloak now clothes Elisha.*

Then the prophets' disciples *at Jericho* approached Elisha and humbled themselves before him.

Prophets' Disciples: 16There are 50 strong men along with us, your servants, who could go looking for your mentor. Perhaps the Spirit of the Eternal *inside the whirlwind* swept Elijah up *into heaven* and left him on some mountaintop or in some valley *of the lowlands.*

Elisha: That won't be necessary.

17But they kept asking his permission *for a search,* and he felt ashamed, so he finally agreed. They sent out *a search party of* 50 men who spent three days looking for Elijah, but they found no trace of him. 18The search party came back to Elisha while he was still in Jericho.

Elisha: I told you not to go. *He's gone from the earth.*

Men of Jericho: 19*Life is pleasant in this city; and* as you can see, the city is in an advantageous location, except for the water. It's contaminated, so the land is barren.

Elisha: 20Fetch me a new bowl, and pour some salt into it.

So they brought him the bowl with the salt he had requested. 21He then walked outside to the water spring and tossed some salt into it.

Elisha: This is the Eternal's message: "This water is now entirely pure. It will no longer bring death or cause the earth to be barren."

22This water has been potable ever since, just as Elisha said.

23Elisha then traveled north to Bethel *retracing his last steps with Elijah.* On his way there, a *large* group of young boys came out of the city and began making fun of him: "Keep going, baldy! Keep going, baldy!" 24When Elisha looked back at them, he spoke against them by the authority of the Eternal. *Almost immediately,* 2 female bears walked out of the forest and ripped up 42 of the young boys. 25Elisha then returned to Mount Carmel, and he went back to Samaria.

3 During the 18th year of Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah, Jehoram (Ahab's son) took over the throne of Israel at Samaria for 12 years. 2The Eternal saw that he did wicked things, but not to the same degree his parents did. He tore down *and had nothing to do with* the pillar honoring Baal that his father had crafted. 3But still, he walked the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) that caused the Israelites to live sinful lives. He never repented from his wickedness.

[4]Mesha (Moab's king) bred sheep and, as payment, he would give Israel's king 100,000 lambs and the fleece of 100,000 rams. [5]But when Ahab died, *Mesha* (Moab's king) turned against Israel's king. [6]King Jehoram left Samaria and assembled the entire community of Israel. [7]He sent a message to Jehoshaphat (Judah's king).

Jehoram's Message: Moab's king *is no longer on Israel's side. He* has turned against me. Will you accompany us in battle against him?

Jehoshaphat's Reply: Yes, I will fight beside you. What is mine is yours—my people, my horses, *everything*.

Jehoram's Second Message: [8]What path do you want to take?

Jehoshaphat's Reply: We will travel through the desert of Edom.

► Since David defeated the nation of Moab (2 Samuel 8:2), it has been a vassal state to Israel; but under their new king Mesha, the Moabites are ready to revolt. Mesha has fortified the entire country, building a temple, palace, walls, and reservoirs. Most importantly, he fortifies the northern entrance to Moab, so Israel is forced to find another way to attack. Unfortunately, the only other option is for Israel to enter from the south, and that requires marching through Judah and Edom, something that would be perceived as an act of war. By securing Judah's and Edom's cooperation in the attack, Israel does not have to worry about being attacked while traveling through their nations, and she gains allies against the impressively strong Moab.

[9]Israel's king traveled with Judah's king and Edom's king. *It was a difficult trip* that lasted for seven days, a circular route *around the territory held by Moab*. By then there wasn't any water for the army or for the livestock.

Jehoram: [10]This is terrible! The Eternal intends to hand the three of us over to Moab.

Jehoshaphat: [11]Surely there is a prophet of the Eternal One among us. *If so, let him come forth* so that we can talk with the Eternal through him.

Jehoram's Servant: Yes, there is *a prophet of the Lord among us*! Elisha (Shaphat's son)! He used to serve *the great* Elijah by pouring water on his hands!

Jehoshaphat: [12]The message *and power* of the Eternal One accompany him.

So Israel's king *(Jehoram),* Jehoshaphat *(Judah's king)*, and Edom's king went to find Elisha.

Elisha *(to Jehoram)***:** [13]What business do I have with you? *Why don't you* go to the prophets of your parents' *god*?

Jehoram: I can't because the Eternal called the three of us together in order to hand us over to Moab.

Elisha: [14]As certain as the life of the Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies, to whom I offer my life, I would pay you no attention except that I have such great respect for Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. But I have no regard for you! I will not even look at you! [15]But now, bring me a musician!

While the musician was playing, Elisha was empowered by the Eternal.

Elisha: [16]This is the Eternal's message: "Dig trenches throughout this entire valley."

[17]This is the Eternal's message: "You will not see rain *fall from the sky* or feel wind *blow across your skin,* but you will see this valley filled with water. You and your livestock will have *plenty of* water to quench your thirst!" [18]*And that's not all!* It is indeed a small thing for the Eternal One: He is also going to hand the Moabites over to you. [19]Then you will attack every fortified and prosperous city, chop down every decent tree, plug up every water hole, and use stones to destroy every healthy piece of land *along your way*.

[20]In the morning, water coming from the *higher* ground in Edom filled the entire

land around the time that sacrifices were offered.

21The Moabites heard *a rumor* that the kings were about to wage war against them, so every man who could wear armor—from young men to old men—was called *to battle* and waited at the border. 22They woke up at dawn, as *the fiery glow of* the sunrise was kissing the water. From the view of the Moabites, the water was blood red.

Moabites: 23Look! Blood! The kings have fought and killed each other, *and now their blood fills the country*. Go forth, Moab, and collect the spoil!

24But when the Moabite warriors arrived at the Israelite encampment, the Israelites jumped up and killed the Moabites. The surviving Moabites ran away, but the Israelites ran after them and killed them all. 25Then the Israelites destroyed every city, chopped down every decent tree, plugged up every water hole, and filled all the healthy land with stones *along their way*. Only the stone walls of Kir-hareseth remained *after they were finished with it,* but the men with slings later took care of these rocks as well. 26When Moab's king perceived how dangerous the battle was, he gathered up 700 of his swordsmen who tried to make their way through to Edom's king. But it was impossible.

27*Desperate to survive,* Moab's king offered *his own son,* his oldest son who was next in line for the throne, as a burnt offering *to Moab's god Chemosh* on the wall.

► Unlike the Lord, who does not allow child sacrifice (Genesis 22), the Moabites believe their god, Chemosh, responds favorably to the sacrifice of children. Seeing that he is about to lose the war, Mesha makes the greatest sacrifice he can imagine: he offers his oldest son and heir. Not only does Mesha sacrifice the future of his nation and his son's life, he believes he also sacrifices the boy's afterlife, since burnt offerings are totally consumed and no body would remain for burial. Mesha's action gives his army courage to fight, but it is the military engagement that saves his nation. Moab defeats Israel and her allies.

Then a fierce wrath swept against Israel, so they fled from Moab's king and went back to their own country.

4 The wife of one of the prophets' disciples pleaded with Elisha.

Woman: My husband who served you is now dead. He *greatly* feared the Eternal. You yourself know this to be true. The creditor is now trying to take away my *only* two children and make them into slaves.

Elisha: 2What is it that you want me to do? Do you have anything *of worth* in your house?

Woman: *I don't really have much of anything.* The only thing I have in my house *that might be of any worth* is a jar of oil.

Elisha: 3Borrow as many large empty containers as you can. Ask neighbors *for anything they can give to you.* Be sure to collect a lot of them. 4Then enclose yourself in a room with only you and your sons. Pour oil into as many of the containers as you can. Set aside the full ones.

5The widow went away from Elisha and enclosed herself in a room with her sons. *One at a time,* her sons held a container before her, and she poured. 6Soon all of the containers were filled.

Woman: Bring me another container.

Son: There aren't any left.

It was then that the oil ran out. 7The widow then went back to Elisha, the man of God.

Elisha: Now go sell the oil, and pay *the creditor* what you owe. *Then your children won't be made into slaves,* and you and your sons can live on the remaining *money*.

8One day, Elisha traveled to Shunem. There was a well-known woman who lived there, and she convinced him to eat something. So whenever he walked by her house, he went in and ate.

Shunammite Woman *(to her husband)*: 9This man, who comes by here frequently *to eat,* is a holy man of God.

[10]Can we please make a little room for him—*just a simple* setting: a bed, a lamp, a table, and a chair. That way, whenever he comes here, he can rest in his own room *and have his privacy*.

[11]Elisha went by their house *to eat* one day, and he went and lay down in the upper room. [12]He spoke to his servant, Gehazi.

Elisha: Tell the Shunammite *woman* to come here.

So Gehazi called out her name, and she came to him.

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: [13]Tell her, "You have been *fearfully* attentive to us. *We thank you* for all of your care. Now what can I do to repay you? Would you like for me to speak to the king or the military commander on your behalf?"

Shunammite Woman: *No, that's OK.* I dwell with my own people.

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: [14]Is there anything at all that I can do for her?

Gehazi: Actually, her husband is an old man, and she doesn't have a son.

Elisha: [15]Tell her to come here.

Gehazi called out her name, and she came and stood at the entrance to the room.

Elisha: [16]This time next year, *when spring is full of new life,* you will hold a son *of your own in your arms.*

Shunammite Woman: That's impossible, my lord! *You are a man of great integrity,* a man of God, so please do not deceive me, your servant.

[17]But that time next year, the Shunammite woman did conceive and deliver a son, just as Elisha said she would. [18]When the child was older, he walked out to his father, who was *harvesting the fields* with the reapers.

Son *(to his father)*: [19]My head *hurts*! My head *hurts*!

Father *(to his servant)*: Take the child *inside* to his mother.

[20]The servant brought the child *inside* to his mother; and about noon, while the boy was sitting in his mother's lap, he died. [21]She *took his lifeless body and* laid him down on Elisha's bed. She then closed the door and went away.

Shunammite Woman *(to her husband)*: [22]I beg you to send me a servant and a donkey so that I can go find *Elisha,* the man of God. *As soon as I do,* I will come back here.

Father: [23]Why is it that you are so anxious to find him today? Today is not *a holy day*—a new moon or a Sabbath.

Shunammite Woman: *Don't worry;* all will be well.

[24]She prepared the donkey and gave instructions to her servant.

Shunammite Woman: Go quickly! Don't slow down unless I tell you to.

[25]She rode *quickly* toward the man of God *who was staying about a day away* on Mount Carmel. *As she approached,* Elisha saw her at a distance.

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: Look! It's the Shunammite woman. [26]Go quickly to see *what she wants.* Ask her, "Is everything fine? Is your husband well? Is your son well?"

Shunammite Woman: Everything is fine.

[27]When she approached the man of God at the mountain, she *fell to the ground and* hugged his feet. Gehazi approached to pull her away, but the man of God stopped him.

Elisha: Leave her be. Her very soul is distressed, but the Eternal has kept her troubles hidden from me.

Shunammite Woman: [28]Was it I who asked for a son? I told you not to mislead me!

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: [29]Prepare yourself, and carry my staff to where the boy is now. Do not acknowledge any blessing to anyone on your way there. If someone speaks a blessing to you, do not respond. *When you get there,* lay my staff on the boy's face.

Shunammite Woman *(to Elisha)*: 30As certain as the life of the Eternal and your own life, I will not leave without you.

Elisha then stood up and followed her *to her house.* 31Gehazi went ahead of them and laid the staff on the boy's face, but *nothing happened.* The boy did not move or make a sound. Gehazi went back to Elisha and reported this to him: "The boy did not wake up."

32Elisha arrived at the house and saw the lifeless body of the boy lying on Elisha's bed. 33He went into the room, closed the door behind both of them, and prayed to the Eternal. 34Elisha approached the boy and lay down, placing his mouth on the boy's mouth, his eyes on the boy's eyes, and his hands on the boy's hands. He covered the boy with his own body, and warmth returned to the boy's body. 35Elisha turned around and paced back and forth in the house, then he went back into the room and covered the boy's body with his own body. The boy sneezed seven times, and then he opened his eyes.

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: 36Tell the Shunammite woman to come here.

Gehazi told the Shunammite woman to go inside the room, and she did.

Elisha: Lift up your son, *for he is alive.*

37She fell *to the floor* before Elisha's feet, bowing to the ground, *and she wept with happiness.* She picked up her son and left the room with him.

38Elisha returned to Gilgal, and he found that there was a famine throughout the *entire* country. While the disciples of the *local* prophets were sitting with him, he told his servant to find a big pot and make a big stew for the prophets' disciples.

39A man walked out into the fields to look for herbs, and he came across an uncultivated vine and picked enough wild gourds from it to fill the folds of his cloak. He chopped up the gourds and tossed them into the large pot of stew, not knowing what they were. 40Those *who prepared the stew* gave helpings of it to the men. While they were eating the stew, *they cringed and pushed the bowls away from them.* They could not eat it.

Prophets' Disciples: Man of God, this stew *is horrible!* It will be the death of us!

Elisha: 41Go bring some meal.

They brought him some meal, and Elisha threw it in the large pot *and renewed the stew.*

Elisha: Distribute this food to the people so that they may fill their *hungry* bellies.

Everyone ate it, and there was nothing wrong with it this time.

42*Sometime later,* a man from Baal-shalishah brought some food from the firstfruits of the harvest to the man of God: in his sack were 20 barley loaves and fresh produce *still in the husk.*

Elisha: Distribute this food to the people so that they may fill their *hungry* bellies.

Servant: 43Do you really think this will be enough for 100 *hungry* men?

Elisha: *Yes, do as I said, and* distribute this *food* to the people. The Eternal One says, "They will fill their bellies and still have some food left over."

44He handed out the food to them; and exactly as the Eternal One said, they ate and had food to spare.

5 Naaman's master considered him an extraordinary man. He was the military commander of Aram's army, and he had won *many important battles* for Aram by the power of the Eternal. Naturally he was greatly esteemed by his king. Naaman was a fierce warrior, but he also had a skin disease. 2Now *one time,* the Arameans went out in raiding parties and took a little girl from Israel as their prisoner. The little girl became a servant to Naaman's wife.

Girl *(to Naaman's wife)*: 3If only my master could be near the prophet in Samaria, the prophet there could heal my master's disease.

4Naaman *became hopeful, and he* went and told his king what the little girl from Israel said.

King of Aram: 5I am going to write a letter to Israel's king, and I want you to take it to him immediately.

Naaman left *with the king's letter in his hand,* plus 750 pounds of silver, 150

pounds of gold, and 10 sets of *fine* clothing. 6-7Naaman handed the letter to Israel's king, and the king read it.

King of Aram's Message: The man carrying this letter is my servant, Naaman. He has a skin disease, and I request that you heal him.

King of Israel *(ripping his clothing)***:** Who does he think I am—God? Why does Aram's king think I have the power to kill and make alive again? What *in the world* makes him think that I can heal you of your disease? It is obvious that Aram's king is trying to create trouble between us.

8Elisha, the man of God, received word that Israel's king had ripped his clothing, so he sent a message to Israel's king.

Elisha's Message: What has caused you to rip your clothing? Tell the man *who has come to you for healing* to come to me. Then he will be assured that a prophet lives in Israel.

9*The king told Naaman to go find Elisha,* so Naaman showed up at Elisha's door with his horses and chariots. 10Elisha *did not show his face to Naaman, but instead* sent instructions: "Wash yourself in the Jordan *River* seven times. *The waters will heal you,* and your skin will be back to normal. You will be cleansed." 11Naaman boiled with anger as he left Elisha. *He had come to his house expecting something much different.*

Naaman: *What is this!* I came here thinking that Elisha would come outside and call upon the name of the Eternal One his God, and that Elisha's hand would pass over my sores and heal my skin disease, *not the waters of the Jordan River.* 12The Abanah and Pharpar Rivers in Damascus are greater rivers than all the rivers of Israel *combined,* so why couldn't I just go bathe in those and be healed?

Naaman then stormed away, boiling with anger. 13Later his servants approached and spoke to him *with respect.*

Naaman's Servants: Father, if the prophet had told you to do some important thing, wouldn't you have done what he asked? Why is it difficult for you *to follow his instructions* when he tells you, "Bathe *yourself in the Jordan River,* and be cleansed"?

14So Naaman *swallowed his pride,* walked down to the Jordan *River,* and washed himself seven times, just as the man of God had instructed him to do. *There, the miracle occurred.* Naaman's *disease* was healed: his skin was as new as an infant's, and he was clean *from the disease.* 15Naaman and all his entourage went back to the man of God.

Naaman: I am convinced that there is no God who exists in the entire world like *the True God* in Israel. Please accept this gift from me, your *humble* servant.

Elisha: 16As certain as the life of the Eternal whom I worship, I refuse to take any gifts.

Naaman tried again to give Elisha a gift, but Elisha would not take it.

Naaman: 17*OK.* If you won't *take my gift,* at least allow me to take two mule-loads of earth. I, your servant, will no longer give burnt offerings or sacrifices to other gods. The Eternal One is my only God now. 18May the Eternal One forgive me when I walk into the house of Rimmon, *the storm god of Aram,* to worship there beside my master. As his first officer, *I must be by his side wherever he goes, even when he worships.* May He forgive me for bowing down in that place.

Elisha: 19Go, and be at peace *about this matter.*

So Naaman left and traveled for a while.

20*About this time,* Gehazi, who served Elisha, the man of God, had a *wicked* thought: "My master let this Aramean Naaman leave and refused Naaman's gift! *That means the gift is still with Naaman.* As certain as the life of the Eternal, I vow to go after him and try to get the gift from him myself."

21So Gehazi went after Naaman. When Naaman saw Gehazi chasing him, he stepped down from his chariot in order to greet Elisha's servant.

Naaman: Is everything fine?

Gehazi: 22*Yes,* everything is well. Elisha told me to *hurry after you and* give you this message. He says, "Two young men who are the prophets' disciples have just

arrived from the hilly land of Ephraim. I request that you give them 75 pounds of silver and two changes of clothing."

Naaman: [23]Of course. Please take 150 pounds.

Naaman then put the 150 pounds of silver in two bags, along with two sets of clothing. He secured the bags, placed them in the possession of two of his servants, and gave them instructions to take the bags *back to Elisha's house* with Gehazi. [24]When Gehazi *and Naaman's servants* arrived at the hill *where Elisha's house sat,* Gehazi took the bags from Naaman's servants and placed them in the house. He then told the servants to go back *to Naaman,* and so they went away. [25]Gehazi then went to find Elisha.

Elisha: *I've missed you.* Where have you been, Gehazi?

Gehazi: I've been here all along.

Elisha: [26]You must not be aware that I knew where you were when Naaman stepped down from his chariot and asked you *if everything was well.* Do you think you are in a place to accept money, clothes, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, and servants *on my behalf*? [27]*Because you have sought to deceive me and have deceived Naaman,* the skin disease *that was washed away* from Naaman *in the Jordan River* will now infect you and your offspring for all of time.

► Skin diseases of all kinds—psoriasis, eczema, vitiligo, and even baldness—are of great concern in God's purity laws (Leviticus 13–15). The appearance of some of these diseases makes a person ineligible to enter the temple, especially diseases with open sores and flaking skin. Israelites with such a skin disease are quarantined outside of the cities until it disappears and they become pure again. In the case of chronic diseases such as psoriasis, the sufferer is doomed to permanent exile and separation from God. What greater punishment can there be for a prophet of God?

Gehazi turned and departed from Elisha. By the time Gehazi had walked out of the room, the skin disease had entirely infected him, and his skin was as white as snow.

6 The students of the prophets spoke to Elisha.

Students of the Prophets: The place where we are staying with you is too small for us. [2]Allow us to travel to the Jordan *Valley,* cut down trees, and build a house there for ourselves.

Elisha: Go.

One of the Students: [3]Will you please travel with us, your servants?

Elisha: *Yes,* I will go *with you.*

[4]Elisha traveled with them, and they cut down trees when they arrived at the Jordan. [5]While one *of the students* was cutting down a tree, the iron *of the ax broke off and* dropped into the river.

Student of the Prophets *(to Elisha)***:** Oh no, master! *This ax is not mine!* I borrowed it!

Elisha: [6]Where did it drop *into the river*?

The man showed Elisha where *it had dropped into the water,* and Elisha took a stick and tossed it into the river. Then the iron *of the ax* floated *to the surface.*

Elisha: [7]Get your iron *out of the water.*

The man then grabbed it.

[8]Aram's king had waged war against Israel. He gave instructions to those who served him: "I want my *war* camp at this particular place." [9]The man of God sent a message to Israel's king.

Elisha's Message: Be sure not to travel through this place. The Arameans are on their way.

[10]Israel's king passed this warning on to *those in* the place the man of God had told him about. Elisha's warning saved Israel's king more than a few times. [11]Aram's king became greatly angered by this. He gathered his servants together.

King of Aram: Which one of you has *betrayed me and* sided with Israel's king?

Servant: 12It is none of us, my lord and king. The prophet Elisha, who lives in Israel, is the one who informs Israel's king of these things. *Elisha somehow knows everything you say*—even the *secret* things you whisper in your private chambers.

King of Aram: 13Find Elisha right away so that I may capture him!

The servants *found Elisha and* informed Aram's king, "Elisha is in Dothan." 14So Aram's king dispatched a great army *of warriors,* along with many horses and chariots, and they encircled the city *of Dothan* at night.

15The servant of the man of God woke up early and went outside. There he saw a *great* army, along with *many* horses and chariots, encircling Dothan.

Elisha's Servant: Ah! Master, what are we going to do now?

Elisha: 16Have no fear. We have more on our side than they do.

17(praying) O Eternal One, I ask You to allow my servant to see *heavenly realities.*

The Eternal awakened Elisha's servant so that he could see. This is what he saw: the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha. 18When the enemy approached Elisha, he prayed.

Elisha: Eternal One, I ask you to blind these people.

The Eternal blinded them, just as Elisha had requested.

Elisha *(to the blind army)***:** 19*You are wrong.* This is the wrong path and the wrong city. I will lead you to the person you are really after.

Elisha then led them to Samaria.

Elisha *(arriving in Samaria)***:** 20O Eternal One, I ask you to allow these men to see.

The Eternal awakened the men so they could see. This is what they saw: they were in Samaria. 21The king of Israel saw them.

King of Israel *(to Elisha)***:** Do you want me to slaughter these men, my father? Shall I slaughter them?

Elisha: 22*No,* do not slaughter them. Would you really slaughter men whom you have captured with your sword and with your bow? Set *the table and fill it with* bread and water. Let them eat and drink and return to their own master.

► Similar to the Elijah story but expanded, the Elisha story relates the prophet's life and ministry mostly outside the land. While Elisha is given Elijah's mantle in Palestine, most of his traveling circuit occurs "outside the land" in Phoenicia or Syria. He even makes a prophecy over Hazael the next Syrian king and enemy of Israel.

The introduction of the figure Ben-hadad (meaning "son of Hadad," who is the central Syrian god) is pivotal for the rest of the stories of Elisha and Israel. The Eternal uses Syria (also called Aram) as an instrument of divine punishment for Israel's sins. Ultimately in 732 B.C., Damascus and Syria fall under the hand of Tiglath-Pileser III. The city of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom are conquered just 10 years later.

23Israel's king *had the table set and* offered the Arameans a great feast. After they ate and drank, Israel's king told them to leave. They returned to their own master, and the Arameans stopped sending raiding parties into Israel.

24Later, Ben-hadad,* Aram's king, assembled his army and surrounded Samaria. 25There was already a famine in Samaria. Aram's king surrounded Samaria for so long that, *within Samaria,* a donkey head cost two pounds of silver and two cups of dove's dung* cost two ounces of silver.

26Once when Israel's king was walking on the wall, a woman yelled up to him.

Woman: My lord and king, help!

* 6:24 This may have been Ben-hadad's son. * 6:25 A few versions based on the Dead Sea Scrolls have suggested a vegetable dish.

King of Israel: 27How am I supposed to help you if the Eternal does not help you? *Do you expect me to miraculously get food* from *empty* storerooms or *drink* from the *silent* winepress? 28But tell me, what is bothering you?

Woman: A woman approached me and said, "If you give up your son and allow us to eat him today, *I promise to give up* my son, too, and we can eat him tomorrow." 29*So I gave up* my son, and we boiled him and ate him. But when I went to the woman the next day and asked for her son so that we could eat him, she had hidden him.

30When the king heard of this horror, he ripped his clothes. Since he was walking on the wall, everyone who looked up saw that he was wearing sackcloth underneath.

King of Israel: 31May God behead me and even worse if the head of Elisha (Shaphat's son) is still attached to his body *by the end of* today.

32Meanwhile Elisha was resting in his house with the elders. The king had sent a messenger to him; but before the messenger arrived at Elisha's house, *Elisha knew what would happen.*

Elisha *(to the elders)***:** Watch closely. A murderer's son desires my head *on a platter*. When the messenger arrives, close the door and hold it tightly shut. Certainly his master will be close behind him.

33While Elisha was telling the elders these things, the messenger arrived.

Messenger: This wickedness is from the Eternal. Why should I be patient for Him?

7 **Elisha:** Pay attention to this prediction from the Eternal. This is His message: "By this time tomorrow, 7 quarts of flour and 13 quarts of barley will sell for 11 grams *at the market* in the gate of Samaria."

2Then the king's first officer responded to the man of God.

First Officer: Even if the Eternal carved out windows in heaven, is this really possible?

Elisha: You will witness this event, but you will not be allowed to enjoy the feast.

3Meanwhile four men with skin diseases were standing and conversing near the gate entrance.

Diseased Men *(to each other)***:** Why are we just sitting around *here isolated,* waiting to die? 4If we decide to go into the city where there is a famine, we will die just the same as if we stay here. So why don't we walk over to the Aramean camp *and see if we can get some food; it is our only hope.* If we live, then we live; if we die, then we die.

5Just before nightfall, they stood up and walked over to the Aramean camp, but when they got close to the camp, there was no one in sight. 6The Lord had fooled the Aramean army. He had caused them to imagine the monstrous noise of a mighty army of chariots and horses *coming toward them.*

Arameans *(to one another)***:** *That's not just the army of Israel.* Israel's king has commissioned the Hittite kings and the Egyptian kings to war against us.

7So the Arameans ran away just before nightfall, *without any fighting taking place. God caused* them to abandon their tents, their horses, their donkeys, and the campsite, and run for their lives.

8When the diseased men arrived at the camp, they walked into one tent and ate and drank. They gathered up *all the valuables they could find*—clothes, silver, gold—and went out and hid them *in a secret place.* Then they went into another tent and did the same thing.

Diseased Men *(among themselves)***:** 9This isn't right. We have stumbled upon a good thing, and we have kept it to ourselves. If we wait until sunrise, we will surely be punished *for our silence.* Let's go quickly now to tell the palace of this news.

10So they returned to the city and called to the gatekeepers.

Diseased Men *(to the gatekeepers)***:** The Aramean camp is empty! We have just come from there, and there is not even a whisper of a man left there! The animals are still tied up, and the tents are still standing, but there is no one there!

11The gatekeepers went and told the palace about this *strange* news. 12The king woke up *and listened to the report. He was immediately suspicious,* so he explained *his theory* to his servants.

King of Israel: *I don't trust this.* I think I know what the Arameans are up to. They are fully aware that we are all starving, so they have hidden themselves in a field outside of their camp and have created a plan: "As soon as they leave the city, we will *attack them and* capture them and overtake their city."

Royal Servant: 13Allow a few men to take five of the horses that are still alive in this *miserable* city. They are already doomed to the same destiny as all the Israelites left here and all the Israelites who have already died; therefore, let's at least try to find a way to survive.

14So a few men took a couple of chariots along with some of the horses *that were still alive in the city,* and Israel's king told them, "Trail after the Aramean army, and get down to the bottom of this." 15The king's messengers traveled to the Jordan *River* and found that the trail was covered with clothing and weapons *and tools* that the Arameans had left behind in their haste. The messengers *immediately* went back and told the king *what they had found.*

16Everyone in the city went and raided the *abandoned* Aramean camp. So 7 quarts of premium flour were sold for 11 grams, and 13 quarts of barley were sold for the same, just as the Eternal had said they would be. 17The king instructed his first officer to guard the gate, but everyone ran over him at the gate *on their way to raid the abandoned Aramean camp.* He was killed, as the man of God had said he would be when the king had spoken to him.

18*You recall that* this man of God had told the king, "By this time tomorrow, 7 quarts of premium flour will sell for 11 grams, and 13 quarts of barley will sell for the same *at the market* in the gate of Samaria." 19The officer had then asked, "Even if the Eternal carved out windows in heaven, is it really possible?" Elisha had replied, "You will witness this event, but you will not *be allowed to* enjoy the feast." 20This was the truth about the officer's destiny, for he was killed at the city entrance—trampled by the *starving, miserable* citizens *of Samaria.*

8 Elisha *went and* warned the mother of the boy whom he had brought back to life.

Elisha: Get up and gather together your family and servants. Travel as far away from here as you can, and live as a resident alien. The Eternal is going to cause a great famine in the land for the next seven years.

2The woman did exactly as the man of God instructed her to do. She got up, gathered her family and servants together, and then settled in Philistine territory for seven years. 3After the seven years were over, she departed from Philistia and went back to her own land. *When she returned home,* she went straight to the king to argue that she be given back her house and her field.

4The king was speaking with Gehazi, servant of the man of God.

King of Israel: Tell me everything about Elisha. Fill me in on all the wonders he has done.

5*So Gehazi told the king everything.* Just when Gehazi got to the part about Elisha bringing the dead boy back to life, the boy's mother walked in and argued that the king should give her back her house and her field. *Gehazi's excitement was piqued by the visitor's timing.*

Gehazi: My lord and king, this is the woman *I was just telling you about.* And this is her son, *the boy* whom Elisha brought back to life!

6The king asked the woman *if this was true,* and she confirmed Gehazi's story. *She told the king every detail. The king was delighted by this story,* and he gave an assignment to one of his officials, *a eunuch,* on her behalf: "Give this woman back her house and her field, as well as all the earnings of her field that were harvested from the day that she left until now."

7Now when Elisha arrived in Damascus, Aram's king, Ben-hadad, was ill. A message arrived for the king: "The man of God has just arrived in Damascus."

Ben-hadad *(to Hazael)***:** 8Greet him with a gift *and with kindness.* Ask the man of God to speak with the Eternal One and find out, "Am I going to get well?"

9Hazael greeted Elisha with a gift *and with kindness*. He *did as instructed and* offered him many excellent items from Damascus—40 camel loads of gifts.

Hazael *(standing before Elisha)*: Benhadad, the king of Aram, who honors you like a father, has asked me to come to you and ask you, "Am I going to get well?"

Elisha: 10Yes, he will get well, but the Eternal has revealed to me that Ben-hadad will certainly die.

11Elisha held his gaze on Hazael until the prophet was ashamed, but then the man of God *broke down and* cried.

Hazael: 12Why are you crying, my lord?

Elisha: Because I am aware of all the wicked things you will do to the Israelites. You will set their strongholds on fire, slaughter their young men with swords, dismember their children, and tear open the bodies of pregnant women.

Hazael: 13*But I have no such will or power.* Am I, your servant, as low as a dog? Why do you think that I will do such a terrible thing?

Elisha: The Eternal has revealed to me that you will reign over Aram as king.

14Hazael went away from Elisha and went back to his king.

Ben-hadad: What did Elisha tell you?

Hazael: He said that it is certain that you will get well.

15The next day, Hazael grabbed the cover *off Ben-hadad's bed,* soaked it in water, and put it over the king's face until he died. Hazael then inherited the throne and reigned *over Aram.*

16During the 5th year of the reign of Joram (Ahab's son) of Israel, and when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram (Jehoshaphat's son) became Judah's king. 17When he inherited the throne, he was 32 years old, and his time as king lasted 8 years in Jerusalem. 18He lived his life as if he were a king in Israel, in the same *wicked* manner as Ahab's family. In fact, he married Ahab's daughter, and he committed *countless* deeds which the Eternal deemed wicked. 19But the Eternal refused to bring Judah to its end, because He had made a promise to David, His *loyal* servant, that David's progeny would always carry the lamp *of his presence.*

20During Jehoram's reign, Edom rebelled against Judah's rule and appointed its own king. 21Joram then traveled to Zair with all of his chariots. During the night, he awoke to find that the Edomites had surrounded his camp and chariot officers, so he fought them *and broke out. After the attack, Joram and* his people ran quickly back to their tents. 22Edom has been in rebellion against Judah ever since, even to this very day; at the same time, Libnah also rebelled. 23Is not the rest of Joram's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 24Joram *left this world to* sleep with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David; Joram's son, Ahaziah, then inherited the throne *of Judah.*

25During the 12th year of the reign of Joram (Ahab's son), Ahaziah (Jehoram's son), Judah's king, inherited the throne. 26Ahaziah was 22 years old when he inherited the throne in Jerusalem, but his reign was *short-lived: only* one year. Ahaziah's mother was Athaliah (granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel). 27He lived in the same *wicked* way as Ahab's family, committing evil in the eyes of the Eternal because he was a son-in-law to Ahab's house.

28Ahaziah joined forces with Joram (Ahab's son *and Ahaziah's own uncle*) in battle against Hazael (Aram's king) at Ramoth-gilead. There Joram was injured by the Arameans. 29King Joram went to Jezreel to be healed of his injuries, which he had received from the Arameans. *He would have plenty of scars by which to remember* the battle at Ramah where he fought against Aram's king, Hazael. Ahaziah (son of Jehoram, king of Judah) *then received word* that Joram (Ahab's son) was ill, so he went to visit him in Jezreel.

9 The prophet Elisha gave instructions to one of the prophets' disciples.

Elisha: Prepare yourself, and transport this bottle of oil to Ramoth-gilead. 2Once you arrive, find Jehu (son of Jehoshaphat, Nimshi's son). Ask him to leave his brothers, and then lead him into a more private chamber. 3Anoint his head with oil from the bottle and speak these

words: "This is the Eternal's message: 'I anoint you as Israel's king.'" Then exit through the door quickly, and do not look back.

4The young prophet traveled to Ramoth-gilead. 5When he got there, the military commanders were sitting together.

Young Prophet: I have a message for you, Commander.

Jehu: *We are all commanders.* Which commander do you seek?

Young Prophet: You, Commander.

6Jehu stood up, and he *and the young prophet* entered the house *together*. The young man anointed Jehu's head with oil and spoke these words:

Young Prophet: This is the message from the Eternal, Israel's God: "I anoint you as king over all of the Eternal's people. You are Israel's king. 7*The first thing I want* you to do is attack your master Ahab's house. Do this so that I may have vengeance for what Jezebel did to My prophets and to those who served Me. 8Slaughter all of Ahab's household, *starting with King Joram.* All the male members of Ahab's house, slave or free, will be killed in Israel. 9Ahab's household will be like the household of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) and the household of Baasha (Ahijah's son)—*ruined.* 10Jezebel will be devoured by dogs in the land of Jezreel. Her body will not be buried by anyone *because it will be torn to pieces.*"

The young prophet then opened the door and departed in haste.

11When Jehu appeared before his master's servants, *one of the commanders* questioned him.

Commander: Is everything well? What did that lunatic have to say to you?

Jehu: You should already know this man and his talk *of nonsense.*

► Jehu's hesitation before telling his commanders what has happened is understandable. These men are all servants of King Joram. By allowing himself to be anointed as king, Jehu commits treason against his king, who has been God's chosen ruler. This story parallels the ascension of David to Israel's throne: both men serve in the king's army, are anointed in private, and are reluctant to kill the king. Just as David was the fresh start for all of Israel, Jehu is God's fresh start in the Northern Kingdom.

Commanders: 12We don't believe you. Tell us what he really said!

Jehu: *Very well.* This is what he told me: "This is the Eternal's message: 'I anoint you as Israel's king.'"

13All the men quickly took off their coats and placed them before Jehu on the steps. They sounded the trumpet.

Commanders: Jehu is *now Israel's* king!

14Jehu (son of Jehoshaphat, Nimshi's son) began plotting against Joram. The entire community of Israel with Joram was defending Ramoth-gilead against Hazael (Aram's king); but *if you remember,* 15King Joram had gone to Jezreel to wait for his injuries to heal—the injuries the Arameans had given him while he was fighting against Aram's king, Hazael.

Jehu: If you really want me to be king, then do not let anyone leave this city to spread this news in Jezreel.

16Jehu took a chariot to Jezreel, where Joram was resting. *As you may recall,* Ahaziah (Judah's king) was there visiting Joram. 17The watchman was up on the watchtower in Jezreel, and he saw Jehu and his followers approaching.

Watchman: There is a large group of people approaching.

Joram: Summon a horseman to go out to the group and ask them, "Do you come in peace?"

18A horseman went out and spoke to Jehu *and his followers.*

Horseman: The king asks, "Do you come in peace?"

Jehu: *Peace?* What do you know about peace? Get behind me, and follow.

The watchman immediately *went and* updated *Joram about the situation.*

Watchman: The horseman went out to them, but he did not come back.

19Joram summoned another horseman.

Second Horseman: The king asks, "Do you come in peace?"

Jehu: *Peace?* What do you know about peace? Get behind me, and follow.

20The watchman *then went and* updated *Joram about the situation again.*

Watchman: The *second* horseman went out to them, but he did not come back either. Their force and speed is *as fierce* as the crazy driving of Jehu (Nimshi's son).

Joram: 21Prepare *my chariot.*

So they prepared his chariot; and he and Ahaziah (Judah's king) went out together, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu's *caravan* on Naboth the Jezreelite's land.

Joram *(face-to-face with Jehu)***:** 22Do you come in peace, Jehu?

Jehu: *Peace?* What *do you know about* peace when the promiscuity and witchcraft of your mother, Jezebel, are too vast to measure!

23Joram *quickly realized that Jehu intended to attack, so he* immediately turned his chariot around, quickly rode away, and yelled out to Ahaziah.

Joram: We've been betrayed, Ahaziah! *Quickly, ride away!*

24But Jehu pulled his bowstring back as far as he could. He released an arrow that struck Joram between his shoulder blades, piercing straight through his heart. Joram fell over in his chariot.

Jehu *(to his officer, Bidkar)***:** 25Pick up his body, and throw him into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite *on the eastern slope of the Jezreel hill.* I have just remembered that while you and I were riding after his father, Ahab, the Eternal revealed a prophecy concerning him: 26"I have seen the past and witnessed Naboth's blood and that of his sons as well. I will one day pay you back in this land," spoke the Eternal. So go now, pick up Joram's body, and throw him into Naboth's field, just as He has said.

27Ahaziah (Judah's king) witnessed all of this *from a distance,* and he rode away by the path to Beth-haggan. Jehu went after him.

Jehu *(calling out)***:** Send an arrow toward his chariot, *and kill him* too!

They shot him at Ibleam as he was driving up toward Gur. *But he did not die there.* He continued on to Megiddo, where he took his last breath.

28Ahaziah's servants transported him to Jerusalem in a chariot. They buried him with his fathers in the city of David. 29During the 11th year of Joram (Ahab's son), Ahaziah inherited the throne over Judah.

30When Jehu arrived in Jezreel, Jezebel was informed *of his arrival.* She put on her *best* make-up and fixed her hair, and she stuck her head out her window. 31While Jehu rode through the gate, she taunted him.

Jezebel: Is everything okay, traitor?* *Is everything all right,* you murderer of your master?

Jehu *(looking up at her window)***:** 32Is anyone *in this city* on my side? Anyone?

A few officers, *who were eunuchs,* peered down at him.

Jehu: 33*Seize her, and* throw her *out the window*!

They did as he instructed and threw her out *the window*. Her blood splattered everywhere—*on the ground,* on the wall, on the horses. He rode his horse over her and pounded her into the ground.

34He then went inside to eat and drink. *After he had his fill, he gave instructions.*

Jehu: *Go take care of the mess outside.* Give the accursed woman a *proper*

* 9:31 Hebrew, *Zimri*

burial. After all, she was a royal daughter.

35They went out to *clean up the mess and* bury her body; but *when they got there, they found a most haunting sight.* All that remained was her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands. 36They went back and told Jehu this news, and he explained it to them.

Jehu: This is the Eternal's message which He gave through the prophet Elijah the Tishbite: "Jezebel will be devoured by dogs in the land of Jezreel.* 37Her body will be *so gruesome that it will be* like a pile of dung on the surface of a field in the land of Jezreel. *No one will recognize the remains.* No one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'"

10 Ahab had *many* sons in Samaria—70 in all. *This is how Jehu got the best of them:* Jehu wrote *many* letters to Samaria—to the leaders in Jezreel, the elders, as well as the caretakers of Ahab's children.

Jehu's Letter: 2When you receive this letter, you will be in the company of Ahab's sons; and at your fingertips, *you will have all the force you need*—chariots, horses, weapons, and a fortified city. 3So choose the best and strongest son of your *late* master to inherit the throne, and then go fight *with honor* for your master's household.

4The leaders of Jezreel became immensely afraid *because of Jehu's letter.*

Leaders of Jezreel: If two mighty kings cannot survive this man, is it possible for us to survive him?

5*All the leading citizens of Jezreel*—leader of the city, house managers, elders, and the children's guardians—sent a letter back to Jehu.

Leaders' Letter: *Mighty Jehu,* consider us all your servants. We will do anything you ask. *But know this,* we are not going to give the throne to one *of Ahab's sons. We hand this matter over to you and wish only for* you to do what you think is best.

Jehu's Reply: 6*Prove yourselves.* If you have truly given yourselves over to my service and will do as I say, then *I command you to* behead Ahab's sons and bring *the heads* to me at Jezreel this time tomorrow.

All 70 of Ahab's sons lived with the chief men in the city, who were their guardians. 7After the leaders of Jezreel read Jehu's *second* letter, they beheaded all 70 of Ahab's sons. *It was a horrific slaughter!* They then placed all the heads in baskets and transported the *blood-drenched* baskets to Jezreel, so that Jehu would have proof *of their obedience to him.*

Servant ***(to Jehu)*****:** 8The heads of the *late* king's sons have arrived.

Jehu: Make two piles of them at the gate entrance, and leave them there until dawn.

9Dawn arrived, and Jehu addressed everyone.

Jehu: I speak to you who are innocent! I am responsible for slaughtering my king, but who is responsible for this slaughter? 10The word of the Eternal One is unbreakable. All that He has said would happen to Ahab's household has happened. His servant Elijah *the prophet* was His *true* messenger, *a true man of God!*

11Jehu slaughtered everyone who belonged to Ahab's household in Jezreel. He slaughtered *all who knew Ahab*—the mighty men *of the city,* the priests, and *even mere* acquaintances. There was not a single person left alive who knew Ahab.

► Whenever a king dies, there is always some struggle over who should follow him. Even when King David died, his successor was unclear (1 Kings 1). Since Jehu is not related to Ahab, he does not have a blood right to the throne; and since Jehu takes it by force, he must keep it by force. The best way to make sure none of Ahab's family and acquaintances conspire against him is to kill them all.

* 9:36 1 Kings 21:23

12*For example,* on his way to Samaria, when Jehu was with the shepherds at Beth-eked, 13he met some relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah.

Jehu: Do I know you?

Ahaziah's Relatives: We are related to Ahaziah. We are here to meet the king and queen's sons.

Jehu: 14Seize them!

They seized Ahaziah's relatives, and they slaughtered them at the ditch of Beth-eked. There were 42 men *slaughtered that day*. Not a single man was left alive. *No mercy was shown.*

15Jehu left *in his chariot,* and he was met by Jehonadab (Rechab's son).

Jehu: I have no grievance against you. Do you have a problem with me?

Jehonadab: No. *I am at peace with you, as you are at peace with me.*

Jehu: If you truly are *at peace with me,* then offer your hand to me.

Jehonadab offered his hand to Jehu, and Jehu lifted him up into the chariot.

Jehu: 16You're coming with me. You will witness my zeal for the Eternal One.

So the two rode off together in Jehu's chariot. 17When they arrived in Samaria, Jehu slaughtered every person who was *at all* connected to Ahab. Finally every remnant of Ahab was erased *from the earth. This all happened exactly* as the Eternal said it would when He gave His message through Elijah.

18*For Jehu's next ingenious move,* he assembled everyone.

Jehu: Ahab served Baal a little, but *I,* Jehu, will serve him much more! 19Quick! Assemble all of Baal's *servants together*—his prophets, priests, and worshipers—so they can witness the great sacrifice I am going to offer Baal. If any of Baal's servants do not attend *this sacrificial gathering,* they will be slaughtered.

► Several cultures in the ancient Near East worshiped gods named Baal, which literally means, "lord." Baal began as a local Canaanite god of thunder and rain long before the Hebrews entered Canaan, but his cult spread to other nations and changed in each of them. One thousand years later, under Jezebel's influence, these Israelites are worshiping the Phoenician Baal, whom they consider the highest god and creator of the universe.

Jehu only said this sly thing so that he might slaughter Baal's servants *all in one attack.*

Jehu: 20Purify the sacred gathering for Baal.

They did as they were told.

21Jehu spread the word *of this sacred gathering* throughout all of Israel. Every single one of Baal's worshipers *in the entire land* attended. Everyone assembled inside the temple of Baal, and it was packed from wall to wall. *Jehu continued pretending he was devoted to Baal.* 22He gave instructions to the wardrobe manager.

Jehu: Bring out the proper robes to all of Baal's worshipers.

The wardrobe manager *did as Jehu instructed and* brought out the *proper* clothing to everyone.

23Jehu was accompanied by Jehonadab (Rechab's son) as he entered the temple of Baal. Jehu gave a *strict* command to Baal's worshipers.

Jehu: Look among yourselves, and make sure that none of the Eternal's servants have slipped in *without us noticing. This is very important.* There should be no one but Baal's servants *within this room.*

24All of Baal's servants began to give offerings and sacrifice burnt offerings *to Baal.* Outside *the temple of Baal,* Jehu had stationed 80 soldiers. He gave them *strict* instructions.

Jehu: *Kill them all without mercy.* If you let anyone escape, then you will die in his place.

25Jehu offered a burnt offering *for show*; and after he finished with it, he gave

the command to the soldiers and their officers.

Jehu: *It's time.* Go inside *quickly,* and be sure to slaughter *every last one of* them. Don't let any escape alive.

Needless to say, when the soldiers enter the place of burnt offerings, all of Baal's servants are shocked and horrified by the attack.

The soldiers slaughtered every one of Baal's servants with the sword—*one by one. After the massacre was over,* the soldiers and the officers then tossed the corpses outside of Baal's temple. *When they had removed all of the corpses,* they entered the inner chamber. 26There they *tore down and* removed the sacred pillars from this pagan temple, and they set them on fire. 27They tore down Baal's sacred pillar and proceeded to tear down the rest of Baal's temple. *Ever since then,* that place has been designated as a latrine, even to this day.

28And that is the story of how Jehu exterminated Baal worship from the community of Israel. 29But Jehu emulated the wickedness of Jeroboam (Nebat's son)—causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. He did not turn away from the golden calves in Bethel and in Dan.

Eternal One *(to Jehu)***:** 30I commend you for your good work. You have honored Me by destroying Ahab's household as I desired. I am going to reward you by allowing your sons, until the fourth generation, to reign over Israel.

31*After all that Jehu had done, and even after the Lord had honored him,* he fell from the higher path, from the ways of the Eternal. His whole heart did not belong to Israel's God. He walked the wicked path of Jeroboam, causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

32During that time, the Eternal One began reducing the territorial holdings of Israel.

Hazael and his Aramean army are the human instrument for this act of divine judgment.

Hazael conquered these sections throughout the land of Israel—33all territories east of the Jordan *River* (where the Gileadites, the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites lived), from Aroer (near the Arnon Valley) *north* to Gilead and Bashan as well.

34Is not the rest of Jehu's story—his accomplishments and his actions—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 35Jehu *left this world to* sleep with his fathers, and he was laid to rest in Samaria. His son, Jehoahaz, then inherited the throne. 36Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria for 28 years.

11 When Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, found out that Ahaziah had been killed, she saw to it that the rest of the royal offspring were killed.

► Athaliah acts as many of the other monarchs and kills potential rivals so no one can challenge her ascension to the throne. But one of the royal offspring survives, and this is how it happens:

2Jehosheba, King Joram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister *and wife of Jehoiada the priest,* took *one of* Ahaziah's sons, Joash,* away from the rest of the royal offspring who were being killed; and she hid him in the bedchamber *of the temple priests where he would be safe* with his nurse. By hiding him from Athaliah, Jehosheba ensured his survival. 3Joash and his nurse lived secretly in the Eternal's temple for the six years Athaliah ruled Judah.

4During the seventh year, Jehoiada summoned the commanders of the Carites' divisions and of the soldiers; and he gave them instructions to meet him in the Eternal's house. There in the temple, Jehoiada entered into a covenant with them and made them swear *to honor it.* Then he revealed Ahaziah's son, *Joash,* to them.

Jehoiada: 5This is what we will do: I am commanding it. On the Sabbath *when you are on duty,* I want a third of you men to guard the palace, 6another third to stand guard at the gate of Sur, and the remaining third to stand guard at the

* 11:2 Throughout 2 Kings 11–13 Joash and Jehoash are the same Judean king.

gate that is *directly* behind the soldiers. The first third must *be unfaltering in* watching the palace. 7The other two-thirds, who normally go off duty on the Sabbath, must also be alert and keep a close watch over the Eternal's temple for the sake of the king. 8*When the time is right,* all of you are to take your weapons in hand and encircle the king. Kill anyone who tries to break through the circle *to get to the king.* Stay near the king wherever he is—whether he is coming or going. *He must be left untouched.*

9All the commanders of hundreds did exactly as Jehoiada the priest had instructed them to do. The commanders gathered their men coming on duty and going off duty on the Sabbath and brought them to Jehoiada the priest. 10The priest handed out King David's spears and shields to all the commanders, *the weapons* that were kept in the Eternal's temple. 11Then all the protectors took up their weapons *and went to their posts*—on the right and left of the palace, by the temple and its altar, and around the king.

Jehoiada arranges everything so that the route from the palace to the temple is blocked.

12Jehoiada then escorted the king's son and placed the crown atop his head. He gave him the testimony *of dedication,* and he anointed Joash as king. *In that moment, his kingship was made official.* Then every one clapped and cheered.

People: May King *Joash* live *forever*!

13Athaliah heard the *loud* noise that the guards and the people were making, and she went to meet everyone who was in the Eternal's temple. 14*When she got there,* she looked over and saw the *new* king standing by the *sacred* pillar, according to tradition. The commanders and trumpeters were standing next to him. Everyone was celebrating and blowing their trumpets. When Athaliah perceived all of this, she tore her garments.

Athaliah: Treason! Treason! *All of you are treacherous traitors!*

15Jehoiada the priest was in charge of all the commanders of hundreds who were in charge of the army units.

Jehoiada: Make her come stand among the ranks, *and we shall see who is on her side.* Kill anyone who follows her *or shows loyalty to her.*

Because the priest had warned, "Do not spill her blood in the Eternal's temple," 16they grabbed her and escorted her to the palace entrance that was used by mounted riders, and they executed her there.

17Jehoiada then entered into a covenant between the Eternal, the king, and the people: the king and his people would belong to the Eternal and live as God's people, and the people would accept Joash as their king. 18*Immediately after the covenant was made,* everyone in the country rushed over to Baal's temple and demolished it. They destroyed Baal's altars and shattered everything made in his image. They slaughtered Mattan, Baal's priest, right in front of the altars. Jehoiada then designated *special* guards to protect the Eternal's temple. 19He gathered up the commanders of hundreds of the Carites' divisions, the soldiers, and everyone in the entire country. They escorted the king from the Eternal's temple to the palace and then traveled *together* through the soldiers' gate. King Joash then sat upon the throne. 20Everyone in the entire country was glad, and the *entire* city was calm *and at peace.* They had put an end to Athaliah by killing her with a sword at the palace.

21Jehoash* was *only* seven years old when *all this took place and* he began to reign.

12 During Jehu's seventh year, Jehoash inherited the throne in Jerusalem. His reign lasted for 40 years. His mother was Zibiah of Beersheba. 2Jehoash was righteous in the Eternal's eyes during the entire time he was mentored by Jehoiada the priest. 3But the high places remained. *They were not destroyed,* and people still went to them to offer sacrifices and burn incense.

► The "high places" where the Israelites worship the Lord start out as pagan shrines. When Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem, he converts those high places to shrines—honoring both the Eternal

* 11:21 Or Joash

of Israel and the foreign deities that are worshiped by his many wives and concubines—so the northern tribes don't have to travel so far to worship and so the locals can retain some of their heritage. Unfortunately Solomon's attempt to grow the worship of God in the north produces odd cults that blend worship of the Lord with worship of other gods at these high places. No matter how good a king is, if he leaves the high places standing, then he isn't fully committing his nation to God and there must be repercussions.

Jehoash *(to the priests)***:** 4Any money that comes into the Eternal's house, any monetary offerings that a man is led to give—money for sacred things, census fees, personal vows, and goodwill offerings—5belong to the priests, from the contributors, so they can repair what needs to be repaired in the Eternal's temple.

6During King Jehoash's 23rd year, *the Eternal One's temple was only getting worse because* the priests had not *used any money to* repair the Eternal One's house. 7So King Jehoash questioned Jehoiada and the other priests.

Jehoash: Why have you not made the needed repairs for the *Lord's* temple? *The dilapidations are only getting worse.* Don't take any more money from anyone. Use all the money that has been collected *already* to repair the Eternal's house *immediately*.

8The priests agreed they would not take any more monetary offerings from anyone, and they would not repair the Eternal's temple.

9-10Jehoiada the priest gouged a hole in the lid of a chest and set it next to the altar. He put it on the right side *of the altar,* so that everyone walked past it as they entered into the Eternal's temple. The priests who stood at the entrance placed all the monetary offerings that were carried into the Eternal's temple into the chest. When the chest was almost full, the king's secretary and the high priest counted the money and placed it into separate bags. 11They handed the money to the workers who took care of the Eternal's temple, and then handed out money to the carpenters and builders who repaired it, 12and they also gave some of the money to the masons and stonecutters who paid for the wood and carved stone and other materials that went into repairing the Eternal's temple. 13None of the monetary offerings that were given to the Eternal's temple were used to make silver cups, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, gold vessels, or silver vessels. 14All the money went to those who repaired the Eternal's temple for their work. 15The priests did not ask for any *receipts or* documentation to be made of the financial handlings. The workers were *completely* trustworthy *and did not cheat.* 16Any monetary offerings—be they guilt offerings or sin offerings—still belonged to the priests and were not carried into the Eternal's temple.

► With the exception of a burnt offering, which is totally consumed and dedicated to God, all offerings are shared among the priests. They keep money that is donated, and they eat parts of the meat and bread offerings as their meals. In spite of the new restrictions, they are allowed to keep the portion given to them in the law.

17Meanwhile Hazael (Aram's king) was fighting Gath *in Philistia,* and he took the *entire* city captive. Then he put his sights on Jerusalem. 18Jehoash, Judah's king, gathered up all the sacred articles that his ancestors, Judah's kings—Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah—had consecrated, as well as all the many articles he himself had consecrated. He gathered up all the gold in the treasuries in the Eternal's temple and in the palace, and he sent it all to Hazael, Aram's king. After that, Hazael departed from Jerusalem.

19Is not the rest of Jehoash's* story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 20Those who served Joash plotted against him, and they killed him at the house of Millo while he was on his way to Silla.

* 12:19 Throughout 2 Kings 11–13 Joash and Jehoash are the same Judean king.

21Joash's own servants, Jozacar
(Shimeath's son) and Jehozabad (Shomer's
son) were the ones who assassinated him.
They laid him to rest with his ancestors
in the city of David. Joash's son, Amaziah,
then inherited the throne.

13 When Joash, son of Ahaziah
and king of Judah, had ruled
Judah 23 years, Jehoahaz (Jehu's
son) succeeded his father as king of Israel
in Samaria. He sat upon the throne for
17 years. 2Jehoahaz committed evil in the
Eternal's eyes. He walked the wicked path
of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) causing the
Israelites to live sinful lives. Jehoahaz did
not abandon Jeroboam's sins.

3The Eternal's wrath burned against
Israel, and He handed them over to
Hazael, Aram's king, and to Ben-hadad,
Hazael's son. 4Jehoahaz begged for the
Eternal One to hear him, and the Eternal
granted his desperate request and lis-
tened to him. He perceived the suffering
of Israel, and He knew how Aram's king
caused that suffering. 5The Eternal One
sent a savior, so that they escaped from
the rule of the Arameans. The Israelites
then went back to living in their own
tents. 6Even though *they escaped from the
Arameans,* the Israelites continued walk-
ing the wicked path that they had learned
from the family of Jeroboam—the path
that caused the Israelites to live sinful
lives. The sacred poles were not demol-
ished in Samaria either. *They remained
standing and in use.* 7Jehoahaz's army *was
decimated. He* was left with only 50 horse-
men, 10 chariots, and 10,000 foot soldiers
at most. Aram's king had killed everyone
else. They were trampled like dust on the
ground.

8Is not the rest of Jehoahaz's
story—his actions and lasting legacy—
documented in the book of the chronicles
of Israel's kings? 9Jehoahaz *left this world to*
sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest
in Samaria. His son, Joash, then inherited
the throne.

10During the 37th year of Joash of
Judah's reign, Jehoash (Jehoahaz's son)
inherited the throne of Israel in Samaria.
His reign lasted 16 years. 11He committed
evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the
wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son)—
causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

12Is not the rest of the story of Joash
(King of Israel)—his actions and his
courage toward Amaziah, Judah's king—
documented in the book of the chronicles
of Israel's kings? 13Joash *of Israel left this
world to* sleep with his fathers and was
laid to rest in Samaria with Israel's kings.
Jeroboam then inherited the throne.

14Now Elisha was sick with a termi-
nal illness; and Joash, Israel's king, came to
visit him. He cried over Elisha,

Joash quotes the prophet Elisha's own words to Elijah before he ascended.

Joash: My father, O my father! The chari-
ots and riders of Israel!*

Elisha: 15*Quickly* find a bow and some
arrows.

Joash *did as Elisha instructed and* brought
a bow and some arrows *back to Elisha's
bedside.*

Elisha: 16Now grip the bow *tightly.*

So Joash gripped the bow, and Elisha
placed his hands over the king's hands.

Elisha: 17Now open the window facing
east.

So Joash opened the window.

Elisha: Now launch the arrow *as far as
you can*!

So Joash *drew back the bow and* launched
the arrow *as far as he could.*

Elisha: That was the Eternal's victory
arrow! You will crush the Arameans at
Aphek! *You will do more than just win;*
you will ruin them! 18(pausing) Here,
take these arrows.

So Joash took the arrows.

Elisha: Hit the ground *with them.*

So Joash hit the ground three times and
stood up. 19But the man of God became
angry at this.

Elisha: *You only hit the ground three times!*
If you had hit the ground five or six
times, then you would have completely
ruined the Arameans. But *because you*

* 13:14 2 Kings 2:12

only hit the ground three times, you will only defeat Aram three times.

20Elisha then died and was laid to rest.

The Moabite bandits used to storm the land every spring. *It was expected by the people.* 21*During the springtime,* while a group of men were out burying a man, they spied a gang of bandits *approaching them. They became afraid,* so they threw the dead man's body into Elisha's grave. As soon as the dead man's body touched the bones of Elisha, the dead man *miraculously* came back to life and stood up.

► This miracle, which is unlike anything else in the Bible, must have happened years after Elisha's death if nothing is left but his bones. Obviously this demonstrates the amazing power Elisha must have had in life, if simple contact with his remains revives a dead man. The demonstration of Elisha's power, however, is not the author's primary intention as he records this story. This story is an illustration of what's about to happen in Israel; a renaissance is coming through their king, Joash.

22Hazael, Aram's king, persecuted *and abused* the Israelites all during Jehoahaz's reign. 23But the Eternal One was gracious and compassionate toward them. *He was good* and turned *his face* to them because of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Eternal, *true to His promise,* had protected them and remained near them until now.

24After Hazael (Aram's king) died, his son, Ben-hadad, inherited the throne. 25Jehoash, *the king of Israel and* Jehoahaz's son, captured the same cities from Ben-hadad (Hazael's son) that Ben-hadad had captured from his father, Jehoahaz. Joash crushed him and delivered Israel's cities three different times *just as Elisha had prophesied.*

14 During the second year of Joash (son of Joahaz, Israel's king), Amaziah (son of Joash, Judah's king) inherited the throne *in Judah.* 2Amaziah was 25 years old when he took the throne, and he sat upon it in Jerusalem for 29 years. Amaziah's mother was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. 3Amaziah did what was good in the Eternal's eyes, but not to the extent that his forefather David had. Amaziah was a lot more like his father, Joash, *than he was like David, for he was not as devoted to the Lord as David was.* 4But the high places were not destroyed. *They remained standing,* and everyone continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

5As soon as Amaziah inherited the throne, he crushed all the servants who participated in the assassination of his father, King *Joash.* 6But he left the sons of the murderers alive because of the Eternal's command written in Moses' book of laws, "Fathers should not be killed because of *the sins of* their sons, and sons should not be killed because of *the sins of* their fathers. Every man is to be held accountable for his own sins."*

7Amaziah crushed 10,000 Edomites *while fighting* in the valley of Salt, and he won Sela in battle and renamed it Jok-theel. That name remains today.

8Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, Israel's king, who was the son of Jehoahaz (Jehu's son).

Amaziah's Message: *Let's see how brave you are; I challenge you to* come meet me face-to-face.

Jehoash's reply: 9There was a thornbush in Lebanon that said to the cedar tree in Lebanon, "Hand your daughter over to my son as a wife." But a wild animal in Lebanon walked by *about that time* and destroyed the thornbush.

10You have crushed Edom, but your heart has become swollen with pride. Take pleasure in what you have already won, and delight in your home *for a while.* Why would you want to stir up unnecessary troubles and have yourself and Judah taste defeat?

11But Amaziah *was stubborn and* did not listen *to Jehoash's advice.* So Jehoash (Israel's king) went to meet Amaziah (Judah's king) face-to-face at Beth-shemesh, in the land of Judah. 12Israel won the victory, and Judah was left defeated. Then both went back to their own tents. 13Jehoash (Israel's king) took Amaziah (Judah's king) captive at Beth-shemesh and brought him to Jerusalem. Jehoash demolished a

* 14:6 Deuteronomy 24:16

large part of the Jerusalem Wall—from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, 600 feet in all. 14He then took possession of all *the precious valuables he could find*—the gold, silver, and objects that were in the Eternal's temple and in the king's palace treasuries. He also took hostages and then went back to Samaria.

15Are not the remainder of Jehoash's deeds—his mighty actions and how he defeated Amaziah (Judah's king)—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 16Jehoash *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest in Samaria with Israel's kings. His son, Jeroboam, then inherited the throne *in Israel*.

17Amaziah (Joash's son), king of Judah was alive for 15 years after the death of Jehoash (Jehoahaz's son), king of Israel. 18Is not the rest of Amaziah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 19They plotted against him in Jerusalem, and he ran away to Lachish. But they followed after him to Lachish and killed him. 20They brought his body back to Jerusalem on horses, and they buried him with his ancestors in the city of David, *as was tradition*. 21Everyone in Judah raised up his 16-year-old son, Azariah, to be king. Azariah then inherited his father's throne. 22After his father *left this world* to sleep with his fathers, Azariah rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah.

23During the 15th year of Amaziah (Joash's son), Jeroboam (Jehoash's son) inherited Israel's throne in Samaria. Jeroboam's reign lasted 41 years. 24Jeroboam *(Joash's son)* committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. 25He reinstated Israel's border from the Hamath entrance *to Aram* all the way to the Arabah Sea. *He did this* exactly as the Eternal One, the True God of Israel, had said through his servant, the prophet Jonah (Amittai's son) who was from Gath-hepher.

► Several of the prophets whose writings are included in the Old Testament are active at this time. While the writings of Jonah do not relate to these events, many of the other prophets' works do. Amos and Hosea are both prophesying to the Northern Kingdom, warning them to return to God or else their nation will be destroyed. Joel, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah are doing the same thing in the Southern Kingdom, while Isaiah and Micah really get around, prophesying to both kingdoms.

26The Eternal One observed Israel's intense, bitter suffering whether they were free men or slaves. There was no one who came to the aid of Israel. 27The Eternal had not said He would erase the *reputation or* remembrance of Israel from under heaven, so He rescued them through Jeroboam (Joash's son).

28Is not the rest of Jeroboam's story—how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel* through his military exploits—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? 29Jeroboam *left this world to* sleep with his fathers, including Israel's kings. His son, Zechariah, then inherited the throne.

15 During the 27th year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Azariah (Amaziah's son) inherited the throne of Judah. 2Azariah was only 16 years old when he inherited the throne, and his reign in Jerusalem lasted 52 years. His mother was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 3He did what was good in the Eternal's eyes and followed in the footsteps of his father, Amaziah.

4But the high places remained. They were not destroyed, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. 5*Sadly,* the Eternal One afflicted the king with a skin disease until his dying day. He lived in a quarantined house *so that he would not make anyone else ritually unclean;* and his son, Jotham, took care of Azariah's household and acted as judge over all the people in Judah.

6Is not the rest of Azariah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 7Azariah *left this world to* sleep with his fathers, and his body was laid to rest with his ancestors in the city of David, *as was tradition*. Azariah's son, Jotham, then inherited the throne.

* 14:28 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

[8]During Azariah's 38th year as king of Judah, Zechariah (Jeroboam's son) inherited the throne of Israel in Samaria. His reign only lasted six months. [9]He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes, just as those who reigned before him did. He walked the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. [10]Shallum (Jabesh's son) plotted against Zechariah and assassinated him in front of everyone. Shallum then inherited the throne.

[11]Is not the rest of Zechariah's story—*his actions and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

[12]This is the promise that the Eternal One had given to Jehu: "Your sons, until the fourth generation, will reign over Israel." And that is exactly what happened.

The Eternal One keeps His promise. Four generations after Jehu ruled—Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam, and Zechariah—Jabesh's son ends the dynasty.

[13]Shallum (Jabesh's son) took over the throne during the 39th year of Uzziah *(also known as Azariah),* Judah's king. Shallum's reign lasted one month in Samaria. [14]Menahem (Gadi's son) arrived in Samaria from Tirzah and assassinated Shallum (Jabesh's son). Menahem then inherited the throne. [15]Is not the rest of Shallum's story—including the coup he planned—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

[16]Menahem then attacked Tiphsah and everyone who was living there, all the way to Tirzah. He *savagely* attacked them because they would not let him in. He, *in a nightmarish act,* tore apart every pregnant woman *he could find*.

[17]During Azariah's 39th year as Judah's king, Menahem (Gadi's son) took over Israel's throne in Samaria. His reign lasted 10 years. [18]He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

[19]Tiglath-pileser,* Assyria's king, waged war against Israel, but Menahem *tried to* pay tribute with 37 tons of silver so that Tiglath-pileser would help make Menahem's rule stronger *and save Israel from invasion*. [20]Menahem gathered the money from all the rich people in Israel. He took 20 ounces of silver from each person and gave it to the Assyrian king. After *he had received all the money,* the Assyrian king went back to Assyria.

► Tiglath-pileser III is one of Assyria's strongest kings. After seizing the throne during a civil war in 745 B.C., he sets out on a wildly successful campaign, enlarging Assyria's sphere of influence from the northern part of the Northern Kingdom all the way to Babylon. As Assyria grows, its army grows because Tiglath-pileser incorporates the conquered people into his army. He cannot be stopped. He lays the groundwork for his son, Shalmaneser V, who will continue campaigning and actually conquer the Northern Kingdom, deporting Israelites to other parts of the Assyrian Empire.

[21]Is not the rest of Menahem's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings? [22]Menahem *left this world to* sleep with his fathers. Menahem's son, Pekahiah, then inherited the throne.

[23]During Azariah's 50th year as king of Judah, Pekahiah (Menahem's son) inherited the throne of Israel in Samaria, and his reign only lasted two years. [24]He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the wicked path of Jeroboam (Nebat's son), causing the Israelites to live sinful lives. [25]Pekah (Remaliah's son), one of Pekahiah's officials, plotted against him *in secret* and killed him in Samaria, along with *two of Pekahiah's loyal bodyguards,* Argob and Arieh. *The killings took place* in the palace citadel. *The conspirator,* Pekah, was joined by 50 Gileadites in his assassination of the king *and two of his bodyguards*. Pekah then took over the throne. [26]Is not the rest of Pekahiah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

[27]During Azariah's 52nd year as king of Judah, Pekah (Remaliah's son) inherited Israel's throne in Samaria. His reign lasted 20 years. [28]He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He walked the wicked path of

* 15:19 Hebrew, *Pul*

Jeroboam (Nebat's son) causing the Israelites to live sinful lives.

29During Pekah's reign over Israel, Tiglath-pileser, the Assyrian king, took possession of Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee, and all of Naphtali; and he *also* took the inhabitants as captives and deported them to Assyria. 30Hoshea (Elah's son) *secretly* plotted against Pekah (Remaliah's son) and assasinated him. Hoshea then took over the throne during the 20th year of the reign of Jotham (son of *Azariah who was also known as* Uzziah) *in Judah.*

31Is not the rest of Pekah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Israel's kings?

32During the second year of Pekah (Remaliah's son) the king in Israel, Jotham (son of *Azariah who was also known as* Uzziah) inherited the throne of Judah. 33Jotham was 25 years old when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 16 years. His mother was Jerusha (Zadok's daughter). 34He did what was good in the Eternal's eyes and followed the example of his father, Uzziah. 35But the high places remained, *though Jotham did not support them.* Sacrifices were still offered and incense was still burned there by the people. He also constructed the upper gate of the Eternal's house.

36Is not the rest of Jotham's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 37During that time, the Eternal One dispatched Rezin (Aram's king) and Pekah (Remaliah's son) *from Israel to wage war* against Judah. 38Jotham *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest in the city of David. His son, Ahaz, then inherited the throne.

16 During the 17th year of *the reign of* Pekah (Remaliah's son) *as king of Israel,* Ahaz (Jotham's son) inherited the throne in Judah. 2Ahaz was 20 years old when he inherited the throne, and his reign in Jerusalem lasted 16 years. He did not do what was good in the eyes of the Eternal, his True God, unlike his ancestor, David. 3He walked the *wicked* path of Israel's kings, and he even made his own son go through the fire *as a child sacrifice. He did this,* modeling the abhorrent practices of nations whom the Eternal had exiled to make way for the Israelites. 4He also offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on hills, and beneath every green tree.

5Then Rezin, Aram's king, and Pekah (Remaliah's son and king of Israel) approached Jerusalem with *one thing in mind*—war.

Their goal is to get Judah to join them in an alliance against Assyria. This is known as the Syro-Ephraimite War.

They laid siege to Ahaz but were unsuccessful in defeating him. 6Rezin, Aram's king, brought Elath back into Aram's possession. He drove out the Judeans who lived there. Arameans moved back to Elath and still live there today.

7Ahaz dispatched messengers to Tiglath-pileser, Assyria's king.

Ahaz: I am your servant and your son. *I need your help now. Please* rescue me from the grip of Aram's king and Israel's king. They are swarming against me *at this very moment.*

8Ahaz then gathered up all the silver and gold in the Eternal's temple and in the palace treasuries, and he gave it to Assyria's king as a gift. 9Assyria's king *received the gift and* listened to the message. He responded by attacking and capturing Damascus, *the capital of Aram.* He exiled the inhabitants of Damascus to Kir, and he killed Rezin.

10King Ahaz traveled to Damascus to meet with Assyria's king, Tiglath-pileser. There he laid eyes upon the altar in Damascus so he sent renderings of the altar—its patterns and design—to the priest Urijah.

► Ahaz is enamored with the Syrian altar and its design. He wants to build something just like it for the temple, possibly because the bronze altar at the Jerusalem temple is too small (1 Kings 8:64).

11Urijah the priest then constructed an altar from the plans King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. Urijah made it *an exact likeness,* and he completed it before Ahaz returned from Damascus.

12After his return from Damascus, Ahaz saw the *new* altar *Urijah had*

constructed, walked up to it, and offered
13burnt offerings, meal offerings, and drink
offerings and anointed the altar with
blood from the peace offerings *as Solomon had done when he dedicated the first bronze altar*. 14He carried the bronze altar from the entryway of the temple to the north side of the *new* altar, so that it remained before the Eternal One.

Ahaz *(to Urijah the priest)*: 15Use the *new and* magnificent altar *for both my offerings and the people's offerings.* The morning burnt offering and evening meal offering and the king's burnt offering and meal offering, as well as the people's burnt offering and meal offering and drink offerings, *can go on the new altar,* anointed with the blood of the burnt offering and sacrifice; but the bronze altar is only for me to pray. *The people cannot use it ever.*

16Urijah the priest followed all of King Ahaz's instructions.

17Then King Ahaz severed the edges of the stands and took out the basins. He removed the basin from the bronze oxen beneath it and set it on a stone platform. 18He also took out the Sabbath canopy that was constructed in the Eternal One's temple and the outer entryway for the king because of Assyria's king. 19Is not the rest of Ahaz's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 20Ahaz *left this world to* sleep with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of David, *as was tradition.* His son, Hezekiah, then inherited the throne.

17 During the 12th year of Ahaz (Judah's king), Hoshea (Elah's son) inherited Israel's throne in Samaria. His reign lasted nine years. 2He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes, but not in the same way *some of* Israel's kings had.

3Shalmaneser, Assyria's king, waged war against Hoshea, but Hoshea humbled himself before Shalmaneser by paying tribute. 4But Shalmaneser sensed a secret plot in Hoshea who, instead of paying the expected tribute to Shalmaneser as he had done yearly, had sent messengers to So, the king of Egypt. Because of this, Assyria's king bound and locked Hoshea in prison.

* 17:12 Exodus 20:4-5

► The easiest way to make Assyria angry is to attempt an alliance with Egypt. During this time, Assyria and Egypt are the two "world powers," struggling to expand their borders and continually fighting over Israel and Judah, who are stuck in the middle. Hoshea's appeal to Egypt for help is a perfectly logical move. Unfortunately, Egypt does not help, and without military power to back up Hoshea's bold refusal to pay tribute, the Northern Kingdom is doomed.

5Assyria's king then invaded Israel and besieged Samaria for three years. 6During Hoshea's ninth year, Assyria's king captured Samaria and carried off the Israelites to exile in Assyria. The exiles were forced to stay in Halah and Habor on the Gozan River and also in the cities of the Medes.

7This all happened because the Israelites had committed *countless* wicked deeds against their God, the Eternal One, who brought them out of Egypt and freed them from the oppression fueled by Pharaoh, Egypt's king. They revered gods *other than the Lord* 8and lived by the *wicked* traditions of the people whom the Eternal had forced out of the land before the Israelites arrived. They lived by the *religious and cultural* practices that Israel's kings had introduced. 9The Israelites committed unrighteous acts and tried to hide them from the Eternal their God; *but of course, the Lord witnessed them all.* They constructed high places everywhere, *small or large*—from lookout towers to fortified cities. 10They decorated every hill and the shade of every tree with holy pillars and sacred poles. 11They burned incense at all the high places just as the people whom the Eternal One had forced out of the land before them had done. *They repeated the very same sins.* They did many wicked deeds, provoking the anger of the Eternal. 12They placed themselves in the service of idols—the same ones He had given them instructions about, commanding, "Do not do this. *They are evil!*"*

13The Eternal One gave fair warning to Israel and Judah. *He gave His warning* through the *mouths of* prophets and seers throughout the land: "Abandon your

wickedness, and obey My commands and laws which I gave to your ancestors through *the mouths of* My servants, the prophets."

14But the Israelites *were fools and* did not heed the warning. They were stubborn just like their ancestors who did not trust in the Eternal One their God. 15They spurned His laws and even the covenant He had entered into with their ancestors. They rejected the fair warnings He gave to them. They were devoted to their own vanity and followed the same *wicked* path as the neighboring nations—the ones He had instructed them not to imitate. 16They abandoned all the laws the Eternal One their God had given to them. They crafted two golden calves, put up a sacred pole, and also praised the sun, the moon, the stars, and Baal *as their master*. 17They made their children pass through the fire, they performed witchcraft and divining, and they committed evil in the eyes of the Eternal and provoked Him to *burn with* anger. 18Therefore, He was furious with Israel, so He banished them from His sight. The only tribe that remained was Judah. 19But Judah also abandoned the laws of their God, the Eternal One, and they walked the *same wicked* path the Israelites had walked. 20He rejected all the sons and daughters of Israel *and banished them from His sight*. He made them suffer and handed them over to pillagers until they were finally cast out of His presence.

21After the Eternal had cut Israel out of the house of David, the people made Jeroboam (Nebat's son) *their first* king. But he caused the people to turn away from the Eternal One and caused Israel to sin *in every way*. 22The Israelites walked the wicked path of Jeroboam 23until the Eternal removed Israel from His presence, just as He had said through *the mouths of* His servants the prophets. The Israelites were forced to leave their own land and go live in Assyria, where they still dwell today.

24Assyria's king transported men from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sephar-vaim, and he made them live in the Samaritan *towns and* cities where the Israelites had lived. Samaria now belonged to these new inhabitants of the *towns and* cities. 25When they first began living in Samaria, the foreigners lacked any fear of the Eternal One. So He caused lions to invade their *ignorant* community and kill some of the people. 26One of them contacted Assyria's king.

New Samaritan: The people you have transported to the cities of Samaria from foreign lands do not know the ways of Samaria's God. He caused lions to invade our community and kill some of the people who are ignorant of the ways of Samaria's God.

King of Assyria: 27Send for one of the exiled priests, and take him back there so he can teach these new inhabitants the ways of Samaria's God.

28*Ironically* a priest who was exiled *by God for not following His ways* was brought back to Samaria and became responsible for teaching the new inhabitants how to revere the Eternal. He stayed at Bethel.

29Even after all of this, all the nations were still crafting their own gods and placing them in the high places built by the Samaritans, each nation in the cities where it settled. 30The Babylonian men crafted Succoth-benoth, the Cuth men crafted Nergal, the Hamath men crafted Ashima, 31the Avvites crafted Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites gave their own children as burnt sacrifices to their gods Adrammelech and Anammelech. 32They also *greatly* feared the Eternal One and nominated some of their own men to act as priests at the high places, interceding for them at the high places' temples. 33They feared Him while *at the same time* honoring the gods of the nations from where they had been exiled.

34Still today, they honor the earlier traditions *of the wicked people before them,* and they fail to revere the Eternal *properly*. They do not honor the *sacred* laws and judgments that He gave to the descendants of Jacob (whom He called Israel). 35He entered into a *sacred* covenant with the new Samaritans and gave them *the same sacred* commands *to follow*.

Eternal One: *I am your God!* Do not fear, bow down to, serve, or sacrifice to any other gods *except for Me*. 36You should only fear, bow down to, and sacrifice to Me who led you out of Egypt with My great power and an outstretched arm. 37Be careful to observe all the laws, statutes, ordinances, and commands I have inscribed for you. And do not revere any other gods. 38Remember the *sacred* covenant you have entered into with Me, and do not revere any other *gods except Me. I am your God—your only God!* 39You should only fear the Eternal One your

God. I will deliver you from the grip of your enemies.

40But they did not listen *to the Lord's message.* Instead they did just as they had done when they lived in their own nations. 41They feared the Eternal One while at the same time serving their own idols. Their descendants have done the same ever since.

► In the New Testament, tension remains between the former "Northern Kingdom" and "Southern Kingdom," although the names have changed. The Judeans in the south argue that only they maintain God's law, and that the Samaritans in the north are no longer God's people. Of course, the Samaritans believe the opposite. This argument started because of Assyria's deportation practices. Although the religion of the Lord remained active in the Northern Kingdom after the Assyrian conquest, the importing of people from all over the East caused the religion to be combined with alien, pagan practices.

18 During the third year of Hoshea (Elah's son and *the last* king of Israel), Hezekiah (Ahaz's son) inherited the throne in Judah. 2Hezekiah was 25 when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 29 years. His mother was Abi (Zechariah's daughter). 3He did what was good in the Eternal's eyes, *and he walked the same righteous path* as his ancestor, David.

4He tore down all of the *wicked* high places and demolished all the holy pillars and the sacred pole. He shattered the bronze serpent that Moses had crafted because the Israelites burned incense to honor it.* The bronze serpent was named, "the bronze thing."* 5Hezekiah put his trust in the Eternal One, Israel's God. Before and after his *righteous* reign, no other king ever compared to him in Judah. 6He embraced the Eternal, and he did not abandon the righteous path. He obeyed all the *sacred* laws that the Eternal had given to Moses. 7The Eternal One was with Hezekiah, and His blessings covered him everywhere he went. Hezekiah defied Assyria's king and refused to humble himself before him, *unlike his father, Ahaz.* 8He conquered the Philistines all the way to Gaza, taking everything from *imposing* lookout towers to *large* fortified cities.

9During King Hezekiah's fourth year, which was the seventh year of Hoshea (king of Israel and Elah's son), Shalmaneser, Assyria's king, waged war against Samaria and attacked it *with full force.* 10After three years, during Hezekiah's sixth year *in Judah* and Hoshea's ninth year as king of Israel, they took possession of Samaria. 11Assyria's king transported the Israelites to Assyria as exiles. He forced them to live in Halah on the Habor (the river of Gozan) and in the cities of the Medes. 12*This took place* because they did not obey the warning of the Eternal their God. Instead they transgressed both the *sacred* covenant He had made with them and everything Moses, the servant of the Eternal, had commanded. They would not listen to the *sacred* laws, much less obey them.

► The Assyrian King Sennacherib invades Judah at the end of the 8th century. In 701 B.C., he reaches Jerusalem and sets himself against King Hezekiah. In one of his royal documents are words describing Hezekiah's situation: "like a bird in a cage in Jerusalem, his royal city, I penned him." Hezekiah is desperate and consults Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah tells Hezekiah to trust God entirely.

The story is phenomenal! God sends an angelic warrior to the Assyrian camp and 185,000 Assyrians from the royal army are killed. The Greek historian Herodotus also mentions this story and says that multitudes of rats brought a divine omen and disease to the Assyrian camp. The writer of the book of Kings clearly encourages his reader to see this event as God's hand favoring Judah over Assyria.

13During King Hezekiah's 14th year, Sennacherib, Assyria's king, attacked and

* 18:4 Numbers 21:9 * 18:4 Hebrew, *Nehushtan*

captured all of Judah's fortified cities.
14Hezekiah (Judah's king) sent a message to Sennacherib at Lachish.

Hezekiah's Message: *I confess that what* I have done is wrong! *Please* leave now, and I will personally pay the penalty *of my own actions.*

Assyria's king demanded 11 tons of silver and one ton of gold from Hezekiah, king of Judah. 15Hezekiah gathered up all the silver he could find in the Eternal's temple and in the palace treasuries; and he gave it to Assyria's king, *just as he had demanded.*
16He even stripped the gold off the Eternal's temple doors and doorposts that he had gilded, and he handed it over to Assyria's king.

17Assyria's king then dispatched a large army to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. The army was led by *three senior military officers,* Tartan, Rab-saris, and Rabshakeh, from Lachish. They came to Jerusalem and waited by the channel of the upper pool. (The channel is on the main route to the fuller's field.) 18They called out to the king; but *instead of the king coming out to meet them,* Eliakim (Hilkiah's son) the palace administrator, Shebnah the lawyer, and Joah (Asaph's son) the reporter *to the king and the people* approached them.

Rabshakeh: 19*Go back and* tell Hezekiah that this is the message of Assyria's mighty king: "What is the basis of your confidence? 20You are a big talker, saying, 'I have *everything I need* for war—guidance and might.' But to whom do you turn now that you have turned against me? 21You turn to a broken reed, Egypt. If a man leans on a broken reed, it stabs his palm. It is the same with Egypt's Pharaoh and all who lean on him. 22But you profess to me, 'We put our faith in the Eternal One our God.' Is it not His high places and altars that Hezekiah has torn down? Did not Hezekiah tell Judah and Jerusalem, 'Worship at this place in Jerusalem'?"

23Make a deal with my master, Assyria's king, and you will receive 2,000 horses from me. I hope you have enough riders for them. 24How can you turn away a governor—even the least of my master's governors—and lean on Egypt instead for horsemen and chariots? 25Do you think I have come here to destroy this land without the Eternal's permission? He is the One who told me, "Go destroy it! *I'll support you.*"

Eliakim, Shebnah, and Joah *(to Rabshakeh):* 26*This needs to be a private conversation.* Please speak to your servants in *a different tongue*—Aramaic—for we understand it and do not need you to speak to us in Judean. That way everyone on the walls won't be able to understand you.

Rabshakeh: 27*How arrogant and foolish of you!* Do you think I have been sent here by my king to talk to only you and your king? I am to speak to everyone. Soon you and these men on the walls will surely be doomed to fill your bellies with your own dung and quench your thirst with your own urine.

28(loudly in Judean) Listen to what Assyria's mighty king has to say! 29He says, "Do not trust in Hezekiah. He cannot save you from me! 30Do not allow Hezekiah to deceive you into trusting the Eternal when he says, 'The Eternal One will save us, and our city will not be handed over to Assyria's king.'" 31Do not listen to Hezekiah. Assyria's king says, "Let there be peace between us. Join me now, and fill your bellies with food from your own vineyards and orchards and drink from your own pools. 32Then I will come and lead you to a land similar to your own—a land of *plentiful* grain, new wine, bread, vineyards, olive orchards, and honey. This is a place where you will live *in peace* and not worry about a *premature* death. Do not listen to Hezekiah when he lies to you, saying, 'The Eternal will save us.' 33Have any of the gods of other nations ever saved their lands from Assyria's king? *Is there a single nation that has survived him?* 34Where are Hamath's gods and Arpad's gods? Where are Sepharvaim's gods, Hena's gods, and Ivvah's gods? Did they save Samaria from me? 35Are there any gods in any land that have saved their lands from me? *No, there is not a single one.* So do you really think that the Eternal will *be any different? Do you really think He can* save you, Jerusalem, from me?"

36Everyone listening was quiet and did not reply with a single word, because the king had given them the command, "Don't speak a *single* word to him." 37Eliakim (Hilkiah's son) the palace administrator, Shebna the lawyer, and Joah (Asaph's son)

the reporter approached Hezekiah and tore their garments. Then they recited every word Rabshakeh had spoken *to them*.

19 King Hezekiah tore his clothes after he heard what had been said. He then covered himself with sackcloth and entered the Eternal's temple. 2Hezekiah dispatched the palace administrator, Eliakim, along with Shebna the lawyer and the priest-elders, to go meet with the prophet Isaiah (Amoz's son). *Eliakim, Shebna, and the elders* all went wearing sackcloth.

Eliakim, Shebna, and the Elders *(to Isaiah)*: 3This is Hezekiah's message: "Today is filled with hours of sorrow, *pain,* anxiety, and reproof. Children are ready to be born, but there is no strength to deliver them. 4It may be that the Eternal One your God will disprove the words of Rabshakeh, whom Assyria's king has sent to taunt the living God. So pray *hard* that your God, the Eternal One, will rebuke those words and *save* His few *children* who remain."

5King Hezekiah's servants approached Isaiah, 6and Isaiah spoke to them.

Isaiah: *Go back and* tell your master, "This is the Eternal's *urgent* message: 'Have no fear of the blasphemy which the servants of Assyria's kings have spoken. They are *merely empty* words. 7I am going to infect Assyria's king with a spirit, and he will hear a rumor and go back to his homeland. There I will cause him to die by the sword.'"

8Rabshakeh returned to the Assyrian king who was now battling against *the city of* Libnah because he had heard that the king had abandoned Lachish.

9-10Sennacherib then received word about Tirhakah, Cush's king: "He is preparing to fight you." So Sennacherib sent a message again to Hezekiah.

Sennacherib's Message: Hezekiah, king of Judah, *I warn you* not to be fooled by your God, on whom you rely, when He says, "Jerusalem will not be conquered by Assyria's king." 11Surely you have heard about how the kings of Assyria demolished all the nations completely—*every last one of them*. Do you really think you will be rescued? 12Were the people of those nations saved by their gods when my fathers attacked? Were Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and Eden's sons in Telassar ever rescued? *No!* 13And what happened to the kings of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim's city, Hena, and Ivvah?"

14Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers, read it, and then placed it before the Eternal in His temple.

Hezekiah *(praying to the Lord)*: 15O Eternal One, Israel's God, who sits above the winged guardians, You alone are God of all the kingdoms on earth, the One who made heaven and earth. 16Eternal One, open up Your ears and Your eyes so You may hear and see. Listen to the words Sennacherib uses to reject the living God. 17Eternal One, I certainly know that the Assyrian kings have destroyed the nations and lands. 18*I know how* they have thrown the gods of the nations into the *flames of the* fire and destroyed them, but those gods were created out of wood and stones by men. 19Eternal One, our True God, I pray You save us now from Sennacherib's conquest—*the fate that all the other nations have suffered*—so that every nation on earth will know that You alone, Eternal One, are God.

20Isaiah (Amoz's son) sent a message to Hezekiah.

Isaiah's Message: This is the message of the Eternal One, Israel's God: "Because you have come to Me about Assyria's king, Sennacherib, I have heard *every word you have prayed*."

21This is the Eternal's message against Sennacherib:

"She has abhorred and ridiculed you,
Zion's virgin daughter.
She has ridiculed you behind your back,
Jerusalem's daughter!
22Whom have you rebuked and spoken blasphemies against?
Whom do you speak loudly against?
And arrogantly lift up your eyes against the Holy One, Israel's God?
23Your messengers have been your vessels of rebuke against the Lord;
you have spoken, 'In the company of my countless chariots,
I arrived at the mountain heights.
At the most distant lands of Lebanon,

I chopped down the tallest cedars
and the finest-looking cypress trees.
I went to its most distant resting place,
in its deepest forest.
24I made wells *in the ground*
and quenched my thirst with
foreign waters;
With the bottom of my feet I soaked up
every last drop of Egypt's rivers.'

25Don't you know?
I did this thing a long time ago;
From the beginning, I planned it.
I have now done it,
So that you might cause strong cities
to turn into piles of rubble.
26Those who lived there were weak;
they were distressed and
humiliated.
They became like the grass that grows
in the field
and also like the green herb,
Just like grass *that grows* on the roofs
of houses
but is burned by the sun before it
gets too high *and thick*.
27But I am aware of *everything you do*—
when you sit down, when you go
out, when you return—
and *I am aware* of your fury
against Me.
28Because you have raged against Me,
because your arrogance has flooded
My ears,
I am going to insert My hook into your
nose
and harness your lips with My
bridle,
And I will send you back in the
direction
from which you came.

29"This will be the sign for you: for the first year, you will feast on what grows on its own; for the second year, *you will feast on* what grows from the original source; and for the third year, you will prepare the soil, gather, plant vineyards, and feast on their fruit. 30Whatever is left of Judah's house will again spread its roots down *into the soil* and grow upward with fruit. 31A remnant will depart from Jerusalem; survivors will depart from Mount Zion. This will all be accomplished by the intense passion of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies."

32This is the Eternal's message regarding Assyria's king: "He will not approach this city, nor will he shoot an arrow toward it. He will not approach it with a shield *in hand* or construct a ramp against it. 33He will go back the same way he came, and he will not approach this city." This is the Eternal's message. 34"I will defend this city in order to preserve it for My own honor and for the honor of David, My servant."

35That night *one of* the Eternal One's heavenly messengers invaded the Assyrian camp and struck 185,000 men. When they woke up the next morning, the camp was filled with corpses. 36Assyria's king, Sennacherib, went away and returned to his own land, Nineveh.

37One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword. Then they fled to Ararat. Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, then inherited the throne.

20 At that time, Hezekiah was deathly sick. The prophet Isaiah (Amoz's son) went to Hezekiah.

Isaiah: This is the Eternal's message: "*This is your last chance to* make your final preparations because you are not going to recover; you are going to die."

2Then Hezekiah faced the wall and began to pray to the Eternal.

Hezekiah: 3Eternal One, I beg You to remember that I have lived in faithfulness and given my heart to you and have practiced goodness before Your eyes.

Hezekiah *was truly distraught and* wept bitterly. 4Before Isaiah had departed from the middle court, the Eternal's message came to him.

Eternal One: 5Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of My people, "This is the message of the Eternal One, the God of your ancestor David: 'I have listened to your prayer and have witnessed the tears falling down your face; therefore I am going to heal you. I want you to go to the Eternal's temple on the third day. 6I will add 15 years to your life, and I am also going to save you and your city from Assyria's king. I will fight on behalf of this city in order to preserve My honor and My servant David's honor.'"

Isaiah: 7Fetch a lump of figs.

They placed the figs on the king's open sore, and he was healed.

► Long before the discovery of penicillin and invention of pharmaceuticals, people understand how to use natural remedies readily available. A poultice of figs—and a healthy dose of prayer—successfully heal Hezekiah's sore. Many other plants have similar healing qualities: wild, poisonous gourds are used in small amounts as purgatives; terebinth resin, frankincense, and myrrh are common antiseptics (even though they are more popular as cosmetics); and mandrake fruit is thought to cure female infertility. While future generations might question the healing properties of plants, they are considered powerful medicines to the people in the ancient Near East.

Hezekiah *(to Isaiah)***:** 8Should I be looking for a sign from the Eternal, a sign that tells me He is going to heal me and that it is time for me to go to the Eternal's temple on the third day?

Isaiah: 9*Yes,* this is the sign the Eternal One will give for you to know He will uphold His promise to you: will the shadow move forward 10 steps or retreat 10 steps?

Hezekiah: 10It's nothing special for the shadow to increase 10 steps. May the shadow retreat 10 steps.

11The prophet Isaiah called out to the Eternal, and He caused the shadow on the stairs to retreat 10 steps down Ahaz's stairs, *which had been designed as a sundial.*

12During that period in time, Berodach-baladan, one son of Baladan, Babylon's king, heard that Hezekiah was ill, so he sent him a gift and *get-well* messages. 13After Hezekiah received the gift and the letters, he gave Berodach-baladan's messengers a tour of his treasuries and showed them all the silver, gold, spices, oils, armor, and everything else that was in the treasure house. He left nothing out of the tour of his house and province.

Isaiah *(to King Hezekiah)***:** 14What did those men tell you, and where did they come from?

Hezekiah: They came from a faraway land—Babylon.

Isaiah: 15*How much* of your house *did you show to them*? What all did they see?

Hezekiah: They saw everything. I left nothing out of the tour I gave them through my treasuries.

Isaiah: 16Listen to the Eternal's message: 17"A time is near when everything in your house, including everything that your ancestors have contributed until today, will be taken to Babylon. Not one item will remain *in your house*." This is the Eternal's message. 18"*A time is near* when your sons, who are yet to be born, will be removed *from your land* and made to be eunuchs in the Babylonian king's palace."

Hezekiah: 19The Eternal's message that you relayed to me is good.

(to himself) Is it not good that peace and truth will rule while I still live?

20Is not the rest of Hezekiah's story—his power and his construction of the pool and the conduit to provide water for the city—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings?* 21Hezekiah *left this world to* sleep with his fathers. His son, Manasseh, then inherited the throne.

21 Manasseh was 12 years old when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 55 years. His mother was Hephzibah. 2He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes, like the abhorrent practices of those nations driven out by the Eternal before the Israelites *settled in Canaan.* 3Manasseh reconstructed the high places his father, Hezekiah, had demolished. He constructed altars for Baal and crafted a sacred pole, just as Ahab the *former* king

* 20:20 The story of Hezekiah is also found in Isaiah 36:1–39:8.

of Israel had done. He offered his praise to all the gods of the skies and was in service to them.

4He constructed altars in the Eternal's temple *to foreign, pagan gods*. This was the temple the Eternal had spoken of when He said, "My name will dwell in Jerusalem." 5He *contaminated the temple by* constructing altars for all the gods of the skies in both the courts in the Eternal's temple.

6He forced his son to go through the fire *as a burnt offering,* and he was trained in *the dark arts of* witchcraft and fortune-telling. He practiced them both. He consulted necromancers and clairvoyants. He committed many wicked acts in the Eternal's eyes, which caused Him *to boil in* anger.

7He placed a carved image of *the goddess* Asherah in the Eternal's temple. It was the very temple that the Eternal had spoken of to David and to Solomon, saying, "My name will dwell in this temple in Jerusalem forever. I have handpicked it from all of Israel's tribes. 8If the Israelites will honor the commands and laws I have given them through Moses, then I will no longer force them to be apart from the land I promised to their ancestors. *They will live peacefully within the promised land.*"

9But the Israelites kept their ears *and hearts* closed *to the message of the Lord;* and Manasseh caused them to live even more sinful lives than the *wicked* nations, whom the Eternal annihilated before them, had committed. 10The Eternal One delivered His message through His servants, the prophets.

Prophets: 11Manasseh, Judah's king, has committed even worse atrocities than the Amorites had committed before his time, and he also inspired wickedness throughout Judah because of his idols; 12therefore, this is the message of the Eternal One, Israel's God: "Observe! I am going to infect Jerusalem and Judah with disaster. The ears of anyone who hears the sounds of this catastrophe will tingle! 13I will judge *the uprightness of* Jerusalem by the same plumb line that I used in Samaria and by the same level I used for Ahab's house. I will clean Jerusalem in the same manner that one cleans a *dirty* dish. I will wipe *off the grime* and flip the dish over *and wipe off the underside of it as well.* 14I am going to relinquish what is left of My inheritance to the possession of their adversaries. They will be like stolen goods and booty for all their adversaries. 15*This will take place* because of all the wickedness they have committed before Me and because of the anger they have caused *to boil* within Me since the day their ancestors were delivered *by Me* from Egypt until this very day."

16Manasseh killed countless innocent people and filled Jerusalem with their blood. And this is in addition to causing Judah to live sinful lives and committing evil in the Eternal's eyes.

► According to tradition, one of those innocent people is the prophet Isaiah. Manasseh and Isaiah have a tumultuous relation ship from the start, when Hezekiah invited Isaiah to the court to meet his sons. Isaiah prophesied then that Manasseh would be evil. After Manasseh becomes king, Isaiah tells him the temple will be destroyed. Infuriated, the king orders Isaiah's arrest. Isaiah flees into the hills where he hides inside a cedar tree. But Manasseh's men find him—when they are cutting the tree in half. This legend is attested to by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (11:37-38).

17Is not the rest of Manasseh's story—his wickedness and sin—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 18Manasseh *left this world* to sleep with his fathers and was laid to rest in his own garden, the garden of Uzza. His son, Amon, then inherited the throne.

19Amon was 22 years old when he became king. His reign in Jerusalem lasted two years. His mother was Meshullemeth (daughter of Haruz from Jotbah). 20He committed *much* wickedness in the Eternal's eyes just as his father, Manasseh, did. 21He walked the *wicked* path of his father, and he served and worshiped the same gods his father had served. 22Amon *was corrupt and* abandoned the Eternal One, the God of his ancestors. He did not walk on the Eternal's path.

23Amon's servants plotted behind his back and murdered him in his own house.

24Then the people of the land slaughtered those who had plotted *in secret* against King Amon, and they gave the throne to Amon's son, Josiah.

25Is not the rest of Amon's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 26Amon was laid to rest in the garden of Uzza *with his father*. His son, Josiah, then inherited the throne.

22 Josiah was 8 years old when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 31 years. His mother was Jedidah (daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath). 2Josiah was righteous in the Eternal's eyes. He continually did what was right, just as his ancestor David had. He did not ever step away *from the righteous path*.

3During Josiah's 18th year as king, he dispatched his minister of state,* Shaphan (son of Azaliah and grandson of Meshullam), to the Eternal's house with instructions.

Josiah: 4Visit the priest, Hilkiah, and ask him to give us an account of the finances that have been collected by the doorkeepers from those who enter the Eternal's temple. 5Tell them to give it to the workers who watch over the Eternal's temple, to the repairmen who keep the place in good condition, 6to the carpenters and builders and masons for purchasing the wood and cut stones to keep the temple in working order. 7There is no need to document the financial exchange with these workers because they are honest in their dealings.

Hilkiah *(to Shaphan)*: 8I have discovered the book of the law in the Eternal's house.

Hilkiah then handed the book *of the law* to Shaphan, and Shaphan read through it. 9Shaphan the secretary returned to the king with a report.

► The discovery of the book of the law which has been forgotten for a long time serves two purposes: it rewards Josiah for the work he's already done, and it pushes him toward more reforms. Besides its positive effect on Judah, not much is known about the book of the law, except that it isn't a book at all. It is probably a scroll with two columns of writing, much like the Dead Sea Scrolls. The exact content is unknown, but it is probable that the book of the law was the foundational text for the compiler of Deuteronomy. Assuming this, the laws from Deuteronomy explain why Josiah destroys any object that could be used in pagan worship.

Shaphan: Those who serve you in the Eternal's house have given *every last cent of* the money to the workers who keep the Eternal's house in good condition.

10(continuing) *While I was delivering your instructions,* Hilkiah the priest handed me an *old* book.

Shaphan then read the *old* book aloud to the king. 11While the king listened to the words of the book of law, *he was filled with sorrow, and* he tore his garments. 12Then the king gave a command to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam (Shaphan's son), Achbor (Micaiah's son), Shaphan the minister of state, and Asaiah (one of the king's advisors).

Josiah: 13Go and speak to the Eternal One on my behalf, and *also* on behalf of the people and all of Judah. Speak to Him about this book and all that it commands. There is a wrathful fire *on its way* to us from Him, all because our ancestors before us did not obey the instructions of this book or do all that is written concerning us.

14Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to visit the prophetess Huldah (Shallum's wife). Shallum was Tikvah's son, and Tikvah was the son of Harhas, who was in charge of the clothing and garments. Huldah lived in the second quarter of Jerusalem. Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah spoke to her.

Huldah: 15This is the message of the Eternal God of Israel: "*Go back and* speak to the one who told you to speak to Me that 16the Eternal says, 'I will bring *a*

* 22:3 Literally, secretary

wicked cloud of disaster over this land
and those who live within it. It will be
just as it is written in all the words of
the book read by the king of Judah.
17Because they have turned their backs
on Me and have been *promiscuous* with
other gods, burning incense for them
and causing My anger *to boil* with all
their wicked deeds, *the fire of* My wrath
will consume them and be inextinguish-
able.'"

18But tell Judah's king, the one who
told you to visit me and speak to the
Eternal One *on his behalf,* "This is the
message of the Eternal God of Israel:
'Concerning what you have heard, 19your
heart was gentle *and concerned* about
My commands. You were humble before
the Eternal because of the warnings of
desolation I gave to this place and to
those who dwell within it. You even tore
your garments and cried before Me.
Because you have done all this, I have
certainly heard your *sincerity,*' proclaims
the Eternal One.

20" 'Observe! I am going to bring you
to be with your ancestors, and you will
meet the grave peacefully, so that you
will not have to witness the *wicked cloud
of* disaster I will bring *to shadow* this
land *and all those who dwell within it.*' "

Then Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah returned to the king and gave him the *Lord's* message, *as sent through Huldah the prophetess.*

23 The king ordered an assembly of all of Judah's and Jerusalem's elders. 2He then went to the Eternal's temple with all the citizens of Jerusalem and the men of Judah, as well as the priests and prophets and people of all statuses, and he read to them everything in the covenant book that was discovered in the Eternal's house.

3While standing next to the *sacred* pillar, the king proclaimed a covenant before the Eternal One. *He promised* to follow the Eternal, to obey His commands and laws and testaments with all his being. *He promised* to honor every word of the covenant book *that had been discovered in the temple.* Everyone *who was present* entered into the covenant with the king.

4The king gave a command to the high priest, Hilkiah, and to the priests of the second order, as well as the doormen. He told them to remove from the Eternal's house all the vessels that were crafted to honor Baal, Asherah, and all the other gods of the skies. He set them on fire in the fields of Kidron outside of Jerusalem, and then he transported the ashes to Bethel.

5He got rid of the *corrupted* priests who worshiped false gods and whom the *old* kings of Judah had instructed to burn incense in the high places in Judah's cities and in the land all around Jerusalem, and those who honored Baal and the sun and moon and stars and all the gods of the skies by burning incense.

6The king removed the sacred pole from the Eternal's temple, and he set it on fire at the Kidron brook just outside Jerusalem. He crushed it until it was *nothing more than* a pile of dust, and then he tossed the dust onto ordinary graves, *further contaminating it by contact with dead bodies.* 7He destroyed the houses of cult prostitutes next to the house of the Eternal, where women were weaving hangings for the sacred pole. 8He assembled *in Jerusalem* all of Judah's priests and destroyed the high places from Geba to Beersheba where they had burned incense. He tore down the high places of the gates located on the left side of the city gates near the gate of Joshua, who was governor of Jerusalem.

9The *corrupted* priests of the high places did not approach the Eternal's altar in Jerusalem, but they filled their bellies with unleavened bread in the company of their families, *since they would not travel to Jerusalem to perform their religious duties.*

10The king destroyed Topheth as well. Topheth is in the valley of Hinnom's son. *He did this* so that no man could offer his children as a burnt sacrifice to Molech.

11Close to the entrance to the Eternal's house, near the official Nathan-melech's chamber in the area around the temple, were horses that Judah's kings had dedicated to the sun. The king removed the horses and set fire to the chariots of the sun as well.

12The king also tore down the roof altars, Ahaz's upper room which was crafted by Judah's kings, and the altars crafted by Manasseh for the two courts in the Eternal's house. He crushed them *into piles of dust,* and then he tossed the dust into the Kidron brook. 13The king also destroyed the high places south of the mountain of corruption, which Solomon (Israel's king) constructed east of Jerusalem to honor Ashtoreth, the corrupt Sidonian goddess; Chemosh, the corrupt

Moabite god; and Milcom, the corrupt Ammonite god. 14He shattered the sacred pillars and chopped down the sacred poles. In their place, he desecrated their sites *by contact* with corpses.

15He tore down the altar at Bethel, the high place—the one erected by Jeroboam (Nebat's son), the very Jeroboam who caused the Israelites to live sinful lives. He crushed the rocks and pounded them into dust and set fire to the sacred pole.

16Josiah turned and observed the graves there on the mountain; and he sent men to gather up the bones and set fire to them on the altar, defiling the altar *by contact with corpses* exactly as the Eternal One had spoken through the man of God.*

Josiah *(noticing a specific burial plot)*: 17What is *the significance of* that marker?

Men of the City: This is a grave marker for the man of God from Judah who prophesied the very things which you have just done to the altar at Bethel.

Josiah: 18Leave him be. No one is to lay a finger on his bones, *so that he may rest in peace*.

They let his bones rest in peace next to the bones of the Samaritan prophet.*

19Josiah tore down all the temples of the high places built by Israel's kings in the Samaritan cities. These high places had caused the Eternal's anger *to boil*. Josiah did the same thing to these houses as he did *to the houses* in Bethel.

20Josiah also killed all the priests who were present at the high places. *He killed them* on the altars and set fire to their bones. Then he went back to *the place from which he came*—Jerusalem.

Josiah *(to the people)*: 21The covenant book *that was found in the temple* says we must observe the Passover and rejoice in the Eternal One our God, *who led us out of bondage in Egypt*.

22The Passover had not been observed from the time when the judges judged Israel, even throughout all the generations of Israel's kings and Judah's kings. 23But during King Josiah's 18th year, the Passover was celebrated in honor of the Eternal One in Jerusalem.

24In addition, Josiah destroyed the clairvoyants, necromancers, household gods, idols, and every other corruption in Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he could make things right according to the laws *and commands* of the *covenant* book Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the Eternal's house.

25No king before him or after him ever gave himself to the Eternal *so fully and deeply* as Josiah did. *He offered to the Eternal with all his being*: all of his heart, all of his soul, and all his might, in accordance with the *sacred* law given through Moses.

26Still the Eternal did not abandon His immense wrath. It boiled against Judah, because of all the wickedness Manasseh had committed against Him.

Eternal One: 27I will remove Judah from before My presence. *I will do this* just as I have done it to Israel. I will cast aside Jerusalem, the city I chose for My temple when I said, "This will be the dwelling place for My name."

28Is not the rest of Josiah's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings?

29*Josiah's death happened this way:* Pharaoh Neco, Egypt's king, marched north *with his army* to the Euphrates River to meet with Assyria's king. King Josiah *mustered his forces and* attempted to block Neco's advance.

► The situation has changed for Assyria in the 100 years since the Northern Kingdom was conquered. About 7 years after the Babylonians conquer the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, Neco is actually rushing to the aid of Assyria instead of fighting to destroy her. The Egyptian and Assyrian plan is to defeat Babylonia; and unfortunately, Josiah is in the way. The death of the good king Josiah and the victory of Babylonia over both Assyria and Egypt doom Judah to becoming part of the Babylonian Empire.

In the ensuing battle, Neco *and his forces* killed Josiah at Megiddo. 30Josiah's servants

* 23:16 1 Kings 13:2 * 23:18 1 Kings 13:11-12

took his body back to Jerusalem from Megiddo in a chariot. They laid him to rest in his own tomb *instead of in a tomb with his fathers*. The people of Judah then took Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, and anointed him and set him upon the throne of his father as king.

31Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted three months. His mother was Hamutal (Jeremiah's daughter from Libnah). 32He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes, just as his ancestors had done before him.

33Pharaoh Neco put him in prison at Riblah in Hamath so that he would no longer sit on the throne in Jerusalem. He forced a fee on Judah—7,500 pounds of silver and 75 pounds of gold. 34Pharaoh Neco appointed Eliakim (Josiah's son) as king and gave him a new name—Jehoiakim. He transported Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he spent his last days. 35Jehoiakim handed over all the silver and gold to Pharaoh. It was all tax money he had *quickly* gathered from the people of the land. He demanded silver and gold from the citizens, according to the *tax* assessment of each person, and he gave it to Pharaoh Neco.

36Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he was given the throne *by Neco*. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 11 years. His mother was Zebidah (Pedaiah's daughter from Rumah). 37He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He was just like his ancestors.

24 *Early* in Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's king, came into the land; and Jehoiakim was in his service three years. Then Jehoiakim rebelled. 2The Eternal One dispatched Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites to demolish Judah, in accordance with the message the Eternal spoke through His servants the prophets.

3Because of Manasseh's *abhorrent* wickedness and all he did, Judah was removed from the presence of the Eternal One, just as He had commanded. 4His wrath came because of the innocent blood Manasseh had flooded Jerusalem with. He would not forgive them.

5Is not the rest of Jehoiakim's story—his actions *and lasting legacy*—documented in the book of the chronicles of Judah's kings? 6Jehoiakim *left this world to* sleep with his fathers. His son, Jehoiachin, then inherited the throne.

7Egypt's king never departed from his own country again because Babylon's king, *Nebuchadnezzar,* ruled everything that had formerly been in the possession of Egypt's king, all the way from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

8Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he inherited the throne. His reign in Jerusalem lasted 3 months. His mother was Nehushta (Elnathan's daughter from Jerusalem). 9He committed evil in the Eternal's eyes. He was just like his father.

10-11During that time, the servants of Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) put Jerusalem under siege, and Nebuchadnezzar entered the city during the siege. 12Jehoiachin, Judah's king, met with Nebuchadnezzar *face-to-face in a peaceful surrender,* along with Jehoiachin's mother, servants, commanders, and administrators. The king of Babylon took Jehoiachin captive during the eighth year of his reign. 13He cleaned out all the treasuries in the Eternal's temple and in the king's palace, and he also *took and* cut into pieces all the gold vessels Solomon (king of Israel) had crafted in the Eternal's temple, just as the Eternal One had said.* *He left nothing.* 14Nebuchadnezzar then gathered up all of Jerusalem—the commanders, warriors, craftsmen, and artisans (10,000 in all)—and forced them into exile. Only the poorest people remained.

► Like Assyria, Babylonia exiles the people when they conquer any new territory. There is an important difference, however. When the Assyrians conquered a city, they sent all the people into different parts of their empire and filled that city with foreigners of several other nationalities. This "shook up" the nations, kept them from retaining their prior identities, and lowered the chance of civil war. The Babylonians, on the other hand, leave some people in Judah and allow those who are exiled to continue practicing their religion. Because they are able to retain their religious and national identities, the Judeans (now known as "Jews") will be able to move back into the land and rebuild one day.

* 24:13 Jeremiah 20:5

15Nebuchadnezzar forced Jehoiachin, his
mother, his wives, his administrators, and
the elders of Judah into exile in Babylon.
16He also forced 7,000 warriors and 1,000
craftsmen and artisans into exile in Bab-
ylon. 17Nebuchadnezzar then appointed
Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, to take his
place as king, and Nebuchadnezzar gave
Mattaniah a new name—Zedekiah.

18Zedekiah was 21 years old when he
was given the throne *by Nebuchadnezzar*.
His reign in Jerusalem lasted 11 years. His
mother was Hamutal (Jeremiah's daugh-
ter) from Libnah. 19Zedekiah committed
evil in the Eternal's eyes. He was wicked
like Jehoiakim.

20This all took place in Jerusalem
and Judah because of the Eternal's *boiling*
anger. The Eternal One moved them *out of*
the land and away from His presence.

Then, Zedekiah turned his back on
Nebuchadnezzar.

25 On the 10th day of the 10th
month, during the 9th year
of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar
(Babylon's king) and his entire army sur-
rounded Jerusalem. They camped outside
the city and built siege ramps around it.
2The city remained under siege until the
11th year of Zedekiah's reign.

3On the 9th day of the 4th month,
there was a food shortage in the city, and
no one had anything to eat. *Everyone*
became afraid of starvation. 4The city *wall*
was breached, and all the warriors ran
out during the night through the gateway
between the two walls near the king's gar-
den, in spite of the Chaldeans surrounding
the city. The warriors went on the Arabah
road. 5The Chaldean army chased after
the *fleeing* king and caught up to him in
the fields of Jericho. His army dispersed
in all directions. 6They took the king cap-
tive and escorted him to Babylon's king
at Riblah. Nebuchadnezzar decided on
a punishment for the king: 7they killed
Zedekiah's sons right in front of Zedekiah;
then they gouged out Zedekiah's eyes *so*
that the slaughter of his sons was the last
thing he ever saw, and they put him in
bronze shackles and transported him to
Babylon.

8On the 7th day, during the 5th
month of Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year as
king over Babylon, Nebuzaradan, a servant
of the king and captain of Nebuchadnez-
zar's guards, arrived in Jerusalem. 9Nebu-
zaradan set fire to the Eternal's temple,
the palace, and every house in Jerusalem.
He burned down every large house *and*
structure in Jerusalem. 10The entire Chal-
dean army, who was with Nebuzaradan,
tore down Jerusalem's walls. 11Nebu-
zaradan captured everyone who was still
in the city, even the renegades who had
fled to Nebuchadnezzar, and he forced
them into exile. 12But Nebuzaradan spared
the poorest people and left them to take
care of the land as farmers and gardeners.

13The Chaldeans *took everything of*
value. They took the bronze pillars, stands,
and the bronze sea in the Eternal's temple;
and they broke them up into pieces and
took the bronze to Babylon. 14They also
took the pans, the shovels, the snuffers,
the *bronze* objects, and every bronze cup
that was used during the rituals of the
temple. 15Nebuzaradan took the coal pans
and bowls and all the gold and purified
silver. 16The amount of bronze (including
the two *bronze* pillars, the *bronze* sea, and
the *bronze* stands Solomon crafted for the
Eternal's temple) was so great that it could
not be weighed. 17Each pillar was 27 feet
high with a bronze capital. The capital
was 54 inches high, and it was covered
with bronze network and bronze pome-
granates. Both pillars were exactly alike.

18Nebuzaradan gathered Seraiah, the
head priest, and Zephaniah, the second
priest, along with the three doorkeepers.
19In the city, he gathered up one officer
of the army, five of the king's counselors,
the army captain's aide for mustering
the troops, and 60 other Judahite men.
20Nebuzaradan (captain of the guard)
escorted them to Babylon's king at Riblah.
21Nebuchadnezzar killed them all at
Riblah in Hamath. Thus Judah was sepa-
rated from the land and forced into exile.

22Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,
had allowed some people to remain in
Judah, so he appointed Gedaliah (son of
Ahikam, Shaphan's son) to govern the
land. 23When all the army commanders
received word that Nebuchadnezzar had
appointed Gedeliah to govern the land,
they went to visit Gedeliah in Mizpah.
Those who visited him were Ishmael
(Nethaniah's son), Johanan (Kareah's son),
Seraiah (Tanhumeth the Netophathite's
son), and Jaazaniah (the Maacathite's son),
including their men. 24Gedaliah *attempted*
to assuage them and swore an oath before
them.

Gedaliah: Do not fear those *Babylonian*
officials who serve the Chaldeans. If you
dwell here and give your service to the

Babylonian king, then you will live in peace *and have nothing to fear*.

25But during the 7th month, Ishmael, (son of Nethaniah, Elishama's son) of the royal family, attacked Gedaliah with 10 male accomplices. Gedaliah and all the Jews and Chaldeans at Mizpah were killed. 26Everyone in the community, both rich and poor, even the commanders of the army, traveled to Egypt because they *greatly* feared the Chaldeans.

27On the 27th day of the 12th month during the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin (Judah's king), Evil-merodach (Babylon's king) released Jehoiachin from prison. *Evil-merodach did this* the same year he inherited the throne. 28Evil-merodach was good to Jehoiachin, and he gave Jehoiachin an *honorary* throne that was higher than all the thrones of the other kings held captive in Babylon. 29Jehoiachin removed his prison garments *and put on new clothes*. He ate his meals with the king every day for the rest of his life. 30The king also gave him a stipend on a daily basis for the rest of his life.

► Sitting in a foreign country and getting comfortable with pagan ways isn't the end of the story for Judah. A remnant will return to re-found Jerusalem and Israel, a story that is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. God will lift out of captivity those people who remain faithful to Him in spite of difficult circumstances.

For the Northern Kingdom of Israel, their fate is not so clear. When Assyria exiles the northern Israelites all over the empire, those ten tribes are lost. For centuries people have developed theories as to what happened to them, some more far-fetched than others, but one thing is certain: whatever is left of the proper worship of God when they are captured dies among those people. Without that connection to Him, there is no one to save them.



Israel and Judah Divided

1 CHRONICLES

A history from Saul through David written for the Jews after their exile

By an unknown chronicler, possibly Ezra, the priest who came out of exile

As the Jews return from their Babylonian exile to their parents' and grandparents' homeland in Judah, all are excited by the prospect of renewing the people's covenant with the Lord.

Many generations have passed since the people enjoyed the freedom of ruling their own nation and worshiping their own God in Jerusalem. They aren't even known as Israelites anymore—the Babylonians have renamed them the "Jews." These Jews have been oppressed by the pagan rule of the Babylonians and kept from worshiping the Lord in Jerusalem. Now their God has given them the opportunity to return home, though the Jews have been separated from much of their own history and many of their traditions by the exile in Babylon. As their leaders and priests begin to rebuild Jerusalem, her temple and her government, the author, known as the chronicler, wants to remind his fellow Jews of their position as God's people. The Lord chose them out of all of Adam's descendants, their neighbors, their allies, and their enemies as His nation. Now the Jews must remember their ancestors, the Israelites, and learn from their mistakes; they must remember their covenant and follow God's commands.

Fondly does the chronicler remember the stories of Israel's two greatest kings, David and Solomon. Both were men of God who furthered Israel's dedication to the Lord. David dedicated his reign to drafting the plans for the temple. Solomon put those plans to work, building a most magnificent temple. As they focused on God when ruling the nation and leading the religion, so must the Jews now focus as they rebuild Israel's government and her temple.

Also the chronicler remembers the examples of Israel's later Judean kings—kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah—who reformed the political and religious practices of the wayward and returned Judah to proper observation of the law and worship of the Lord. As the Jews now begin the arduous work of returning Jerusalem to her glory, they must remember these kings' stories and adopt their zeal for right worship and practice.

What the chronicler is recording for his people is a history of Israel from their first ancestor to the end of their Babylonian exile. This history reminds the Jews of their ancient status as God's chosen nation and of their illustrious ancestors' work to form the nation.

1 *God created the first person, our forefather,* Adam. *His lineage descended nine generations until the flood:* Seth, Enosh, 2Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, 3Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, *and Noah.* 4*Our ancestor* Noah *had three sons*: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. *From these, three distinct nations arose.*

The history of Israel begins with the creation of the world.

5The sons of Japheth *fathered the nations north of Israel. They* were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. 6The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Diphath, and Togarmah. 7The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.

8*Three* sons of Ham *fathered the nations south of Israel. They* were Cush *(the Ethiopians),* Mizraim *(the Egyptians),* and Put *(the northern Africans). Noah condemned Ham's fourth son,* Canaan, *whose descendants we conquered.* 9The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raama, and Sabteca; the sons of Raama were Sheba and Dedan. 10Cush fathered Nimrod (the first hero on earth). 11Mizraim fathered the people of Lud, Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh, 12Pathrus, Casluh (from whom the Philistines descended), and Caphtor. 13Canaan was the forefather of *our eastern neighbors:* Sidon (his first son), Heth, 14the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, 15the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, 16the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites.

17Shem fathered *the Semitic nations. His sons were* Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. Aram fathered Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech. 18Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. 19Eber had two sons, Peleg (*whose name means "divided"* because the earth was divided during his life) and his brother, Joktan. 20Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 21Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 22Ebal, Abimael, Sheba, 23Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab.

24*Our ancestry descended nine generations directly from* Shem: Arpachshad, Shelah, 25Eber, Peleg, Reu, 26Serug, Nahor, Terah, and *finally* 27Abram (whom *God renamed* Abraham). 28*Our ancestor* Abraham, *who formed our people's initial covenant with God,* fathered *two* sons: Isaac and Ishmael.

29Ishmael fathered Nebaioth, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 30Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, 31Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.

32Abraham also fathered sons by a concubine, Keturah: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan's sons were Sheba and Dedan. 33Midian's sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah.

34Abraham's *second* son, Isaac, fathered *two* sons: Esau *(the ancestor of Edom)* and Israel *(our ancestor).*

35The sons of Esau were Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. 36Eliphaz fathered Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, and by Timna, Amalek. 37Reuel fathered Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

38Seir fathered Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. 39Lotan (whose sister was Timna) fathered Hori and Homam. 40Shobal fathered Alian, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. Zibeon fathered Aiah and Anah. 41Anah's son was Dishon, who fathered Hamran, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 42Ezer fathered Bilhan, Zaavan, and Jaakan. Dishan *(son of Seir)* fathered Uz and Aran.

43These *men* were kings in Edom long before our ancestors reigned in Israel. Bela (the son of Beor) ruled the city of Dinhabah. 44When Bela died, Jobab (the son of Zerah of Bozrah) succeeded him. 45When Jobab died, Husham (a Temanite) became king. 46When Husham died, Hadad (the son of Bedad who crushed Midian in the field of Moab) succeeded Husham and renamed the city Avith. 47When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him. 48When Samlah died, Shaul of Rehoboth by the *Euphrates* River succeeded him. 49When Shaul died, Baal-hanan (the son of Achbor) became king. 50When Baal-hanan died, Hadad ascended to the throne. Hadad named his city Pai. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred and granddaughter of Mezahab. 51When Hadad died, *the monarchy crumbled and* Edom was ruled by chiefs: Timna, Aliah, Jetheth, 52Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, 53Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, 54Magdiel, and Iram.

2 The sons of *our ancestor* Israel *(the brother of Esau)* were *the forefathers of the twelve tribes*: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, 2Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

3The sons of Judah (Er, Onan, and Shelah) were born to his wife Bath-shua of Canaan. Er (Judah's firstborn) was wicked

in the eyes of the Eternal One, so He put him to death. *Er's widow* (and Judah's own daughter-in-law), [4]Tamar, gave birth to *Judah's youngest children,* Perez and Zerah, giving Judah a total of five sons. [5]Perez fathered Hezron and Hamul. [6]Zerah fathered five sons: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara. [7]The son of Carmi *(the grandson of Zimri)* was Achar, the trouble-maker in Israel who violated the ban *against taking the spoils of Jericho*. [8]The son of Ethan was Azariah.

[9]*King David descended from Perez's first son.* Hezron fathered Jerahmeel, Ram, and Chelubai. [10]Ram fathered Amminadab, and Amminadab fathered Nahshon, the leader of the tribe of Judah. [11]Nahshon's son was Salma, who fathered Boaz. [12]Boaz fathered Obed, and Obed's son was Jesse. Jesse had *seven sons*: [13]Eliab (his firstborn), Abinadab (the second), Shimea (the third), [14]Nethanel (the fourth), Raddai (the fifth), [15]Ozem (the sixth), and David (the seventh). [16]*David had two* sisters: Zeruiah and Abigail. The three sons of Zeruiah were Abshai, Joab, and Asahel. [17]Abigail married Jether the Ishmaelite and gave birth to Amasa.

[18]Hezron's son Caleb had sons by his wife, Azubah, and by Jerioth. Jerioth's sons were Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. [19]When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath, who gave birth to Hur. [20]Hur fathered Uri, and Uri's son was Bezalel.

[21]After that Hezron married the daughter of Machir (the father of Gilead) when he was 60 years old. She gave birth to Segub. [22]Segub fathered Jair, who had 23 cities in the land of Gilead. [23]But Geshur and Aram conquered the *23* cities of Jair and the villages of Kenath—60 cities total. The conquerors were the sons of Machir (the father of Gilead). [24]After Hezron died in Caleb-ephrathah, Abijah (Hezron's wife) gave birth to Ashhur, the leader of Tekoa.

[25]Jerahmeel (the firstborn of Hezron) had *five* sons: Ram (the firstborn), Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. [26]Jerahmeel had another wife, Atarah, who gave birth to Onam. [27]Ram fathered Maaz, Jamin, and Eker. [28]Onam fathered Shammai and Jada. Shammai's sons were Nadab and Abishur. [29]Abishur's wife was Abihail, and she gave birth to Ahban and Molid. [30]Nadab's sons were Seled and Appaim. Seled died without sons, [31]but Appaim fathered Ishi. The son of Ishi was Sheshan, who fathered Ahlai. [32]Shammai's brother, Jada, fathered Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without sons, but [33]Jonathan fathered Peleth and Zaza. They were the generation of Jerahmeel.* [34]Sheshan had no sons, only daughters, and he had a servant named Jarha, who was Egyptian.

► Although many of the Jews' female ancestors are influential in the development of the nation of Israel—women such as Rahab, Jael, and Deborah who perform feats even men are too faint of heart to accomplish—the men are the ones who build wealth and power over the generations. Because of the way inheritances work, only a son can continue his family's lineage. When a father dies, his property is divided among his sons, with the first son inheriting a double portion of the assets. Daughters are typically married off and take on the identities of their husbands' families; so when a man dies without any sons, his family line ends and his assets are disbursed to the nearest male relatives.

[35]Sheshan married one daughter to Jarha (his *Egyptian* servant), and she gave birth to Attai. [36]Attai fathered Nathan, and *here are the 11 generations that descended* from Nathan: Zabad, [37]Ephlal, Obed, [38]Jehu, Azariah, [39]Helez, Eleasah, [40]Sismai, Shallum, [41]Jekamiah, and Elishama.

[42]Caleb, the brother of Jerahmeel *and son of Hezron,* fathered Mesha (his firstborn and the father of Ziph) and Mareshah (the father of Hebron). [43]Hebron fathered Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. [44]Shema's son, Raham, fathered Jorkeam, and *his brother* Rekem fathered Shammai. [45]The son of Shammai was Maon, and Maon fathered Bethzur. [46]Ephah (Caleb's concubine) gave birth to Haran, Moza, and Gazez. Haran fathered Gazez. [47]The sons of Jahdai were Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph. [48]Maacah (*another of* Caleb's concubines) bore Sheber, Tirhanah, [49]Shaaph (the father of Madmannah), Sheva (the father of Machbena and Gibea), and a daughter, Achsah.

* 2:33 Verses 25-33

The tradition of firstborn rights in inheritance and genealogy is often the norm in the ancient world, but God sees fit to rearrange customs and alter expectations. In such an important listing of Israel like the book of Chronicles—which marks out in detail the Israelite people all the way to Adam—Jacob's firstborn Reuben is not mentioned until the third spot! The genealogy starts in chapter 4 with Judah and then moves to Simeon, Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, and Levi.

The prominence of David from Judah's line goes back to the Genesis stories that told of how Reuben, Simeon, and Levi all committed horrible sins that removed them from royal contention and headship over their brothers, who would later become twelve tribal groups. In a way, everything in Chronicles (from ancestry lists to temple building) is set around King David from Judah and his lineage up to the Babylonian exile, which concludes the book of Chronicles.

50These were the generations of
Caleb through Hur (the firstborn of
Caleb's second wife Ephrathah) were Sho-
bal (the father of Kiriath-jearim), 51Salma
(the father of Bethlehem), and Hareph
(the father of Beth-gader). 52Shobal, the
father of Kiriath-jearim governed Haroeh
(half of the Manahathites) 53and the
families of Kiriath-jearim (the Ithrites,
the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the
Mishraites). From these came the Zora-
thites and the Eshtaolites. 54Salma gov-
erned Bethlehem and the Netophathites,
Atroth-beth-joab, and the Zorites (half of
the Manahathites). 55Families of scribes
lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shime-
athites, and the Sucathites. Those are the
Kenites who came from Hammath (the
father of Rechab).

3 *The great king* David fathered *6* sons
during his 7½ years reigning in
Hebron. Ahinoam the Jezreelitess
gave birth to his first son, Amnon. Abigail
the Carmelitess birthed his second son,
Daniel. 2Maacah, the daughter of Talmai
(king of Geshur) bore his third son, Absa-
lom. His fourth son, Adonijah, was born to
Haggith. 3Abital bore his fifth son, Shepha-
tiah. Ithream was his sixth son, and was
born to his wife, Eglah.

4These were the 6 sons born to him
in Hebron during his 7½-year reign there.
David then ruled from Jerusalem for 33
years. 5There, Bath-shua (the daughter of
Ammiel) gave him 4 sons: Shimea, Sho-
bab, Nathan, and Solomon; 6-8and 9 other
sons also were born there: Ibhar, Elishama,
Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia,
Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. 9These
were David's sons, in addition to their sis-
ter, Tamar, and his concubines' children.

10*David's son and successor,* Sol-
omon, had *15 generations of* descendants:
Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat,
11Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, 12Amaziah, Aza-
riah, Jotham, 13Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh,
14Amon, and Josiah.

15Josiah's sons were, in order from the
firstborn to the last: Johanan, Jehoiakim,
Zedekiah, and Shallum. 16The sons of
Jehoiakim were Jeconiah and Zedekiah.
17The sons of Jeconiah (who was taken
prisoner *by Nebuchadnezzar*) were Sheal-
tiel, 18Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar,
Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. 19The
sons of Pedaiah were Zerubbabel and
Shimei. Zerubbabel fathered Meshullam
and Hananiah, and their sister, Shelomith.
20He had five other *children,* Hashubah,
Ohel, Berechiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-
hesed. 21Hananiah fathered Pelatiah and
Jeshaiah, the sons of Rephaiah, the sons
of Arnan, the sons of Obadiah, and the
sons of Shecaniah. 22Shecaniah had six
descendants: *his son* Shemaiah, and his
grandsons Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah,
and Shaphat. 23Neariah fathered three
sons: Elioenai, Hizkiah, and Azrikam.
24Elioenai fathered seven sons: Hodaviah,
Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah,
and Anani.

► Each tribe is influential in the nation of Israel and has the honor of being descended from the Jews' ancestor Jacob, but the tribe of Judah has prominence and power. From this tribe comes Israel's monarchy, even though their forefather Judah was not the oldest son and therefore not the one who would have been expected to father kings. The selection of Judah as the progenitor of kings demonstrates that God is in control of His people even

when tradition and convention are contrary to His ways.

4 Judah's lineage *descended as so*:
Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and
Shobal. 2Shobal fathered Reaiah (the
father of Jahath and grandfather of Ahumai and Lahad). They were the families of
the Zorathites. 3Etam fathered *three* sons,
Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash, and their sister,
Hazzelelponi. 4Penuel fathered Gedor, and
Ezer fathered Hushah. These are the sons
of Hur, who was the firstborn of Ephrathah, who fathered Bethlehem.

5Ashhur, the leader of Tekoa, had two
wives: Helah and Naarah. 6Naarah gave
birth to Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni, and
Haahashtari. 7Helah gave birth to Zereth,
Izhar, and Ethnan. 8Koz fathered Anub,
Zobebah, and the families of Harum's son,
Aharhel.

9Jabez, whose name commemorates
his mother's labor pains, was more honorable than his brothers. 10He asked the God
of Israel, "Please bless me and extend my
territory. Let Your hand be with me and
guard me from harm so I will not experience pain *as my mother did*." And God did
just that.

11Shuhah's brother Chelub fathered
Mehir, who fathered Eshton. 12Eshton
fathered Beth-rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah who fathered Ir-nahash. These are the
men of Recah.

13Kenaz fathered Othniel and
Seraiah. Othniel's sons were Hathath and
Meonothai. 14Meonothai fathered Ophrah.
Seraiah's son was Joab, the father of Geharashim, the skilled workers.

15Caleb (the son of Jephunneh)
fathered Iru, Elah, and Naam. Elah's son
was Kenaz. 16Jehallelel fathered Ziph,
Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel. 17Ezrah fathered
Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon. Jether's
wife bore Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah
(the father of Eshtemoa). These are the
sons of Bithia (Mered's wife and Pharaoh's
daughter). 18His Judahite wife birthed
Jered (the father of Gedor), Heber (the
father of Soco), and Jekuthiel (the father
of Zanoah). 19Hodiah's wife (the sister of
Naham) gave birth to the fathers of Keilah
the Garmite and Eshtemoa the Maacathite. 20Shimon fathered Amnon, Rinnah,
Benhanan, and Tilon. Ishi fathered Zoheth
and Ben-zoheth.

21Judah's son Shelah fathered Er
(the father of Lecah), Laadah (the father
of Mareshah), and the families of linen
workers at Beth-ashbea, 22Jokim, the men
of Cozeba, Joash, Saraph (who ruled in
Moab), and Jashubi-lehem. This record is
ancient. 23They were the potters who lived
in Netaim and Gederah, working for the
king.

24The sons of Simeon were Nemuel,
Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul. 25Shaul's
lineage descended Shallum, Mibsam, and
Mishma, 26and the sons of Mishma were
Hammuel, Zaccur, and Shimei. 27Shimei
fathered 16 sons and 6 daughters, but his
brothers did not have many sons and their
tribes were not as large as the Judahites.
28*Until David united the tribes into one
nation,* Shimei's descendants lived at Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar-shual, 29Bilhah,
Ezem, Tolad, 30Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag,
31Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susim, Beth-biri,
and Shaaraim. These were their cities
until David became king. 32Their five city-states were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen,
and Ashan, 33near the city of Baal. These
were recorded in the genealogy of their
villages: 34Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah (son
of Amaziah), 35Joel, Jehu (son of Joshibiah,
son of Seraiah, son of Asiel), 36Elioenai,
Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, 37Ziza (son of Shiphi, son of
Allon, son of Jedaiah, son of Shimri, son of
Shemaiah).

38These were chiefs, and their clans
increased rapidly. 39They sought pastures
for their flocks from the gate of Gedor
to the east side of its *surrounding* valley.
40There they found a rich pasture and
abundant, quiet, and peaceful land. The
Hamites inhabited the land 41until the
Simeonites attacked them during the reign
of Judah's king Hezekiah. They completely
destroyed the tents and the Meunites who
lived there. The Simeonites now live in
their place, where there is pastureland for
the flocks.

42Five hundred Simeonites went
to Mount Seir, led by the sons of Ishi:
Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel.
43There they killed the remaining Amalekites, and they live on that mountain until
this day.

5 1-2Because Reuben slept with his
father's concubine, he forfeited his
rights as the firstborn of Israel, *his
monetary inheritance and his political position as the leader of the nation of Israel.*
Although Reuben's inheritance and birthright were given to Joseph, Judah's descendants became the rulers of Israel.

3Reuben's sons (the firstborn of Israel)
were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.
4The descendants of Joel were Shemaiah,
Gog, Shimei, 5Micah, Reaiah, Baal, 6and
Beerah. Beerah (who led the Reubenites)
was exiled by Tilgath-pilneser, the king of
Assyria *who destroyed Israel and exiled the
inhabitants*. 7His kinsmen led their fami-
lies in the order of their generations: Jeiel
was the *first* chief, then Zechariah, 8Bela of
Aroer (son of Azaz, son of Shema, son of
Joel), Nebo, and *finally* Baal-meon.

9The Reubenite territory stretched to
the Euphrates River Valley because their
cattle had increased in the land of Gilead.
10During Saul's reign they slaughtered the
Hagrites and seized their territory east of
Gilead.

11The Gadites lived across from the
Reubenites between Bashan and Salecah.
12Joel was the chief, and Shapham was
his second *in command,* then Janai and
Shaphat in Bashan. 13There were seven
clans in the tribe: Michael, Meshullam,
Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber. 14These
were the sons of Abihail (son of Huri, son
of Jaroah, son of Gilead, son of Michael,
son of Jeshishai, son of Jahdo, son of Buz).
15Ahi (son of Abdiel and grandson of Guni)
was chief of a clan. 16These leaders lived
in Gilead, in Bashan, and in its towns.
Their pastures filled the lands of Sharon.
17Their genealogies were recorded during
the reigns of Jotham, king of Judah, and
Jeroboam, king of Israel.

18-19The Reubenites, the Gadites,
and the half-tribe of Manasseh were skill-
ful warriors who carried shields, wielded
swords, and shot arrows. There were
44,760 who conquered the Hagrites, Jetur,
Naphish, and Nodab. 20They defeated
the Hagrites and all who were with them
because they asked for God's help during
the battle and trusted in Him, and their
plea was granted. 21They seized 100,000
men and their herds: 50,000 camels,
250,000 sheep, and 2,000 donkeys. 22Many
of the enemies died because *the men were
fighting* God's battle. The tribes then lived
in these *conquered* lands until the exile.

23The numerous members of the
half-tribe of Manasseh lived between
Bashan and Baal-hermon, between Senir
and Mount Hermon. 24The clan leaders
were famous and glorious men: Epher,
Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and
Jahdiel. 25But they disobeyed the God
of their fathers, prostituting themselves
to the pagan gods whom God had
destroyed in front of them. 26So the God
of Israel awakened the king of Assyria,
Pul or Tilgath-pilneser,* to exile the Reu-
benites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of
Manasseh. The people were taken *from
Israel* to live in Halah, in Habor, in Hara,
and by the river of Gozan, where they
remain today.

6 Levi fathered Gershon, Kohath, and
Merari. 2Kohath's sons were Amram,
Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 3The chil-
dren of Amram were Aaron, Moses, and
Miriam. Aaron fathered Nadab, Abihu,
Eleazar, and Ithamar. 4Eleazar's lineage
descended 21 generations until the exile:
Phinehas, Abishua, 5Bukki, Uzzi, 6Zera-
hiah, Meraioth, 7Amariah, Ahitub, 8Zadok,
Ahimaaz, 9Azariah, Johanan, 10Azariah (he
was priest in Solomon's temple which was
constructed in Jerusalem), 11Amariah, Ahi-
tub, 12Zadok, Shallum, 13Hilkiah, Azariah,
14Seraiah, and Jehozadak 15(one of those
from Jerusalem and Judah whom the Eter-
nal One exiled by Nebuchadnezzar).

► While the tribe of Judah boasts the kingly lineage, specifically Israel's beloved kings David and Solomon, the tribe of Levi is the priestly tribe. These men are at the center of the worship of the Lord, performing the daily rituals and sacrifices required in the law.

16*These are the Levite clans according to
their patronage:* Levi fathered Gershom,
Kohath, and Merari. 17Gershom's sons
were Libni and Shimei. 18Kohath's sons
were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.
19Merari's sons were Mahli and Mushi.
These are the Levitical clans. 20Gershom's
lineage *descended seven generations*: Libni,
Jahath, Zimmah, 21Joah, Iddo, Zerah, and
Jeatherai. 22Kohath's lineage *descended
ten generations*: Amminadab, Korah, Assir,
23Elkanah, Ebiasaph, Assir, 24Tahath,
Uriel, Uzziah, and Shaul. 25The sons of
Elkanah were Amasai and Ahimoth.
26Elkanah's lineage *descended six genera-
tions*: Zophai, Nahath, 27Eliab, Jeroham,
Elkanah, and Samuel. 28Samuel's sons
were Joel (the firstborn) and Abijah (the
second). 29Merari's lineage *descended seven*

* 5:26 Some consider Pul and Tilgath-pilneser to be the same ruler, 2 Kings 15:19, 29.

generations: Mahli, Libni, Shimei, Uzzah,
30Shimea, Haggiah, and Asaiah.

31After the chest of the covenant came to rest in the tent of the congregation, *King* David appointed the following Levites to be the musicians in the temple.
32They ministered with songs with respect to their responsibilities outlined for them at the congregation tent until *our king* Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem.
33These served with their sons: From the Kohathites was Heman the singer (son of Joel, son of Samuel, 34son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah, 35son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai, 36son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah, 37son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, 38son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel).

39On Heman's right stood his cousin Asaph (son of Berechiah, son of Shimea, 40son of Michael, son of Baaseiah, son of Malchijah, 41son of Ethni, son of Zerah, son of Adaiah, 42son of Ethan, son of Zimmah, son of Shimei, 43son of Jahath, son of Gershom, son of Levi).

44On *Heman's* left stood their cousin from the Merarites, Ethan (son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch, 45son of Hashabiah, son of Amaziah, son of Hilkiah, 46son of Amzi, son of Bani, son of Shemer, 47son of Mahli, son of Mushi, son of Merari, son of Levi).

48Their cousins from other Levitical clans served the congregation tent of the house of God. 49Aaron and his sons performed the holiest work: they gave burnt offerings and incense offerings. These offerings atoned for Israel, according to all God's servant Moses had commanded.
50The lineage of Aaron *descended 11 generations*: Eleazar, Phinehas, Abishua, 51Bukki, Uzzi, Zerahiah, 52Meraioth, Amariah, Ahitub, 53Zadok, and Ahimaaz.

64Because the Levites *were a priestly tribe without their own land,* the other tribes each gave them cities and pastures.* 54These are their territories and the pasturelands in these settlements: To the descendants of Aaron of the Kohathite clan (the highest clan) 65the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin gave *9* cities 55including Hebron in the territory of Judah and those cities' surrounding pastures. 56But the fields of Hebron and its villages still belonged to Caleb (son of Jephunneh). 57-59The descendants of Aaron received Hebron, a city of escape, *and they also lived in the cities of* Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Hilen, Debir, Ashan, and Beth-shemesh with their surrounding pastures.
60The tribe of Benjamin gave *4* cities and their pastures including *Gibeon,** Geba, Allemeth, and Anathoth. The descendants of Aaron held 13 cities; 61the half-tribe of Manasseh gave 10 cities to the remaining Kohathite clan.

62The tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh gave 13 cities in Bashan to the Gershomites.

63The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun gave 12 cities to the Merarites.

66-69The tribe of Ephraim also gave cities and surrounding pastures to the Kohathites. These cities of refuge included Shechem (in the hill country of Ephraim), Gezer, Jokmeam, Beth-horon, Aijalon, and Gath-rimmon. 70The half-tribe of Manasseh gave the cities and pastures of Aner and Bileam to the rest of the Kohathites.

71The half-tribe of Manasseh gave these cities and surrounding pastures to the Gershomites: Golan in Bashan and Ashtaroth. 72-73The tribe of Issachar gave Kedesh, Daberath, Ramoth, and Anem.
74-75The tribe of Asher gave these cities and their pastures: Mashal, Abdon, Hukok, and Rehob. 76The tribe of Naphtali gave the cities and pastures of Kedesh (in Galilee), Hammon, and Kiriathaim.

77The tribe of Zebulun gave these cities and pastures to the Merarites: Rimmono, Tabor, 78-79and Jericho (beyond the Jordan *River* on the east side). The tribe of Reuben gave the cities and pastures of Bezer, Jahzah, Kedemoth, and Mephaath.
80-81The tribe of Gad gave the cities and pastures of Ramoth (in Gilead), Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer.

► If the Levites are servants of the temple, then why can they live anywhere besides Jerusalem? The temple calendar is set up so that each Levite only serves for two weeks each year at the temple. For the remainder of the year, the Levites are spread throughout the nation and live in pastoral settings, planting grains and tending flocks just as most of the Israelites do. But they have one more function. Within the

* 6:64 Verses 64 and 65 were moved forward to help in the comprehension of the passage. * 6:60 Gibeon appears in the parallel listing in Joshua 21:17.

various cities, they collect the temple taxes that each Israelite owes based on the tribal area where he lives. This way the Levites keep all of the Israelites accountable to God year round.

7 Issachar fathered four sons: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron. 2Tola's sons were Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Samuel. These were heroic warriors, and their clans numbered 22,600 during *King* David's reign.

3Uzzi's son Izrahiah fathered Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah, and all were the chiefs *of their own generations.* 4The clans these men led numbered 36,000 troops because the men had many wives and sons. 5These clans, in addition to the other clans of Issachar, totaled 87,000 heroic warriors.

6Benjamin fathered three sons: Bela, Becher, and Jediael. 7Bela's five sons were Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri. They were chiefs of their clans, heroic warriors numbering 22,034. 8Becher's sons were Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. 9They were chiefs in their clans, heroic warriors numbering 20,200. 10Jediael's son was Bilhan. Bilhan's sons were Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. 11They were chiefs in their clans, heroic warriors numbering 17,200. 12And Ir fathered Shuppim and Huppim. Aher fathered Hushim.

13*Israel's concubine* Bilhah gave birth to Naphtali, who fathered Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shallum.

14The sons of Manasseh and his Aramean concubine were Asriel and Machir (father of Gilead). 15Machir found a wife for Huppim and Shuppim, whose sister was Maacah.* The second *sister* was Zelophehad, who had only daughters. 16Machir's wife, Maacah, bore Peresh. His brother was Sheresh, who fathered Ulam and Rakem. 17Ulam's son was Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead (son of Machir, son of Manasseh). 18His sister, Hammolecheth, gave birth to Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah. 19Shemida fathered Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

20Ephraim's lineage *descended seven generations*: Shuthelah, Bered, Tahath, Eleadah, Tahath, 21Zabad, and Shuthelah. Ezer and Elead *(Shuthelah's sons)* were killed by men of *the Philistine city* Gath because the brothers stole livestock. 22Their father Ephraim mourned many days, and his relatives comforted him. 23His wife became pregnant and birthed Beriah (whose name *means "misfortune" and* commemorates the tragedy in Ephraim's family). 24His daughter, Sheerah, built lower and upper Beth-horon and Uzzen-sheerah. 25His sons were Rephah and Resheph. Resheph's lineage *descended seven generations*: Telah, Tahan, 26Ladan, Ammihud, Elishama, 27Non, and Joshua.

28-29The tribes descended from Joseph bordered each other. The Ephraimites occupied Bethel with its towns, to the east Naaran, and to the west the cities and towns of Gezer, Shechem, and Ayyah. Their borders lined Manasseh's territories: the cities and towns of Beth-shean, Taanach, Megiddo, and Dor.

30Asher fathered *four* sons, Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and their sister Serah. 31Beriah's sons were Heber and Malchiel (father of Birzaith). 32Heber fathered *three sons,* Japhlet, Shomer, and Hotham, and their sister Shua. 33Japhlet's sons were Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. 34Shemer fathered Ahi, Rohgah, Jehubbah, and Aram. 35His brother Helem fathered Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal. 36Zophah's sons were Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, 37Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera. 38Jether fathered Jephunneh, Pispa, and Ara. 39Ulla fathered Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia. 40All these men were heroic warriors and chiefs of their clans. The Asherites contributed 26,000 men to the army.

8 1-2Benjamin fathered five sons: Bela, Ashbel, Aharah, Nohah, and Rapha. 3Bela's sons were Addar, Gera, Abihud, 4Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, 5Gera, Shephuphan, and Huram.

6Ehud's sons were the clan leaders in Geba who were exiled to Manahath:* 7Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera (who led them into exile and fathered Uzza and Ahihud).

8After sending away his *two* wives, Hushim and Baara, Shaharaim fathered children in the country of Moab. 9-10By his wife Hodesh he fathered these clan leaders: Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sachia, and Mirmah. 11By Hushim he

* 7:15 Hebrew is obscure here. In verse 16, Maacah is Machir's wife and Shuppim and Huppim in verse 12 are sons of Ir.
* 8:6 Geba was six miles north and east of Jerusalem, but the location of Manahath is unknown. It was possibly a journey of a couple of days. A more likely possibility was into Moab.

Although these ancestral and tribal lists seem tedious and monotonous, they are absolutely essential for marking identity and place in the postexilic community. For example, a person from Saul's line among Benjamin may have positioned himself for the Judean throne during a time of political and economic weakness. If such a person has arisen from Benjamin or any other tribe such as Ephraim, which is the dominant tribe of the Northern Kingdom, then the scribes in Jerusalem can simply consult the tribal lists in the book of Chronicles.

These lists are not just for noting the "insiders" and "outsiders," but they also serve the purpose of setting forth a long and special covenant identity before the Eternal One and the specific roles within His nation and people called "Israel." The ancestry lists of Chronicles support the one who says, "I am a singer before the Eternal One," and those who say, "We are guards at the house of our God."

fathered Abitub and Elpaal. 12Elpaal's sons were Eber, Misham, Shemed (who built the cities and towns of Ono and Lod), 13Beriah and Shema (who were clan leaders in Aijalon and drove away the people of *the Philistine city* Gath), 14Ahio, Shashak, and Jeremoth. 15-16Beriah's sons were Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, Michael, Ishpah, and Joha. 17-18Elpaal also fathered Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab. 19-21Shimei's sons were Jakim, Zichri, Zabdi, Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel, Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath. 22-25Shashak's sons were Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, Abdon, Zichri, Hanan, Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, Iphdeiah, and Penuel. 26-27Jeroham's sons were Shamsherai, Sheharíah, Athaliah, Jaareshiah, Elijah, and Zichri. 28These men were leaders of their clans who lived in Jerusalem.

29In Gibeon, Jeiel (the father of Gibeon) lived with his wife Maacah. 30His sons were Abdon (the firstborn), then Zur, Kish, Baal, Nadab, 31Gedor, Ahio, and Zecher. 32Mikloth fathered Shimeah, and they also lived with their relatives in Jerusalem across from their other relatives. 33Ner fathered Kish, the father of Saul, *the first king in Israel*. Saul's sons were Jonathan, Malchi-shua, Abinadab, and Eshbaal.

34Jonathan's son Merib-baal fathered Micah. 35The sons of Micah were Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz. 36Ahaz fathered Jehoaddah, who then fathered Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri's lineage *descended five generations*: Moza, 37Binea, Raphah, Eleasah, and Azel. 38Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Shearíah, Obadiah, and Hanan. 39His brother, Eshek, fathered three sons in order: Ulam, Jeush, and Eliphelet. 40Ulam's sons were heroic warriors and archers who had 150 sons and grandsons. All of these were of the tribe of Benjamin.

9 All *the tribes of* Israel were recorded in the book of the kings of Israel; then Judah was exiled to Babylon for their unfaithfulness *to God*.

► It might seem strange that the Jews' genealogy continues seamlessly from pre-exilic Judah and Israel to their return home, especially since the generations of people who live in exile are lost from the list. But it is important that those who return, who become known as "Jews" while they are exiled in Babylon, are connected to the Israelites. The Jews are the continuation of God's covenant, so they should remember the long history of faithful ancestors and use them as examples in building the new Israel.

2*At the end of our exile,* the first people who returned to their cities were Israelites, Levites, the priests and the temple servants.

3Some people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem: 4Uthai the son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, son of Perez, son of Judah. 5From the Shilonites were Asaiah (the firstborn) and his sons. 6From the Zerahites were Jeuel and 690 relatives. 7From the Benjaminites were Sallu (son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah), 8Ibneiah (son of Jeroham), Elah (son of Uzzi, son of Michri), Meshullam (son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah), 9and 956 relatives. All these were leaders of their clans.

10From the priests were Jedaiah,
Jehoiarib, Jachin, 11Azariah (son of Hilkiah,
son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of
Meraioth, son of Ahitub—the chief officer
of the temple), 12Adaiah (son of Jeroham,
son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah), Maa-
sai (son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of
Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of
Immer), 13and their chiefs. These men
totaled 1,760 *workers in the temple*. These
were all talented men fit for service in the
temple.

14The Levites *who returned* included
Shemaiah (son of Hasshub, son of Azri-
kam, son of Hashabiah, son of Merari),
15Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, Mattaniah
(son of Mica, son of Zichri, son of Asaph),
16Obadiah (son of Shemaiah, son of Galal,
son of Jeduthun), and Berechiah (son of
Asa, son of Elkanah). They lived among
the Netophathites.*

17-18The gatekeepers, who guarded
the entrances *and performed other daily
chores,* were Shallum (stationed at the
king's gate in the east), Akkub, Talmon,
Ahiman, and their relatives. 19These were
the gatekeepers for the congregation tent
and monitored activities there (as their
fathers had ruled the camp of the Eternal
One as keepers of the entrance): Shal-
lum (son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of
Korah) and his fellow Korahites. 20Phine-
has (son of Eleazar) ruled them previously,
and the Eternal was with him. 21Zechariah
(son of Meshelemiah) was gatekeeper at
the entrance of the congregation tent. 22All
the men who were gatekeepers numbered
212. They were recorded in the local gene-
alogies and were chosen by *King* David
and the seer Samuel.

23They and their sons guarded the
gates of the temple and the congregation
tent. 24The gatekeepers were stationed
on all sides: to the north, south, east,
and west. 25Their relatives joined the
gatekeepers once per week to keep them
company. 26The four chief gatekeepers
(who were Levites) had the important task
of controlling the chambers and treasur-
ies in the temple. 27Because guarding
was their primary task, they spent their
nights watching the temple and opened
it each morning. 28Others were in charge
of the vessels of service; the vessels were
counted as they were brought into and
taken out *of the temple*. 29Still others were
in charge of the sanctuary's furniture
and utensils, and of the flour, wine, oil,
frankincense, and spices. 30Some of the
sons of the priests mixed these spices.
31Mattithiah (a Levite and the firstborn
of Shallum the Korahite) was responsible
for things baked in pans *for offerings*.
32Some of their Kohathite relatives baked
the unleavened bread used as showbread
every sabbath. 33These are the singers,
the chiefs of the Levites during their own
generations, who lived in the chambers
of the temple *in Jerusalem* free from other
service because they worked day and
night. 34All these men were the chiefs of
the Levites during their own generations,
and they all lived in Jerusalem.

► All priests may be Levites, but not all Levites are priests. Priests are descendants of Aaron, Israel's first high priest, and perform sacrifices in the temple. Levites who are descendants of the other Levite patriarchs perform all the other duties necessary in the temple; they are elders, custodians, musicians, assistants, handymen, gatekeepers, treasurers, etc. All jobs are equally necessary to the functioning of the temple, so no one of them should be more highly regarded than another. Even the high priest is no more important than the young Levite who sweeps the floor every day.

35Jeiel (the leader of Gibeon) lived in
Gibeon with his wife Maacah. 36Their
firstborn son was Abdon, then Zur, Kish,
Baal, Ner, Nadab, 37Gedor, Ahio, Zecha-
riah, and Mikloth. 38Mikloth fathered
Shimeam. These lived with their relatives
in Jerusalem, across from their other rela-
tives. 39Ner fathered Kish, whose son was
Saul (father of Jonathan, Malchi-shua,
Abinadab, and Eshbaal). 40Jonathan's son
was Merib-baal, and Merib-baal's son was
Micah. 41Micah fathered Pithon, Melech,
Tahrea, and Ahaz. 42Ahaz's son was Jarah,
who fathered Alemeth, Azmaveth, and
Zimri. Zimri fathered Moza, 43whose
lineage *descended four generations*: Binea,
Rephaiah, Eleasah, and Azel. 44Azel had
six sons: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael,
Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan.

* 9:16 People from an area about three miles southeast of Bethlehem

► Having explained how the Israelites and the postexilic Jews are part of the same family with this extensive genealogy, the chronicler now presents a narrative about the most glorious period of Israel's history: the united kingdom. It is in kings David and Solomon that the returning Jews are to find inspiration to rebuild their nation and follow their God.

10 *At the end of Saul's reign as king of Israel,* the Philistines attacked Israel. The Israelites fled from the Philistines and were killed on Mount Gilboa. 2As the Philistines tracked Saul and his sons, they killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua. 3The fighting was heavy around Saul. Their archers caught up with Saul and wounded him.

Saul *(commanding his armor bearer)*:
4Draw your sword and kill me; otherwise these pagans will capture me and mutilate my body.

But the armor bearer was afraid to kill his king, so Saul *committed suicide,* falling on his own sword. 5When the armor bearer saw Saul's body, he also *committed suicide,* falling on his own sword. 6It was at this battle that Saul, his three sons, and his household were annihilated.

7When the Israelites remaining in the valley realized their kinsmen had fled and Saul and his sons were dead, they also left their cities and fled. The conquering Philistines then inhabited these *conquered cities of Israel.* 8The next day, when the Philistines returned *to the battlefield* to rob the dead, they found Saul and his sons slain on Mount Gilboa. 9So the Philistines stripped Saul and sent his head and armor throughout Philistia, announcing their victory to their gods and to the people. 10They put Saul's armor in their gods' temples and mounted his head in the temple of Dagon.

A prominent god whom the Philistines worship is Dagon. They believe he brings rain, which in turn is vital to the crops, and thus makes life possible in their land.

11When Jabesh-gilead heard how the Philistines desecrated Saul's remains, 12the heroic men buried the bodies of their king and his sons under the oak tree in Jabesh and fasted for seven days.

13-14Because Saul disobeyed the Eternal One and trusted in the counsel of a medium instead, he died at the Eternal's hand; and the Eternal gave the kingdom to *the great king* David, son of Jesse.

11 Then the Israelites found David at Hebron *and acknowledged him as their king.*

Israelites: Certainly we are *your family,* your flesh and blood. 2You have always guided and protected Israel, even when Saul was our king *and it was not your responsibility,* because the Eternal your God decided, "You will be the shepherd of My people Israel, the prince over all of them."*

3So all the elders of Israel came to *coronate* their king at Hebron. David made a covenant with them that the Eternal One witnessed; and they anointed him king over Israel, as the Eternal had commanded them *to do* through the seer, Samuel.

4Then David and his subjects traveled *from Hebron* to Jebus, which is now known as Jerusalem, where the Jebusites lived. 5The Jebusites threatened David, "You shall not pass through these gates." Nevertheless David captured the stronghold (Zion), now known as the city of David, *and made it his capital.*

David uses this conquest to identify his best warriors.

David *(challenging the men)*: 6The first man who kills a Jebusite will be *rewarded with the rank of* chief and commander.

Joab (a son of Zeruiah) *won the challenge,* attacking first and becoming a chief. 7After *the conquest* David lived in Zion, so it became known as the "city of David." 8He fortified the city with earthen ramparts while Joab repaired the damages *caused by the conquest.* 9David, *along with the city,* grew in power because the Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies supported him.

► King David chooses Jerusalem as his capital for political and military

* 11:2 2 Samuel 5:2

reasons. Resting between Benjamin and Judah, it is not located within any of the twelve tribes' borders, making it politically neutral. No one can say that David is showing preference to one tribe over another by locating his capital—and the center of the Israelite religion—within one tribe's borders. And there is a very good reason the Jebusite city remained unconquered by any Israelite tribe when all other Canaanite cities had fallen, a reason that further justifies David's selection of the city: Sitting on a high ridge, Jerusalem is easy to defend. Its very location will help save it from future invaders, such as the Assyrians, when other Israelite cities fall.

10These are leaders of the warriors whom David commanded. They and the citizens of Israel supported him in his rule, as the Eternal desired for Israel *when He chose David as king.* 11So what follows is an accounting of David's great warriors. Jashobeam (son of a Hachmonite) was the chief of 30,* *the highest-ranking officers in David's army.* He slaughtered 300 men in one battle with his spear.

12Second in command was Eleazar (son of Dodo the Ahohite), who was one of three *notable* warriors. 13He fought alongside David in a barley field called Pasdammim when the people fled from the Philistines. 14Together they repelled the Philistines from the field, and the Eternal delivered them *from the Philistines* with a great victory.

15Three *other* of the 30 chiefs pursued the Philistines to their camp in the valley of Rephaim *(between Jerusalem and Bethlehem).* These *other* chiefs waited with David in a rocky area of the cave of Adullam, *west of Bethlehem.* 16While David was in his stronghold and the Philistine garrison was in Bethlehem, 17the king was very thirsty.

David: Could someone bring me water from the well of Bethlehem, which is near the gate *of the city where the Philistines are waiting*?

18The three warriors broke through the Philistine camp *in the valley of Rephaim,* drew water from the well of Bethlehem near the gate, and took it to David. In spite of his thirst, David would not drink it. Instead he poured it out *as an offering* to the Eternal One.

David: 19How could I drink this water with God watching me? I could not drink the blood of my three strong warriors who risked their lives to bring it to me, *so I will not benefit from their sacrifice.*

20Abshai, Joab's brother and leader of these 30,* slaughtered 300 men *in one battle* with his spear and made a notable name for himself. 21Of the three in the second rank, Abshai was the most honored and became their commander, but he was never promoted to the highest rank.

22Benaiah (son of Jehoiada, son of a warrior of Kabzeel) performed great deeds—he killed the two warriors of Moab, killed a lion inside a pit on a snowy day, 23and killed a seven-foot-six-inch-tall Egyptian, who carried a *curved* spear (the size and shape of a weaver's beam). Benaiah attacked this Egyptian with a club, stole the spear from the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with the same spear. 24Because of these great deeds, Benaiah (Jehoiada's son) had a *powerful* reputation equal to that of the three mighty men. 25He was honored among the 30, but he did not achieve the status of the three. *Because of Benaiah's effectiveness in battle,* David appointed him captain of the king's guard.

26The warriors of the armies were Asahel (*another* brother of Joab), Elhanan (son of Dodo of Bethlehem), 27Shammoth the Harorite, Helez the Pelonite, 28Ira (son of Ikkesh the Tekoite), Abiezer the Anathothite, 29Sibbecai the Hushathite, Ilai the Ahohite, 30Maharai the Netophathite, Heled (son of Baanah the Netophathite), 31Ithai (son of Ribai of Gibeah the Benjaminite), Benaiah the Pirathonite, 32Hurai of the brooks of Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite, 33Azmaveth the Baharumite, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, 34the sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan (son of Shagee the Hararite), 35Ahiam (son of Sacar the Hararite), Eliphal (son of Ur), 36Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite, 37Hezro the Carmelite, Naarai (son of Ezbai), 38Joel (brother of Nathan), Mibhar (son of Hagri), 39Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite, the armor bearer of Joab (son of Zeruiah), 40Ira

* 11:11 Some manuscripts read, "three." * 11:20 Syriac and Hebrew read, "three."

the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, [41]Uriah the Hittite, Zabad (son of Ahlai), [42]Adina (son of Shiza, a Reubenite chief) and 30 with him, [43]Hanan (son of Maacah), Joshaphat the Mithnite, [44]Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jeiel (sons of Hotham the Aroerite), [45]Jediael and Joha (sons of Shimri the Tizite), [46]Eliel the Mahavite, Jeribai and Joshaviah (sons of Elnaam), Ithmah the Moabite, [47]Eliel, Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaite.

12 After David fled from Saul (son of Kish) to *the Philistine city of* Ziklag, *all the tribes of Israel* sent warriors to support him in battles. [2]There were *especially skilled* Benjaminite archers, able to sling stones and shoot arrows from their left hands* or from their right hands. [3]Their chief was Ahiezer, then Joash, the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite, Jeziel and Pelet (sons of Azmaveth), Beracah, Jehu the Anathothite, [4]and Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a warrior equal to and better than the 30. Then Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, Jozabad the Gederathite, [5]Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, Shephatiah the Haruphite, [6]Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, Jashobeam, the Korahites, [7]Joelah, and Zebadiah (son of Jeroham of Gedor).

All of these Benjaminites recognize David as king, even over their fellow tribesman, Saul.

[8]While David was positioned in his wilderness stronghold, mighty Gadite warriors joined him in battle. They fought in wars with spears and shields, with the ferocity of lions and the speed *and agility* of gazelles. [9]Their chief was Ezer, then Obadiah, Eliab the third, [10]Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth, [11]Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh, [12]Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth, [13]Jeremiah the tenth, and Machbannai the eleventh. [14]They were captains of the army—the weakest of them was worth 100 *soldiers,* and the greatest of them was worth 1,000.

► Large armies such as David's require many men and complex coordination. In the battlefield, men are lined up according to what weapon they use: Spearmen are in front, protected by their shields and able to fight other spearmen hand-to-hand. Slingers are behind them, able to hoist heavy projectiles over their own spearmen and thin out their opponents' frontline. Archers are in the back, able to shoot their arrows long distances to attack their opponents' midline or to infiltrate high battlements. All three are necessary for sieges, but not all military leaders are able to gather so many men of varying skills to their causes. The size and capability of David's army demonstrates his power and the peoples' widespread support of him.

[15]In the autumn, when the Jordan River overflows its banks, these men crossed the river and conquered its inhabitants, who then fled to the east and the west. [16]Some Benjaminites and Judahites then joined David's army.

David *(to the Benjaminites and Judahites)***:** [17]If you are joining my army because you agree with my rule, then I welcome your help. *We will unify the land of Israel as brothers.* But if you are joining me as spies for my enemies, even though I have done nothing wrong, then *our God,* the God of our fathers, will judge your actions.

Amasai, the Chief of the 30 *(inspired by the Spirit)***:** [18]We are at your command, David, son of Jesse! May peace reward you and your allies, for your God is your ally.

So David accepted them *as warriors* and made them captains of the guard.

[19a]As David requested the aid of his Philistine allies in a battle against Saul, some Manassehites defected from Saul's army to David's army.* [20]The Manassehites included Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai—all captains of thousands in their tribe. [21]They could help David against attackers because they were all warriors and captains in the army. [22]Every day the numbers of David's army increased, until it was as great as the army of God—*large in number and justified by God's will.* [19b]But the Philistines *at Ziklag* refused to help David.

* 12:2 Judges 20:16 * 12:19 The remainder of verse 19 has been moved to follow verse 22 to help in understanding the flow of the passage.

Philistines at Ziklag *(fearfully)*: David may join Saul's army and kill us.

23This is a record of the divisions who joined David at Hebron to defeat Saul and conquer Israel as the Eternal determined.

All twelve tribes of Israel support David's rule, even the Levites who are exempted from military service.

24Of Judah 6,800 fought with spears and shields. 25Of Simeon, 7,100 were warriors. 26Of Levi 4,600 *supported David—* 27Jehoiada led 3,700 of the house of Aaron; 28Zadok, a young mighty man of valor, led 22 captains of his father's house. 29Of Benjamin (Saul's relatives), only 3,000 *followed David* because many maintained allegiance to their king, Saul. 30Of Ephraim 20,800 were famous warriors. 31Of the half-tribe of Manasseh, 18,000 helped to make David king. 32Of Issachar (politically savvy men), 200 were chiefs of their own relatives. 33Of Zebulun 50,000 fought with various weapons and followed David with complete devotion. 34Of Naphtali 1,000 chiefs led 37,000 who fought with spears and shields. 35Of Dan 28,600 were skilled at keeping ranks. 36Of Asher 40,000 joined the ranks of the army able to keep formation. 37From the other side of the Jordan, 120,000 of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh fought with various weapons. 38All these warriors came to Hebron wholeheartedly to support King David as he ascended to the throne of Israel. All others living in Israel recognized David's right to rule, 39and they celebrated with David three days with the food and drink their relatives had prepared for them. 40Their kinsmen and the neighboring tribes (even as far as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali) brought food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen—large amounts of flour cakes, fig cakes, raisins, wine, oil, oxen, and sheep. All of Israel rejoiced.

13 **David** *(after consulting the captain of each army division)*: 1-2If you agree, and if the Eternal One our God requires, then let us request the company of our relatives throughout Israel—including the priests and Levites who are among the *other eleven* tribes in their cities with pasture lands. 3Let us take the covenant chest of our God *from its exile in Kiriath-jearim* and return it to our presence, *making it our focus,* since we did not keep it with us during Saul's reign.

► Having been established as the king over Israel, David's first act is to ensure proper religious practice for his nation. He decides to make Jerusalem the center of both political and religious power in Israel by moving the chest containing Moses' covenant there. Since God dwells wherever it is, moving the covenant chest to Jerusalem should move God's presence to Jerusalem. As long as it remains in Jerusalem, Jerusalem is more than just the average national capital—it is God's holy city. If anyone chooses to wage war against David and his city, then that person fights God.

4Everyone agreed *with David* that this was right: *the chest of the covenant should be among the people*. 5So David assembled Israel, from the Shihor of Egypt to the entrance of Hamath *in Aram,* to take the covenant chest of God from Kiriath-jearim. 6Everyone went up to Baalah (also known as Kiriath-jearim) in Judah to take the covenant chest of God where the Eternal sits between the winged heavenly creatures and His name is called. 7They carried the covenant chest of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab; Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. 8David and all Israel rejoiced with all their might with songs, lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets as a celebration before God.

9When they arrived at the threshing floor of Chidon, the oxen *tripped,* nearly tipping the covenant chest *off the cart,* so Uzza reached out to steady it. 10The Eternal was enraged at Uzza because he touched the chest *and defiled its sanctity, ignoring God's instructions never to touch it,* so He killed the man in His presence. 11David was angry at the Eternal's retribution against Uzza, so *the king* named that place Perez-uzza, *meaning "broken Uzza,"* as it still is called today. 12David feared God and wondered, "How can I bring the covenant chest of God, *something with such awesome power,* home with me?" 13Instead of bringing it to the city of David, he took it to the house of Obed-edom

the Gittite, *who was from Gath Rammon (a Levitical city).* 14There the covenant chest of God remained three months *before David moved it to Jerusalem,* and the Eternal blessed Obed-edom's family in everything.

14 Hiram (king of Tyre) sent messengers to David with cedar trees, masons, and carpenters to build a royal palace, *acknowledging Israel and David's political influence in the region.* 2Because of the expanding power of Israel, David realized the Eternal had selected him as king over Israel to provide for His people. 3At Jerusalem he took more wives and fathered more children. 4These were the children born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 5Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, 6Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 7Elishama, Beeliada, and Eliphelet.

► David is obviously God's man. The blessings God pours out on David are apparent: he is experienced in political and military success, his family rapidly expands, and his massive building projects are visible everywhere.

8When the Philistines heard about David's ascension to the throne of all Israel, they prepared to attack him. But David heard about their movement and sent his troops to attack them. 9As the Philistines raided the valley of Rephaim, 10David asked for God's guidance.

David: Shall I fight the Philistines? Will You assure me a victory?

Eternal One: Fight them, and I will ensure a victory.

11David defeated the Philistines at Baal-perazim, so named because "God broke the enemies with my hand as rushing waters break through barriers." 12The Philistines abandoned their gods there, so David ordered the idols to be burned.

13The Philistines raided the valley again. 14Again David asked for God's counsel.

Eternal One: *This time* do not attack them directly. Circle behind their forces and attack *from their rear coming* out from the balsam trees. 15When you hear marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then go out to fight. I will have already attacked the Philistine army before you arrive.

16David obeyed God's command, and he defeated the army of the Philistines from Gibeon to Gezer. 17David was famous among his neighboring nations, and the Eternal made all other nations afraid of him.

15 David founded the city of David *as his capital* and built his palaces there. *But in his zeal to rebuild Jerusalem and build his palaces,* He prepared a place for the covenant chest of God in a tent *adjacent to the palace.* 2-3Then David invited the people of Israel to Jerusalem for *a parade celebrating* the arrival of the covenant chest of the Eternal.

David *(to the assembly)***:** *Because of Uzza's fiasco when we tried to move the chest three months ago,* no one but the Levites may carry the covenant chest of God. The Eternal has selected them *and them alone* to bear it and to serve Him forever.

4So David gathered the men of Aaron and the other Levites: 5the men of Kohath (Uriel the chief and 120 of his relatives), 6the men of Merari (Asaiah the chief and 220 of his relatives), 7the men of Gershom (Joel the chief and 130 of his relatives), 8the men of Elizaphan (Shemaiah the chief and 200 of his relatives), 9the men of Hebron (Eliel the chief and 80 of his relatives), and 10the men of Uzziel (Amminadab the chief and 112 of his relatives).

11*When they had all gathered together,* David summoned Zadok and Abiathar (two priests) and the other Levites: Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab.

David *(commissioning them)***:** 12You are the heads of the households of the Levites. *You are the ones whom God wants to carry His covenant chest.* Sanctify yourselves and your relatives, so you may deliver the covenant chest of the Eternal One, God of Israel, to the tent I have prepared for it *next to my palace in Jerusalem.* 13You did not carry the chest *from Kiriath-jearim* the first time *we moved it,* so the Eternal our God was infuriated at

us for ignoring His commands. *This time, we will bring it to Jerusalem in the way He told us to.*

14After the priests and the Levites were consecrated for their duty, *David and the Levites organized the city's* processional in honor of the chest of the Eternal, the God of Israel. 15The Levites picked up the covenant chest of God and carried it by *wooden* poles on their shoulders as the Eternal commanded them to do through *His prophet* Moses. 16David told the leaders of the Levites to select their relatives as musicians and singers *in the parade,* playing instruments such as lutes, lyres, and cymbals and raising their voices in joy. 17So the Levites appointed Heman (son of Joel) and his kinsmen, Asaph (son of Berechiah), the sons of Merari, and Ethan (son of Kushaiah). 18With these men were their assistants: Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, and Mikneiah, along with Obed-edom and Jeiel who were gatekeepers.

19*The celebration began with a parade.* The *assembled* singers (Heman, Asaph, and Ethan) sounded their bronze cymbals; 20Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah played their lutes tuned to alamoth, 21and Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah played their lyres tuned to sheminith. 22Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, directed the singing because of his musical ability, 23while Berechia and Elkanah led the gatekeepers. 24Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer (all priests) blew their clarions *at the front of the parade* in front of the covenant chest of God, as Obed-edom and Jehiah carried it. 25In this manner, David, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands prepared to move the covenant chest of the Eternal from the house of Obed-edom *into its high place in Jerusalem* with rejoicing. 26As God was helping the Levites to carry the *heavy* covenant chest, they offered seven *wild* bulls and seven stags to Him. 27David, all the Levites carrying the chest, the singers, and Chenaniah the song leader were dressed in fine linen robes. The king also wore a linen priestly vest. 28All Israel celebrated the chest's journey *to its tent,* rejoicing with the sound of trumpets, clarions, and cymbals, and *worshiping with* harps and lyres.

29When the covenant chest of the Eternal entered the city of David, Michal (the daughter of Saul *and David's wife*) gazed out of a window and saw her husband dancing and celebrating *in the parade. At that moment,* Michal hated David.

16 The Levites set the covenant chest of God down in *the middle of* the tent David had built for it, and they made sacrifices and burnt offerings before God. 2When David finished these rituals of burnt offerings and peace offerings he blessed the people under the Eternal's authority. 3He gave a loaf of bread, a date roll,* and a raisin cake to every man and woman in Israel. 4He appointed some of the Levites as servants of the covenant chest of the Eternal, *as officers* to commemorate, to give thanks, and to give praise to the Eternal One, God of Israel. 5Asaph was the head *of the servants,* next Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-edom. Jeiel was over all instruments, including a *ten-stringed* harp and lyre, while Asaph played the cymbals. 6Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests played trumpets regularly before the covenant chest of God. 7That day, *at the end of the parade,* David gave this first song of thanks to Asaph and his brothers:

8Give thanks to the Eternal, and call out
to Him.
Teach the people His deeds.
9Sing to Him! Sing praises to Him!
Talk about all His wonders.
10Brag about His holy name;
let your heart rejoice in following
the Eternal.
11Always follow the Eternal,
His strength and His face.
12Remember the wonders which He did,
and the judgments which He spoke.
13Seed of Israel, you are His servants;
sons of Jacob, you are His chosen.

14He is the Eternal One, your God.
His judgments fill the earth.
15Always remember His covenant,
the word He commanded to 1,000
generations
16Which is His covenant with Abraham
and His pledge to Isaac,
17His statute with Jacob
and His covenant with Israel
forever:

* 16:3 Meaning is unclear and is found only here and 2 Samuel 6:19. Traditionally it has been translated "a portion of meat," but more recently "a cake made from dates."

18"I will give the land of Canaan to you,
a territory as your inheritance."

19*When He promised this,* you were a
diminished few,
mere strangers in the land.
20You went from nation to nation
and from one kingdom to another,
21But He did not let those nations
oppress you.
He reproved the kings:
22"Do not strike My anointed people
or do evil to My prophets."

23Now, sing to the Eternal, all the earth!
Announce the good news of His
salvation each and every day!
24Enlighten the nations to His splendor;
describe His wondrous acts to all
people!
25For the Eternal is great *indeed* and
praiseworthy,
feared *and reverenced* above all
gods.
26For all gods are *worthless* idols,
but the Eternal plotted the *vast*
heavens.
27Honor and majesty precede Him;
strength and beauty infuse His *holy*
sanctuary.

28Give all credit to the Eternal, families of
the world!
Credit Him with honor and
strength!
29Credit Him with the glory worthy of
His *magnificent* name;
gather your sacrifice, and present it
before Him.
Bow down to the Eternal, adorned in
holiness.
30Fear Him, all the earth.
For the earth is firmly rooted; it
cannot move.
31Heavens, be glad; earth, rejoice.
Say to the nations, "The Eternal
One reigns."
32The sea roars, as do its creatures.
The field rejoices, as do its crops.
33Then will the forest and its trees cry
out
before the Eternal, for He comes to
judge the earth.
34Give testimony about the Eternal
because He is good;
His loyal love lasts forever.

35Say, "Save us, God of our salvation.
Gather us and free us from the
nations
To thank Your holy name,
to boast in Your praise."
36Blessed is the Eternal One, God of
Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.

People: So may it be! We will praise the Eternal.

37So David left Asaph and his brothers at the covenant chest of the Eternal to serve it continually, performing the daily rituals. 38Obed-edom and the 68 brothers served, with Obed-edom (son of Jeduthun) and Hosah as the gatekeepers.

39Zadok (the priest) and his fellow priests lived before the congregation tent of the Eternal in the high place at Gibeon 40to burn offerings continually to Him upon the altar in the morning and evening, as God had commanded Israel. 41-42With them were Heman, Jeduthun, and the rest of those who are chosen and recorded here who gave testimony about the Eternal, whose loyal love never ends, using clarions, cymbals, other instruments, and songs. The sons of Jeduthun were assigned to be gatekeepers *at Gibeon.* 43*Once the congregation tent was prepared,* all the people returned to their homes, and David returned to bless his own house.

► After David moves the covenant chest to Jerusalem, Israel has two places of worship and two high priests. One is with the chest in Jerusalem, and the other is at the congregation tent in Gibeon. Although David intends to build a temple in Jerusalem and reunite the covenant chest and the congregation tent, that one worship center will not be built until his son, Solomon, is king.

17 Once David had sat in his palace, he made an observation.

David *(to Nathan the prophet)***:** I live in a *sturdy* house made of *expensive, imported* cedar, but the covenant chest of the Eternal lives in a *temporary* house made of curtains. *This does not seem right.*

Nathan: 2If you want *to build God a house,* then do it. God is with you.

3Later that night, God came to Nathan
and corrected his thinking.

Eternal One: 4Go and tell My servant
David the Eternal One says: You may not
build a house for Me to live in; 5I have
never lived in a house, from the day I
brought Israel out *of Egypt* until today.
I have always moved from tent to tent,
from one home to another. 6In all these
places where I have walked with Israel,
did I ever ask any of the judges I com-
manded to shepherd Israel, "Why have
you not built for Me an *expensive* house
of cedar?"

7I, the Eternal One, Commander of
heavenly armies, pledge this: I moved you
from the pasture, where you followed
behind sheep, to *the palace,* where you
now lead My *sheep,* Israel. 8I have accom-
panied you wherever you have gone and
have destroyed your enemies from before
you. I will exalt your name to the level of
the great ones who are on the earth. 9I
will select a land for My people Israel; I
will plant them so they may live in their
own land and not be moved again. The
wicked will not exhaust them anymore,
as they did from the beginning 10and as
when I commanded judges to be over
My people Israel. I will humble all your
enemies. I, the Eternal One, will build a
house for you, *instead of you building a
house for Me.* 11-12At the end of your life,
when your reign *on earth* is complete and
you have joined your ancestors, I shall
select one of your sons in your place, and
I shall build his house. *In return,* he will
build a house for Me, *a temple where I
shall dwell and where your people will wor-
ship Me.* And I will establish his throne
forever. 13I shall be his Father, and he
will be My son. I shall not take My loyal
love from him as I took it from *Saul* who
reigned before you. 14I shall establish him
in My temple and in My kingdom forever.
His throne will last forever.

► God is clever! David comes to Him, asking to build Him a house, but God turns it around on the king. God uses the opportunity to talk about something more important than a house with four walls; instead, He wants to talk about David's house—David's monarchy. This promise gives the Jews the inspiration they need as they rebuild the temple. Certainly buildings are fleeting, for even Solomon's glorious temple that David draws the plans for is destroyed. But God's promise remains. David's descendants continue to lead His people, just as He has led the Jews back from Babylon.

15Nathan told David exactly what the Eternal said through this vision. 16Then King David sat before the Eternal.

David: Why have You, Eternal God,
brought someone as lowly as me and my
family to such a prominent place? 17This
promise was a small thing to You, O God;
but it ensures the stability of my house
for a long time *and reveals to me future
generations* while regarding me as a man
of importance, *and their importance to
You,* Eternal God. 18How else can I thank
you? For You have honored Your servant,
and you have come to know Your servant.
19Eternal, for my sake and according
to Your desire, You have orchestrated
all this greatness and revealed all these
great things. 20Eternal, there is none like
You; for all we have heard no other god
exists who has revealed such things. 21No
other nation on the earth is like Your
people Israel. You redeemed us to be Your
people, to make Your name great by Your
powerful deeds—driving out nations from
before us, whom You redeemed out of
Egypt. 22You made us Your own people
forever; and You, Eternal One, became
our God forever. 23Eternal, may Your
promise last forever, and may You do as
You have spoken over your servant and
his house. 24May Your name be estab-
lished and magnified forever: "The Eter-
nal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, God
of Israel, is Israel's God; and the house of
Your servant David is established before
You." 25You, my God, have revealed Your
intention to establish my kingdom; there-
fore, I have the courage to pray before
You. 26Now, Eternal, You are God and
have promised this good thing to Your
servant. 27You are pleased to bless the
house of Your servant; may Your pleasure
continue forever. For You, Eternal, have
blessed and will bless forever.

18 After *God blessed David's mon-
archy, King* David conquered
the Philistines—defeating them

and seizing *their capital city of* Gath and its towns.

2He defeated the Moabites, *who were his relatives through his ancestor Ruth,* and the Moabites served David and brought him tribute.

3He defeated Hadadezer (king of Zobah) as far as Hamath *in Aram,* extending the borders *of Israel* to the Euphrates River. 4From Hadadezer David seized 1,000 chariots, 7,000 horsemen, and 20,000 foot soldiers. He cut the leg muscles of all the chariot horses, reserving only 100 for future use with the chariots. 5When *the armies of* Damascus in Aram came to help *their kinsman* Hadadezer, David killed 22,000 Arameans. 6Then David built garrisons in Damascus, and the Arameans served him and brought him tribute. The Eternal helped David, *ensuring his victory,* wherever he went. 7David seized the golden shields from the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. 8He seized large quantities of bronze from Hadadezer's cities of Tibhath and Cun (which Solomon later used to cast the bronze basin, pillars, and utensils *for the temple*). 9When Tou (king of Hamath *in Aram*) heard that David had defeated Hadadezer king of Zobah, 10*he was overjoyed* since he had been fighting with Hadadezer himself. Tou sent his son, Hadoram, to King David to greet him and to bless him with gold, silver, and bronze, for David had fought Hadadezer and had won the victory. 11King David then dedicated these gifts to the Eternal along with the silver and gold he had seized from these nations: Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek.

► These weren't just any surrounding nations; these nations each have long histories as adversaries of Israel. Edom, descended from Jacob's older brother Esau, lost any chance of being God's chosen people when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for stew. Moab and Ammon were formed by the descendants of an incestuous relationship between Abraham's nephew Lot and Lot's daughters. The Philistines, although not related to the Israelites, were frequent enemies whose military prowess threatened Israelite tribes on many occasions. And the Amalekites, also descended from Esau, were almost constant enemies of the Israelites, employing ruthless tactics in their war mongering. By subduing these nations, David not only secures the safety of Israel, but he reaffirms God's selection of Israel as His people over all the other nations in the land.

12*One of David's chiefs,* Abishai (son of Zeruiah), defeated 18,000 Edomites in the valley of Salt. 13He built garrisons in Edom, and all the people of that nation served David. The Eternal helped David wherever he went.

14David was a just and righteous ruler over all Israel—over his people *and the lands he conquered.* 15Joab (son of Zeruiah) led the army; Jehoshaphat (son of Ahilud) was the recorder; 16Zadok (son of Ahitub) and Abimelech (son of Abiathar) were priests; Shavsha was secretary; 17Benaiah (son of Jehoiada) governed the Cherethites and the Pelethites. David's own sons were his *trusted* chiefs giving him advice.

19 After *David had conquered his enemies and united Israel into one nation,* Nahash (king of the Ammonites) died, and his son ascended to the throne. 2So David sent messengers into Ammonite territory to console Hanun (son of Nahash) about his father's death.

David *(resolved)***:** I will be merciful to Hanun because his father was merciful to me.

3But the Ammonite chiefs doubted *David's sincerity.*

Ammonite Chiefs *(to Hanun)***:** Is David really honoring your father by sending you his sympathies? Surely these messengers are here to spy on your affairs and overthrow your government!

4So Hanun humiliated David's servants: shaved them, cut their garment hems up to their hips, and sent them away. 5When David heard what had happened, he sent a message to his humiliated servants:

This is a shameful turn of events. In the ancient world, normally eunuchs are clean shaven, so this is a deep insult to David and his people.

David's Message: Stay at Jericho until your beards grow, and then return *to Jerusalem.*

6When Hanun and the Ammonites realized they had made themselves abhorrent to David, they paid 37 tons of silver to mercenaries from Mesopotamia, Aram-maacah, and Zobah. 7They hired 32,000 chariots and the king of Maacah and his people (who camped at Medeba). Then the Ammonites gathered together from their cities for the battle. 8When David heard *about Ammon's preparations,* he sent Joab and all of his mighty army. 9The Ammonites approached the city gate in their armor, but the *Aramean* kings who had come *to help the Ammonites* were alone in the field.

10When Joab realized his forces were at a disadvantage, he asked the most skilled Israelite soldiers to prepare for battle against the Arameans. 11His brother Abshai commanded the remainder of the forces, who prepared to fight the Ammonites.

Joab *(to Abshai)***:** 12If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you will help me; and if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will help you. 13Be strong. Let us show courage for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God. May the Eternal do what He knows is best.

14When Joab and his forces approached the Arameans, the enemy fled. 15When the Ammonites saw the Arameans flee, they also fled from Abshai back into the city walls. Then Joab returned to Jerusalem.

16After their defeat by Israel, the Arameans sent for other Arameans who lived beyond the *Euphrates* River with Shophach (the commander of Hadadezer's army) leading them. 17When David heard, he responded *to this mobilization* by gathering his forces, crossing the Jordan, and facing the Arameans in formation. When the Arameans saw this they arranged their forces and engaged in battle. 18The Arameans fled from the Israelites; and David killed 7,000 charioteers, 40,000 foot soldiers, and Shophach (the commander of the army).

19When the servants of Hadadezer realized Israel had defeated them, they surrendered to David and served him—unwilling to help the Ammonites anymore.

20 In the spring (the time when kings wage wars *because the spring harvest was over, farm work eased, and soldiers could live off the land*), Joab led the army to ravage the land of the Ammonites and overthrow *their capital city,* Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem *during Joab's campaign.* 2David took the crown off the head of their king (which weighed about 75 pounds and was bejeweled) and it was placed on his own head. And David took the great riches of the city. 3He set the people of the city to work with tools of iron: saws, axes and other sharp implements. This David did to all the Ammonite cities before he and his people returned to Jerusalem.

4After *David conquered Ammon,* war erupted at *the city of* Gezer in Philistia. Sibbecai (the Hushathite) killed Sippai (a descendant of the giants) and subjugated the city. 5During another Philistian encounter, Elhanan (son of Jair) killed Lahmi (brother of Goliath the Gittite) whose spear was as long as a weaver's beam. 6War also broke out at Gath, where there lived a tall man who had 24 fingers and toes—6 fingers on each hand and 6 toes on each foot—who was descended from the giants. 7When he taunted Israel, Jonathan (son of Shimea, David's brother) killed him. 8All these were descended from the giants in Gath *(a Philistine capital),* and they were killed by David and his men.

21 *After our King David had consolidated his power in Israel, conquering his surrounding enemies,* an adversary* stood against Israel, and incited David to conduct a census in the nation *to determine the strength of his army before going to war.*

► In the parallel passage of 2 Samuel 24, David receives three options for punishment concerning his disobedience. He knows the Eternal is far more merciful than human beings, so he elects three days of divine pestilence. Sadly thousands of Israelites die because of David's arrogance in wanting to know just how powerful his kingdom has become. But the chronicler does something the writer

* 21:1 Literally, Satan.

of Samuel does not: he explains how this incident determines where David will plan to build the temple (22:1). The threshing floor of Ornan is the perfect spot for it since this is where God stops the hand of the heavenly messenger from destroying Jerusalem.

David *(to Joab and Israel's tribal leaders)*:
2Count the number of people in Israel
from Beersheba *in the south* to Dan *in*
the north and report that number to me.

Joab: 3May the Eternal add immeasurably
to His followers! But, my lord the king,
aren't every one of those people your
subjects? Why does my lord seek this?
Why would you do something that could
cause your Israelites guilt?

4In spite of Joab's objections, David's census occurred. Joab *obeyed his king,* traveled throughout Israel, and returned to Jerusalem. 5He then reported the number of all the people to David: 1,100,000 swordsmen were in Israel and 470,000 were in Judah. 6But Joab *rebelled against David's command and* did not count Levi and Benjamin because he was against the census.

7*As Joab anticipated,* God was displeased with the census and He struck Israel. 8The king then prayed to God.

David: *I know that* I have sinned greatly by
requiring a census. Please remove the sin
of Your servant, who has acted so very
foolishly.

9The Eternal spoke to Gad, David's seer.

Eternal One: 10Give David My message: "I
am offering you a choice of three punish-
ments. Make your selection, and I will do
that to you."

So Gad paid the king a visit.

Gad *(to David)*: 11The Eternal One says,
"Choose your punishment: 12three years
of famine, three months of pursuit by
your enemies, or three days of the Eternal's sword—plague and destruction by
His messenger." So, what answer should
I tell Him?

David: 13This choice greatly distresses me.
Tell Him I would rather fall before the
Eternal, whose mercies are very great,
than fall before men.

14So the Eternal *did as He promised and* sent a *violent* plague to Israel; 70,000 men of Israel died. 15God also sent a heavenly messenger to destroy Jerusalem; but as the messenger was poised to ruin it, the Eternal saw the damage *caused by the plague* and grieved over the calamity. He told the messenger, "The pestilence is enough *punishment*; stand down." The Eternal's messenger stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite *when the True God stopped him.*

16When David looked up and saw the Eternal's messenger standing between earth and heaven with his sword stretched out over Jerusalem, David and the elders mourned. They dressed in sackcloth and prostrated themselves.

David *(calling out to God)*: 17Wasn't I the
one who commanded the census? I, *the*
shepherd, certainly have sinned and done
evil; but what have *the rest of the nation,*
Your sheep, done? Eternal One, my True
God, please punish only me and my
father's household, not all of Your people.

Messenger *(commanding Gad)*: 18Tell
David to build an altar to the Eternal on
the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

19David obeyed the instruction of the divine messenger.

20When Ornan saw the messenger, his four sons who were with him hid *among the wheat.* But Ornan continued threshing. 21As David approached, Ornan glimpsed the king, left his chores, and prostrated himself before David.

David: 22Sell me this threshing floor so I
may build on it an altar to the Eternal. I
will pay you the full price so the plague
against the people may end.

Ornan: 23Take it; it's yours to do with as
you please. I will donate the oxen for
burnt offerings, the threshing tools for
wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give it all *to you, my king.*

David: 24No, I must buy it for the full price.
I will not give your possessions to the
Eternal *as if they were my own,* nor will
I give a burnt offering which costs me
nothing. *I must sacrifice something for*
this offering.

25So David paid Ornan 15 pounds of gold
by weight for the property. 26There David
built an altar to the Eternal, sacrificed
burnt offerings, and gave peace offer-
ings. David requested His presence, and
He *accepted the altar and sacrifices by*
sending fire from heaven onto the altar
of burnt offering. 27Then the Eternal com-
manded the divine messenger to sheath
his sword. 28When David saw how the
Eternal had answered him on the thresh-
ing floor of Ornan the Jebusite *by coming*
to the altar as fire and by stopping the
plagues and the destruction of Jerusalem,
David offered a sacrifice there *instead of*
at Gibeon. 29(The congregation tent of
the Eternal, which Moses had built in the
wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering
were in the high place at Gibeon at that
time.) 30But David could not go to Gibeon
to commune with God because he still
feared that the Eternal's messenger would
slay him.

22 **David:** *Now* this is the house of
the Eternal God, and this is the
altar of burnt offering for Israel.
We will no longer need to travel to Gibeon
to sacrifice to God.

2*Having purchased a location for the new*
temple, David began preparations for its
construction. He gathered the foreigners
who were in Israel *so they could help build*
the temple. He appointed stonecutters for
the house of God; 3and he prepared large
quantities of iron (to cast the nails for the
gate doors and the hinges), immeasurable
amounts of bronze, 4and enormous quan-
tities of cedar logs (brought to David by
the Sidonians and Tyrians).

Everyone in the region participates in building the Lord's Jerusalem temple.

David: 5Solomon, my *dear* son, is so young
for such a grand project as the Eternal's
house. He does not have the experience
required for a job that should be known
throughout the nations as wondrous. I
will prepare for the temple construction
before Solomon ascends in my place. So
David made all the preparations before
his death.

6Then David called for his son, Solomon,
and instructed him to build a house for
the Eternal God of Israel.

David: 7My son, I had intended to build
a house honoring the reputation of the
Eternal One my God, 8but the Eternal
spoke to me.

The blood on David's hands makes him ritually impure to build a holy structure and house like the Jerusalem temple.

Eternal One: You have shed much blood
and waged great wars, *My wars.* But
because of *your conquests and* the
amount of blood you spilled on My
behalf, you will not build a house honor-
ing My reputation. 9You will have a son
named Solomon, who will be a man of
rest. *He will not fight wars for Me*—I will
give him rest from all his enemies on
every side. I will give peace and quiet to
Israel during his reign.

The name "Solomon" has a similar spelling and sound to *Shalom*, the word for "peace."

10He will build a house honoring My
reputation, *a place where I shall dwell*
and where your people will worship Me.
He will be My son and I will be his
Father. I will establish his kingdom *as*
My representative of My rule in Israel
forever.

David: 11My son, you will need His help
to build the house of the Eternal One
your God successfully, just as He plans
and as I have prepared for you. 12May He
give you discretion, understanding, and
command over Israel, *for you will need*
to keep the laws of the Eternal One your
God *if you are to finish His temple.* 13Only
then you will prosper, by following these
statutes and ordinances for Israel, which
the Eternal gave to Moses. You must be
strong and courageous—never fear or be
distraught.

14I have meticulously prepared for
the house of the Eternal.

David has already received a divine blueprint, has gathered materials, and has solicited international workers.

I have collected 3,750 tons of gold, 37,500
tons of silver, bronze, and iron (they are
more readily available *to us than gold*
is), and timber and stone. You may *eas-*
ily add to these materials *as you need*

to because 15-16there is no limit to the gold, silver, bronze, and iron. I have hired many workmen: stonecutters, stonemasons, carpenters, and tradesmen. Go now and work; *build this magnificent, world-renowned temple,* and may the Eternal be with you *as you do it.*

17*Having completed his instructions to Solomon,* David then commanded all the tribal leaders of Israel to help Solomon.

David: 18The Eternal One your God is with you. Now that He has provided the land for Israel, He has given you peace with your enemies on every border. 19Now prepare yourself mentally and emotionally to follow the Eternal One your God. Go and build the temple of the Eternal God, so you may bring the covenant chest of the Eternal *to rest there* and take the holy vessels of God into His house *for us to use in sacrifice.*

23 When David was old, full of years, *and near death,* he appointed his son Solomon *to succeed him as* king over Israel. 2Then David gathered together all the leaders of Israel, including the priests and the Levites.

► The Israelites can now be blessed by David's organization in two ways. First, as they begin rebuilding the temple, his preparations are practical: they explain what tools and artisans and materials are needed to build God's house. But his organization blesses the Israelites another way: he shows what consistent devotion to God looks like. Even though David knows he won't see the temple with his own eyes, he is no less committed to doing God's work.

The process of rebuilding Jerusalem is an arduous one, one that will take more than one lifetime to complete. So the Israelites cannot become complacent about God's work just because they may not see it come to fruition themselves. They must work for the advancement of His kingdom because that is what He desires.

3*At that time,* there were 38,000 Levites 30 years of age and older, *an employable age.* 4Of these, 24,000 directed the work of the temple of the Eternal, 6,000 were officers and judges, 54,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were *musicians,* praising Him with the instruments David made. 6David divided the Levites into their families, the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

7The Gershonites had *two families*: Ladan and Shimei. 8Ladan had three sons: Jehiel (the first), Zetham, and Joel. 9Shimei had three sons *also*: Shelomoth, Haziel, and Haran. These men were the chiefs of Ladan's family. 10Shimei's *other* four sons were Jahath, Zina, Jeush, and Beriah. 11Jahath was the first and Zizah the second, but Jeush and Beriah did not have strong lineages. Eventually their families combined to make one family.

12The Kohathites had four families: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 13Amram had *two* sons: Aaron and Moses. Aaron's lineage was chosen to ordain and cleanse themselves as the most holy *among the Levites* forever. They were charged with burning incense before the Eternal, ministering to Him, and blessing in His name forever. *Because they were set apart, their lineage is not included in this genealogy.* 14Moses, the man of God, had *two* sons whose family lineages were included in *this genealogy of* the tribe of Levi. 15Moses' sons were Gershom and Eliezer. 16Gershom's son was Shebuel (the chief). 17Eliezer had only one son: Rehabiah (the chief). Rehabiah had many sons. 18Izhar *(the son of Kohath)* had one son: Shelomith (the chief). 19Hebron *(the son of Kohath)* had *four* sons: Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. 20Uzziel *(the son of Kohath)* had *two* sons: Micah the first and Isshiah the second.

21The Merarites had *two* families: Mahli and Mushi. Mahli had *two* sons: Eleazar and Kish. 22When Eleazar died he had no sons, only daughters. These women *maintained their father's line by* marrying their relatives, the sons of Kish. 23Mushi had three sons: Mahli, Eder, and Jeremoth.

24This is the genealogy of Levi according to their families. The leaders of the families were counted along with all those working for the Eternal who were 20 years of age and older.

David: 25Since the Eternal God now lives *in His tent* in Jerusalem forever and has

given rest to His people Israel, 26the
Levites will no longer need to carry the
congregation tent and all the vessels for
its service. *The tent will rest in Jerusalem
along with God's people.*

27These final words of *King* David *changed
who was included in the census. From this
point forward,* the sons of Levi who were
20 years of age and older were included in
the genealogies.

► This alteration of age from 30 years in 1 Chronicles 23:3 to 20 years of age here may indicate that more workers were needed from the Levite tribe for the temple since the change from a moveable tent for worship to the continual service in the permanent structure.

28The Levites help Aaron's family with
their duties in the temple of the Eternal, purifying all the things dedicated to
spiritual service in the courts and in the
chambers *of the temple,* and preparing for
services in the temple: 29*making the loaves
of* unleavened bread, *selecting* the fine flour
for a grain offering, *making the* unleavened
wafers, or preparing anything else that is
baked in the pan or well-mixed, regardless
of the amount and size. 30They stand and
testify about the Eternal regularly, every
morning and evening. 31They offer all the
burnt offerings to Him on the Sabbath
days, the new moons, and the holidays
according to the law *given to Moses.* 32In
these ways, they are responsible for the
congregation tent and the holy utensils
within the sanctuary. They are helpers of
Aaron's family, and they help maintain the
temple of the Eternal.

24 *Because Aaron's family was set
apart by God for the service of
the temple, his family's genealogy
is separated from the other Levites.* The Aaronites were divided *into families* based on
the sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar
and Ithamar. 2*The two oldest,* Nadab and
Abihu, died before their father did, and
they had no sons. So *Aaron's youngest sons,*
Eleazar and Ithamar, became the priests.

3*King* David, with the help of Zadok
(from the line of Eleazar) and Ahimelech
(from the line of Ithamar), divided the
Levites by the duties they performed
in the temple. 4Since the descendants of
Eleazar boasted more chiefs than the
descendants of Ithamar did, the three
men divided the Levites accordingly. In
Eleazar's line, sixteen families were distinguished, in Ithamar's line, eight families
were distinguished. 5The divisions were
determined by a system of lots, *one way
that God's will was revealed to men.* The
descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar filled
two positions: officers of the sanctuary and
officers of God.

6Shemaiah (son of Nethanel the
scribe, a Levite) recorded the results *of the
lots* in front of the king, the princes, Zadok
the priest, Ahimelech (son of Abiathar),
and the heads of the Levite families. *As
the men drew their lots, they formed two
lines:* one representing the line of Eleazar
and one representing the line of Ithamar.
7Now the first lot went to Jehoiarib, the
second to Jedaiah, 8the third to Harim, the
fourth to Seorim, 9the fifth to Malchijah,
the sixth to Mijamin, 10the seventh to
Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, 11the ninth
to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, 12the
eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim,
13the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth
to Jeshebeab, 14the fifteenth to Bilgah, the
sixteenth to Immer, 15the seventeenth to
Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzez, 16the
nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to
Jehezkel, 17the twenty-first to Jachin, the
twenty-second to Gamul, 18the twenty-
third to Delaiah, and the twenty-fourth
to Maaziah. 19They performed their
appointed offices when they entered the
temple of the Eternal *in two-week shifts
each year* as the law requires according
to the Eternal God of Israel's command
through their father Aaron. *The rest of the
year, the Levites served God in their hometowns.*

20This is the continuation of the
Levites *from Kohath's line*: Shubael (son
of Amram) fathered Jehdeiah. 21Rehabiah
(son of Eliezer) fathered Isshiah (the first).
22Shelomoth (son of Izhar) fathered Jahath.
23Hebron *(son of Kohath)* fathered Jeriah
first, Amariah second, Jahaziel third, and
Jekameam fourth. 24Micah (son of Uzziel)
fathered Shamir. 25Isshiah (brother of
Micah) fathered Zechariah.

26-27From Merari's line were Mahli
and Mushi; Jaaziah fathered Beno, Shoham, Zaccur and Ibri. 28Mahli fathered
Eleazar, who had no sons. 29Kish fathered
Jerahmeel. 30-31Mushi fathered Mahli, Eder,

and Jerimoth. These Levites, according to their families, also determined their divisions by the system of lots (as their relatives, the sons of Aaron had done) in the presence of King David, Zadok *the priest,* Ahimelech, and the leaders of the priests' families and of the Levites (the leaders of all the families and those of his younger brother).

25 David and the *heads of the Levites, also known as the* commanders of the army, selected for the service some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. These men were expected to *serve in the temple by* prophesying with lyres, harps, and cymbals. These are the singers who performed these duties *in order of their descent.* 2The sons of Asaph (Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah) were directed by Asaph who prophesied because the king appointed him that duty. 3The six sons of Jeduthun (Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah) were directed by their father Jeduthun who used the harp to prophesy, as well as to testify about the Eternal. 4-5The 14 sons of Heman the king's prophet were Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. His many sons and three daughters gave Heman prominence before God. 6-7All these were directed by their father to sing with cymbals, harps, and lyres in the temple of the Eternal. These *three families,* 288 of whom were *musically* skilled, worked in the temple singing to the Eternal, but they served the king.

8All of these men, the weak and the mighty, the students and the teachers, used a system of lots to determine their duties. *These are the singers who performed in the temple in order of their duties:* 9-31Joseph (son of Asaph) drew the first lot; and the other singers *drew lots in this order,* second through 24th: Gedaliah, Zaccur, Izri, Nethaniah, Bukkiah, Jesharelah, Jeshaiah, Mattaniah, Shimei, Azarel, Hashabiah, Shubael, Mattithiah, Jeremoth, Hananiah, Joshbekashah, Hanani, Mallothi, Eliathah, Hothir, Giddalti, Mahazioth, and finally, Romamti-ezer. Each man who drew a lot represented 12 men, including his sons, his brothers, and himself, *and these 24 groups served in the temple two weeks each year as the Levites did.*

26 The duties of the *Levite* gatekeepers were performed by the Korahites, *specifically by the descendants of* Meshelemiah (Kore's son, of the sons of Asaph).

► One of the most interesting and indeed essential observations from these tribal and ancestry lists is the organic and symbiotic nature of the Israelite community. Every person in every tribe has his or her responsibility for the community as a whole. If certain persons are not guarding the various gates of the city, then marauders and bandits can easily attack. If certain persons are not playing instruments or singing, then the community is without leadership in corporate worship and praise of the Lord and His many benevolent and redemptive acts toward Israel. In the following sections, the specific lists of persons indicate roles both in the worship ethic and in the military life of Israel.

2Meshelemiah fathered sons: Zechariah the firstborn, Jediael the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, 3Elam the fifth, Johanan the sixth, and Eliehoenai the seventh.

4-5God blessed Obed-edom, *another gatekeeper,* with sons: Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar the fourth, Nethanel the fifth, Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, and Peullethai the eighth. 6Obed-edom's son Shemaiah fathered sons who ruled their family, for they were mighty warriors. 7They were Othni, Rephael, Obed, and Elzabad, whose brothers (Elihu and Semachiah) were valiant men. 8These and their relatives were the lineage of Obed-edom; all were capable men with strength for the service *in the temple,* and 62 from this family served.

9Meshelemiah had *other* sons and relatives, 18 valiant men.

10Hosah (one of the sons of Merari) fathered sons *who served as gatekeepers*: Shimri the first (although he was not the firstborn son, his father made him the primary inheritor), 11Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, and Zechariah the

fourth. These sons plus Hosah's other brothers numbered 13.

12All these divisions of gatekeepers, the chief men, performed specific duties (similar to their relatives' duties) when ministering in the temple of the Eternal. 13*Like the other divisions,* the weak and the mighty, *the students and the teachers,* used a system of lots to determine which gates *they would guard* according to their family lineage.

14The eastern gate went to *the family of* Shelemiah. *Since his family was larger than Obed-edom's and Shuppim's, Shelemiah's son Zechariah also drew lots for control of a gate.* Zechariah, a prudent counselor, received control of the northern gate. 15Obed-edom received control of the southern gate, and his sons went to work the *temple* storehouse *within the gates.* 16Shuppim and Hosah were together given the western gate (which is near the gate of Shallecheth, on the ascending road). The guards stood side by side *at their posts.* 17Each day six Levites guarded the east side, four guarded the north, and four guarded the south. The storehouses were guarded *in shifts,* two by two. 18At the Parbar, *a building adjacent to the temple* on the western side, four guarded the highway and two guarded the Parbar *itself.* 19These were the duties of the Korahite and Merarite gatekeepers.

20Other Levites, relatives *of the Korahites and Merarites,* were* over the treasury—both the temple's treasures and the sacred treasures. 21The sons of Ladan (son of Gershon), specifically the Jehielites, were the leaders of the families descended from Ladan the Gershonite. 22Jehieli's sons, Zetham and Joel his brother, were in charge of the treasures in the temple of the Eternal. 23The Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites *performed other duties in the temple.* 24Shebuel (son of Gershom, the son of Moses), was the ruler of the treasures. 25His relative, Eliezer, had *five* sons *in the service of the treasury*: Rehabiah, Jeshaiah, Joram, Zichri, and Shelomoth. 26Shelomoth and his relatives were in charge of all the dedicated treasures which King David, the tribal leaders, the commanders of thousands and hundreds, and the commanders of the army had dedicated *after their battles.* 27Part of their spoils won in battles were used to repair the house of the Eternal, *which was the congregation tent at that time.* 28Others who dedicated spoils *to the treasury* included Samuel the seer, Saul (son of Kish), Abner (son of Ner), and Joab (son of Zeruiah). All of the holdings of dedicated gifts *in the treasury* were cared for by Shelomoth and his relatives.

29The Izharites acted as officers and judges throughout Israel. Chenaniah and his sons were given the duty of *protecting the people* outside of the temple.

30The Hebronites oversaw Israel's duties *east and* west of the Jordan *River.* Hashabiah and his relatives—1,700 capable men—performed such duties for the Eternal and in the service of the king *to the west of the river.* 31The Hebronites who were led by Jerijah were evaluated according to their lineage during David's 40th year as king. Many of them were deemed great men, especially those at Jazer of Gilead. 32Jerijah and his relatives, these capable men, numbered 2,700 and were the leaders of their families. *Because of their exceptional abilities,* King David made them overseers of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites, *all located east of the Jordan River,* watching how these tribes behaved toward their God and king.

27 These are the Israelites (the families' leaders, the commanders of hundreds and thousands) and their officers who performed their duties for the king on a monthly rotation *(one division for each month of the year).*

The Levites are not the only leaders in David's government. While they do perform some duties outside of the temple, most secular work is done by the other tribes.

Each division had 24,000 men:
2-3Jashobeam (son of Zabdiel, a Perezite) was the leader of all the commanders of the army and the leader of the first division during the first month. 4Dodai the Ahohite and his division led the division for the second month under Mikloth, their chief officer. 5Benaiah (son of Jehoiada, the priest) led the third division in the third month. 6He was a powerful man, in charge of his thirty. Ammizabad (Benaiah's son) led his father's division. 7Asahel (brother of Joab) and Zebadiah his son after him led the fourth division in the

* 26:20 Hebrew manuscripts read, "As for the Levites, Ahijah was."

fourth month. 8Shamhuth the Izrahite led
the fifth division in the fifth month. 9Ira
(son of Ikkesh, the Tekoite) led the sixth
division in the sixth month. 10Helez (the
Pelonite of the Ephraimites) led the sev-
enth division in the seventh month. 11Sib-
becai (the Hushathite of the Zerahites) led
the eighth division in the eighth month.
12Abiezer (the Anathothite of the Benja-
minites) led the ninth division in the ninth
month. 13Maharai (the Netophathite of
the Zerahites) led the tenth division in the
tenth month. 14Benaiah (the Pirathonite
of the Ephraimites) led the eleventh divi-
sion in the eleventh month. 15Heldai (the
Netophathite of Othniel) led the twelfth
division in the twelfth month.

16Each of the tribes of Israel had lead-
ers *from within their families*: the leader of
the Reubenites was Eliezer (son of Zichri);
for the Simeonites was Shephatiah (son of
Maacah); 17for the Levites was Hashabiah
(son of Kemuel); for the Aaronites *(a part
of the Levite clan)* was Zadok; 18for the
Judahites was Elihu (one of *King* David's
brothers); for the Issacharites was Omri
(son of Michael); 19for the Zebulunites
was Ishmaiah (son of Obadiah); for the
Naphtalites was Jeremoth (son of Azriel);
20for the Ephraimites was Hoshea (son of
Azaziah); for the half-tribe of the Manasse-
hites was Joel (son of Pedaiah); 21for the
portion of the half-tribe of Manassehites
that was separated from the others in Gil-
ead was Iddo (son of Zechariah); for the
Benjaminites was Jaasiel (son of Abner);
22for the Danites was Azarel (son of Jero-
ham). These men were the leaders of the
tribes of Israel.

23*When* David *conducted the census,
he* did not count anyone 20 years of age
and younger because the Eternal had said
He would make the population of Israel
innumerable, like the stars of heaven.
24Joab (son of Zeruiah) intended to count
them, but he did not finish. It was because
Joab attempted to count the innumerable
that God was angry at Israel and punished
them. *Because the census angered God so
much,* its results are not recorded in the
chronicles of King David.

► The exile takes a toll not just on the lives of the Jews, but also on Israel herself. The chronicles of King David are among several historical documents stored in the royal archives.

When the Babylonians attack Jerusalem and destroy Solomon's temple, those official records are lost as well. Israel loses significant portions of the nation's written history, so that history remains only in the oral traditions of the people. Because of this loss of history, the chronicler writes this book for the Jews—so that their descendants will have a testament to the early history and the greatness of the Israelites before they are forgotten.

25*These are other officials in David's government:* Azmaveth (son of Adiel) managed
the king's *own* storehouses. Jonathan (son
of Uzziah) managed the storehouses *that
did not belong directly to the king* in the
country, cities, villages, and towers. 26Ezri
(son of Chelub) managed the farmhands
who tilled the soil. 27Shimei (the Rama-
thite) managed the vineyards, and Zabdi
(the Shiphmite) managed the grapes and
wine stored in the wine cellars. 28Baal-
hanan (the Gederite) managed the olive
and sycamore trees in the Shephelah, and
Joash managed oil stored *in the storehouses*.
29Shitrai (the Sharonite) managed the
cattle grazing in Sharon, and Shaphat (son
of Adlai) managed the cattle *grazing* in the
valleys. 30Obil (the Ishmaelite) managed
the camels. Jehdeiah (the Meronothite)
managed the donkeys. 31Jaziz (the Hagrite)
managed the flocks. These men were the
managers of King David's property.

32Jonathan (David's uncle) was a
counselor, a discerning man, and a scribe.
Jehiel (son of Hachmoni) was *a compan-
ion of and* attendant for the king's sons.
33-34Ahithophel was counselor to the king,
and he was succeeded by Jehoiada (son
of Benaiah) and Abiathar. Hushai (the
Archite) was the king's confidant. Joab was
the leader of the king's army.

28 *At the end of his life,* David
assembled in Jerusalem all the
officials of Israel *to instruct
them in how to run both the state and the
religion after his death. These officials
included* the leaders of the tribes, the com-
manders of the divisions that served the
king, the commanders of thousands, com-
manders of hundreds, the managers of all
the royal property and livestock, the offi-
cials, the warriors, and all the valiant men.

David *(rising to his feet)*: 2Listen to me, my brothers and my people. *As you know,* I had intended to build a permanent home for the covenant chest of the Eternal and for the footstool of our God *just as He prepared my kingdom and my palace for me*. So I had prepared to build it, *collecting fine materials from all over the region*. 3But God *did not want me to build His temple. He* told me, "You have shed *much* blood and waged *great* wars, *My wars. But because of your conquests and the amount of blood you spilled on My behalf,* you will not build a house honoring My reputation. *The blood on your hands makes you ritually impure.*"

4The Eternal One, God of Israel, decided *the tribe of* Judah would lead His nation. Then He chose and was pleased with me, from among all of my brothers in my father's house, to be the king over Israel and establish an eternal monarchy. 5From among all my sons (for the Eternal has blessed me with many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Eternal One over Israel.

Like David, Solomon is a younger son, who traditionally should not inherit the birthright of his father. But God sees more in David and Solomon than just birth order.

6He said to me, "Your son Solomon, *though younger,* is the one who will *execute your plans to* build My house and My courts; for I shall be his Father and he will be My son. 7I shall settle him *and his descendants as My representatives in My temple and* in My kingdom forever if he *follows your lead and* resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances."

► God has a tendency to choose younger sons to lead His people. This is remarkable! Everyone else in the ancient world is led by the oldest sons; it's tradition. But God chose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, David over his six older brothers, and now Solomon over his many older brothers.

This tendency to choose the unexpected demonstrates that Israel is God's nation, not the nation of any monarch. God is not bound by human traditions, no matter how old those traditions may be. As the Jews face seemingly impossible situations, their ancestors' lives remind them that God can and will do anything to accomplish His goals. He often supports those with a hopeless cause. Why else would He rescue His people, the Jews, from the great Persian Empire and choose them to rebuild His nation?

David: 8*To you, my officials,* follow the laws of the Eternal One your God as a witness *to your neighbors* (all Israel who are the assembly of the Eternal) and in the sight of our God so that you will retain this land and be able to pass it to your descendants forever.

9To you, my son Solomon, maintain a relationship with the God of your father and serve Him with a complete heart in all your thoughts and actions. The Eternal searches all hearts *for their desires* and understands the intentions of every thought. If you search for Him *as He searches you,* then He will let you find Him. But if you abandon Him, then He will reject you forever. 10Realize that the Eternal has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. You must be resolute and do it!

11After instructing Solomon, David gave him blueprints of the temple porch, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms, and the holy of holies for the covenant chest. 12And *David also gave Solomon* the plans he had in mind for the courts of the temple of the Eternal, all the surrounding rooms, the storehouses of the temple of God, and the storehouses of the dedicated gifts. 13David also provided *lists of* the divisions of the priests and Levites and the work of the service *they would perform* in the temple of the Eternal. *David also described how the priests and Levites would treat* all the utensils of service in the house of the Eternal: 14the *ideal* weight of gold for all the golden utensils for every kind of service, the *ideal* weight of silver for all the silver utensils for every kind of service, 15the *ideal* weight of gold for each of the golden lampstands and their golden lamps, the *ideal* weight of silver for each of the silver lampstands and their silver lamps, 16the *ideal* weight of gold

for each of the tables of unleavened bread, and the silver for the silver tables, 17*the ideal weight of pure gold for* the forks, the basins, and the pitchers, the *ideal* weight of gold for each of the golden bowls, the *ideal* weight for each of the silver bowls, 18the *ideal* weight of refined gold for the altar of incense, for the model of the chariot, and for the winged guardian whose wings covered the covenant chest of the Eternal.

David *(to the assembly)*: 19All of these *instructions and* details were written for me by the Eternal, who was guiding me.

(to Solomon) 20Be strong, courageous, and effective. Do not fear or be dismayed. *I know that* the Eternal God, who is my God, is with you. He will not abandon you or forsake you until you have finished all the work for the temple of the Eternal. 21You will be helped in finishing this service by the divisions of the priests and the Levites and by every willing man of any skill. The officials and all the people will be at your disposal *for the completion of the temple.*

► Now that the Jews are rebuilding Jerusalem in the postexilic period, they should take David's words to Solomon as their own charge. They, too, must make their relationships with God of primary importance. He will guide them as they rebuild His temple and His nation, if they continue to follow His purpose. The Jews must not be daunted by the size of the project before them. God will use great leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah to guide them through every step of rebuilding His temple and rebuilding His nation.

29 **David** *(to the entire assembly)*: Although my son Solomon was chosen by God *and has the ability to build a beautiful temple,* he is still young and inexperienced for such a great work. This work is not for men—it is for the Eternal God. 2I have tried to help him as much as I can by providing gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stones (the onyx, inlaid stones, antimony, stones of various colors, precious stones, and alabaster) in abundance to use in my God's temple. 3Furthermore I will give my own gold and silver treasures (in addition to the materials I have provided for the construction) to the temple because of my delight in the house of my God. 4These gifts include 110 tons of *the finest* gold, 260 tons of refined silver (to cover the walls of the buildings), 5*more* gold and *more* silver as needed. All of this work will be done by the skilled workers, so who then is willing give of himself this day to the Eternal?

6Then family leaders, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the managers over the king's work, offered willingly. 7For the service of the temple of God they gave 190 tons and 185 pounds of gold, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. 8Anyone who owned precious stones gave them *willingly* to the treasury of the temple of the Eternal, where they were managed by Jehiel the Gershonite. 9Then all the people rejoiced because the officers had given to the Eternal so willingly and wholeheartedly. King David also rejoiced greatly, and 10he blessed the Eternal *in a prayer* before the assembly.

David: You are blessed, O Eternal One,
God of Israel, our father, forever and ever.
11All that is great and powerful and glorious and victorious and majestic
is Yours, O Eternal One.
Indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to You.
The kingdom belongs to You, O Eternal One, and You are the head of it all.
12Wealth and glory come from You, and You rule over them all.
In Your hand is power and strength, and You use them to make great and strengthen everyone.
13*Because of your greatness,* our God, we testify about Your greatness and praise Your glorious name.

14But who am I and who are my people that we can offer *up anything to You* so willingly?
All *our offerings* come from You, so we can give You nothing that isn't already Yours.
15For we are strangers before You, sojourners, as all our fathers were.

Our days on the earth are dark and
temporary.
16O Eternal One our God, *we realize that*
all this abundance,
all that will build Your temple for
Your holy name,
Is from Your hand already.
Everything is Yours.

17O my God, You test the heart and
delight when it is proven
faithful,
so I, with an honest heart, have
willingly offered all these things.
And now I have joyfully witnessed Your
people, who are present here,
make their offerings willingly *and*
joyously to You.
18O Eternal One, the God of our fathers
Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
sustain this purpose and thought
In the hearts of Your people forever
and guide their hearts to You.
19*Especially* give to my son Solomon a
perfect heart,
one that keeps Your
commandments, Your
testimonies, and Your laws,
One that will do them all, and one that
will build the temple,
for which I have made provisions.

20(to the assembly) Now bless the
Eternal One your God.

Right then, the assembly *obeyed David,*
blessing the Eternal, the God of their fathers, and bowed low in worship before the Eternal One and the king. 21On the next day, they made sacrifices and burnt offerings to Him: 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams, and 1,000 lambs. They also gave abundant drink offerings and sacrifices for all Israel. 22Then they ate and drank before the Eternal with great gladness, and they coronated Solomon (son of David) a second time, anointing him as ruler and Zadok as priest for the Eternal. 23Then, *for the first time,* Solomon sat on the throne of the Eternal as king instead of his father David. Solomon prospered, and all Israel recognized him *as their king.* 24All the officials, the warriors, and the other sons of King David pledged their allegiance to King Solomon. 25The Eternal exalted Solomon *as a great ruler* before all Israel and gave him royal majesty greater than any king before him in Israel.

26David the son of Jesse *was the first king to* reign over all Israel. 27His rule over Israel lasted 40 years: 7 years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. 28Then he died *peacefully* of old age, after a long life, riches, and honor. *And after he joined with his ancestors in death,* his son Solomon reigned over *Israel* in his place.

29The actions of King David, from his birth until his death, are recorded in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, Nathan the prophet, and Gad the visionary. 30*These chronicles include the activities during* his reign, *descriptions of* his power, and the experiences of him, Israel, and all the kingdoms of the nations.

2 CHRONICLES

A history from Solomon through Cyrus written for the Jews after their exile

By an unknown chronicler, possibly Ezra, the priest who came out of exile

In this second act of Chronicles, which in Hebrew is one unbroken piece of prose with 1 Chronicles, the chronicler continues to emphasize his idea that nothing is more important to the Jews returning to Israel from their sixth century B.C. Babylonian exile than maintaining a right relationship with God. He writes to remind them how blessed they are to be members of God's family, a family that began with Adam and continued through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As the Jews rebuild the nation after centuries of disobedience and a miserable exile, they can look to the lives of those men and of the beloved King David for role models. Based on his biography in 1 Chronicles, these rebuilders can emulate the relationship David had with God—a relationship that led David to build a powerful nation recognized by all the surrounding states, to make preparations for God's temple, and to groom the next great king, Solomon, to rule. Just as Solomon made Israel into a great nation with his building projects and diplomacy, now the Jews will rebuild Jerusalem and find their place in a politically tumultuous world.

But David and Solomon were not the only kings whose works should be remembered by the returning Jews. The chronicler includes the examples of Israel's later Judean kings—kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah—who reformed the political and religious practices of the wayward and returned Judah to proper observation of the law and worship of the Eternal One. David and Solomon may have initiated the Eternal One's religion in the land, but these kings had to stomp out their people's entrenched pagan practices to reinstitute proper worship. As the Jews now begin the arduous work of returning Jerusalem to her glory, they must remember these kings' stories and adopt their zeal for right worship and practice. They, too, will have to stomp out pagan ideas, those the people picked up from their captors in Babylon, as Jerusalem is rebuilt. If these Jews can seek God's will as they rebuild Israel and the temple, then the chronicler tells them God will bring glory to His name through His people and His nation once again.

1 *After David had unified the tribes of Israel into one nation, subdued his neighboring enemies, and joined his ancestors in death,* David's son Solomon demonstrated his authority as king *over Israel.* The Eternal God was with Solomon and made him great.

As the new king, Solomon continues building God's temple, utilizing David's preparations, building the structure, and establishing the religion of the Lord.

2 *As their new king,* Solomon spoke to all Israel (commanders of thousands and hundreds, the judges, and every tribal leader). 3 Then he took the group up to the high place at Gibeon, *a place in the mountains known for its connection to the Divine,* where God's meeting tent stood. (Moses, the servant of the Eternal, had made this tent *and the covenant chest* in the wilderness *where it traveled with the people,* 4 but David prepared a permanent home for the covenant chest of God in Jerusalem where it stayed after he took it from Kiriath-jearim.) *At this high place,* 5-6 Solomon and the group looked for the bronze altar, which Bezalel (son of Uri, son of Hur) had placed before the Eternal's congregation tent. Solomon offered 1,000 burnt offerings there in the presence of the Eternal.

7 That night, the True God appeared to Solomon.

God *(following the offerings of Solomon)***:** Ask what *you want from Me, and* I shall give it to you.

Solomon: 8-9 The loyal love You showed my father, David, was immeasurable, and You, O Eternal God, have fulfilled Your promise to my father and made me the king of innumerable people in his place. 10 Now *that I am their ruler,* give me wisdom and knowledge to lead this *great* people. Without such wisdom, who can govern such a great people?

God: 11 You did not ask for *selfish personal gain*: riches, wealth, honor, the deaths of your enemies, or a long life. Instead, you asked for *godly* wisdom and knowledge to rule My people, over whom I have made you king. 12 *Because you thought of the welfare of My people,* I have granted you this *exceptional* wisdom and knowledge. In addition, I will give you riches and wealth and honor greater than any king ever has possessed or ever will possess.

► These gifts are signs that God loves Solomon, and Solomon could use them for his own selfish reasons. But Solomon demonstrates wisdom by using these exceptional gifts to honor God in the construction of His temple.

13 *Having sacrificed to God* at the meeting tent on the high place of Gibeon *and received His gifts,* Solomon returned to Jerusalem to govern Israel.

14 *There Solomon gathered his wealth.* He collected 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen; and then he stationed them in the fortified cities, as well as in Jerusalem, where he remained. 15 He distributed silver and gold until they saturated Jerusalem. He imported cedar trees until they rivaled in number the sycamores of the foothills. 16 He imported horses from Egypt and from Kue, *a nation north of Israel*—the king's merchants bought the horses from Kue, 17 and they acquired chariots from Egypt for about 15 pounds of silver each and horses for about 4 pounds *of silver* each. Solomon then traded them to all the Hittite and Aramean kings.

2 *Having amassed his wealth, Solomon fulfilled God's prediction that David's son would build His house.* Solomon decided to build a house honoring the reputation of the Eternal, *a temple,* and *a house* for himself, a palace. 2 First Solomon procured the stone: 80,000 men would quarry it in the mountains, 70,000 men would carry it, and 3,600 men would supervise them. 3 Then Solomon wrote to Huram, king of Tyre, *asking for cedar*.

Solomon: I come to ask for your *fine* cedarwood, just as my father David did so he could build his royal palace. Please do the same for me.

4 I am preparing to build a temple honoring the reputation of the Eternal One my God. It will be dedicated to Him *and will be the site of our religious practices.* There we will *perform all the duties* He perpetually requires of Israel: burning fragrant incense before Him, preparing the unleavened bread continually, and

This temple on the elevated area overlooking the city of Jerusalem is truly remarkable. Moving from the outer court area, one observes a massive 15 by 30 foot altar to ritually sacrifice clean land animals and a huge "sea" or wash container 7½ by 15 feet to ceremonially wash the priests before they enter the next two areas: the holy place and the most holy place.

Moving into the actual temple structure is similar to being transported into the heavens. One passes between two larger-than-life tree-like columns and then into a brilliant golden room decorated with trees, pomegranates, winged creatures, and jewels. Upon entering the holy place during the eastern sunrise, one would be blinded as though looking into the sun. Then as the worshiper ascends the stairs, the most holy place has two enormous winged creatures flanking the Eternal's temple footstool, the covenant chest. This room images the very heavenly throne room. To visualize and enter Solomon's temple is to visualize and enter the heavens.

giving burnt offerings each morning and evening, on Sabbaths, new moons, and appointed feasts of the Eternal One our God. 5This temple must be great because our True God is more powerful than all the *other* gods. 6Though no one can build a house for Him because He inhabits the heavens and beyond, I am humbly building a place where we can *encounter Him and* burn incense before Him.

7*To this end,* send me a man who can work gold, silver, brass, and iron; sew with purple, crimson, and violet fabrics; and engrave. Your servant will aid the skilled men whom David, my father, provided for me in Judah and Jerusalem. 8Send me cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon, for I know your servants can skillfully cut timber from Lebanon; My servants will work with your servants 9to prepare an abundance of timber for me to use in the temple, which will be great and wonderful. 10I will pay your servants, the carpenters, 125,000 bushels of crushed wheat, 125,000 bushels of barley, 116,000 gallons of wine, and 116,000 gallons of oil.

Huram *(in a letter answering Solomon)*:
11Because the Eternal loves His people, He has made you their king. 12The Eternal One, the God of Israel, creator of heaven and earth, is to be praised for giving King David such a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build houses for both the Eternal and for himself.

13-14I am sending Huram-abi, a discerning man skilled in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood; in purple, violet, and crimson linen and other fabrics; in engravings; and in executing any design. He is the son of an *Israelite* woman (from the tribe of Dan) and a Tyrian father, so he will work well with your skilled men and with those of my lord David, your father. 15-16*In addition to sending workers,* we will cut the timber you need from Lebanon and float it down the coast to Joppa, so that you then may transport it up to Jerusalem. *When the men and supplies arrive at Joppa,* please send your servants, *my countrymen,* the wheat, barley, oil, and wine you have promised them.

17*In preparation for the building projects,* Solomon ordered a census to count only the foreigners residing in Israel. This census *differed from* his father's census, *which counted everyone in the nation.* There were 153,600 *foreigners living in Israel*: 1880,000 men would quarry stone in the mountains, 70,000 men would carry it, and 3,600* men would supervise their work.

► These foreigners are not paid day laborers; they are slaves forced to build a temple they may never enter. This scenario is similar to the Hebrews' forced labor in Egypt and to the Israelites' eventual forced labor in Babylonia. But one thing makes Solomon's rule over them different: he presumably follows the laws of God regarding slaves (Leviticus 25:39-55). These laws specify that slaves may

* 2:18 1 Kings 5:16 "3,300"

come from surrounding nations, must be treated fairly, and must be released in the jubilee year (a prescribed time every 50 years when debts are forgiven, seized land returns to its original owners, and slaves are freed).

3 1-2*Having assembled the materials and workers for the temple,* Solomon began to build the Eternal's temple on the second day in the second month of the fourth year of his reign. He built it in Jerusalem on Ornan the Jebusite's threshing floor (which David had *purchased and* consecrated) on Mount Moriah *(where Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac to God generations before).*

3When Solomon prepared the plans of the True God's temple, *he modeled the design after temples in Syria and Canaan.* The length was 90 feet and the width was 30 feet. 4The length of the front porch was as wide as the temple (30 feet), and it was 30 feet* high. *The rooms of the temple were highly ornamented.* The porch was gilded inside. 5The main room was paneled with gilded cypress wood and engraved with palm trees and ornamental chains. 6The entire temple was decorated with precious stones and gilded with gold from Parvaim. 7-9Even the supports and fasteners were gilded—the beams, the thresholds, the walls, the doors, and the nails (which weighed 20 ounces each). The walls were engraved with winged guardians, and the upper rooms were gilded.

The most holy place, *which was located at the rear of the temple,* was a 30-foot square room gilded with 23 tons of gold—*the same amount that David paid for the temple site.* 10Inside the most holy place were two gilded, sculpted winged creatures, 11-12each with a wingspan of 15 feet.

These fantastic creatures with bird wings, human faces, and animals' body parts protect the covenant chest, and together they act as God's footstool in the temple.

Each cherub touched one wing to the wall of the room and the other wing to the other cherub. 13*Together,* their wings spanned across the room *guarding the most holy place* facing the main room and standing upright on their feet. 14A veil of violet, purple, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, embroidered with winged creatures, *covered the entrance to the most holy place.*

15-17Before the porch stood two columns, 52 feet high, crowned with 90-inch-high capitals. Solomon made decorative chains in the most holy place, adorned them with 100 pomegranates, and draped them on the tops of the columns. The column on the right was named Jachin, *meaning "He establishes,"* and the column on the left was named Boaz, *meaning "He strengthens."*

4 The *temple* altar was bronze *and incredibly large*—30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 15 feet high.

2-5*A large basin, called* "the sea," was cast—15 feet in diameter, 90 inches deep, 45 feet in circumference, and 3 inches thick. The brim was shaped like a lily blossom or like the lip of a cup with figures* cast in two rows all around it, 10 figures every 18 inches, and held 18,000 gallons.* *The basin was supported by a rectangular stand* made of 15-foot-tall statues resembling oxen. The 12 oxen were in two rows, three facing each direction with their hind ends at the center of the stand, all cast in one piece. 6The priests used the sea to cleanse themselves, *but offerings were washed in other basins.* Ten *smaller* basins flanked the sea, five on the right and five on the left, and the burnt offerings were cleansed in those *before they were sacrificed.* 10The sea stood on the right side of the house, facing southeast.*

7Ten golden lampstands were cast according to *God's* requirements, and they were in the temple, five on the right and five on the left. 8Next *to the lampstands* were ten tables, five on the right and five on the left, and the temple was stocked with 100 golden bowls. 9Then the court of the priests, the great court, and its bronzed doors were built.

11Huram, *who was sent by the king of Tyre to help Solomon,* made the pails, shovels, and bowls. When he finished his duties for the construction of the temple, he had made 12the two columns, their capitals, the globes of the capitals, and the two networks *of decorative chains* covering the two globes of the capitals. 13On the chains were 400 pomegranates—two rows

* 3:4 Hebrew, 180 feet, which is unlikely * 4:2-5 Literally, gourds, possibly oxen * 4:2-5 1 Kings 7:26 "12,000 gallons"
* 4:10 Verse 10 was moved forward to help retain the continuity of the description.

of pomegranates on each network that covered the globes of the capitals on the pillars. 14-15He had also made the sea with the twelve oxen underneath, the basins, and their stands. 16Huram-abi used polished bronze for the pails, shovels, forks, and all other utensils commissioned by King Solomon and used in the Eternal's house. 17-18Great quantities were cast in the clay *molds* on the banks of the Jordan *River* between *the cities of* Succoth and Zeredah with an immeasurable amount of bronze.

The magnificence of the temple is reflected in the amount of gold Solomon used.

19He made everything inside the house of the True God, including the golden altar; the tables (which displayed the unleavened bread); 20the golden lampstands (which burned in front of the most holy place as required); 21the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs (all of pure gold); 22the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons, and the fire pans (all of solid gold); and the entrance to the house, the inner doors accessing the most holy place, and the doors of the main room (all of gold).

5 When all this work was completed for the Eternal's house, Solomon brought in the silver, gold, and utensils, which his father, David, had dedicated for use in His temple. These things were stored in the True God's temple treasuries, *where they would be guarded by the Levites.*

2*Just as his father had done when he moved the covenant chest to Jerusalem,* Solomon assembled all of Israel (the generals, the judges, and every tribal leader) to move the covenant chest of the Eternal from the city of David (also called Zion) *into the new temple* 3in the seventh month. *First* all the men of Israel celebrated a feast with the king, 4-5and when the elders of Israel arrived, the Levites who were priests carried the covenant chest, the congregation tent, and all the holy utensils in the tent *to the temple.* 6As King Solomon and the assembly stood before the covenant chest, they sacrificed innumerable sheep and uncountable oxen. 7-8*Following the sacrifices,* the *Levitical* priests carried the covenant chest of the Eternal to its *new* home in the most holy place, under the *protective* wings of the creatures that covered the covenant chest and its carrying poles. 9These poles were so long that their ends could be seen in front of the most holy place (although they were not visible outside), and they are there today. 10Only the two tablets Moses received on Mount Horeb (where the Eternal made a covenant with the Israelites after they left Egypt) were inside the covenant chest.

11When the *Levitical* priests returned *to the crowd* from the most holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves *for this special occasion,* regardless of their duties), 12all the Levitical singers (Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their relatives) were wearing fine linen, standing east of the altar, playing cymbals, harps, and lyres, along with priests blowing 120 trumpets. 13In unison, the musicians and singers with trumpets and cymbals and instruments praised and glorified the Eternal.

Levitical Choir: He is good! His loyal love will continue forever!

At the sound of the music, the Eternal's temple was filled with a cloud, *the glory of God,* 14which prevented the priests from continuing to minister to the Eternal. *The descent of* the glory of God filled the house of the God *of Israel.*

This event signals His acceptance of the temple and is reminiscent of His acceptance of the congregation tent in the desert.

6 **Solomon:** The Eternal has told us that He resides in a thick cloud. 2Now I have built You a grand house where You can reside forever.

3-4(turning to the standing assembly of Israel and blessing them) Blessed is the Eternal God of Israel, who made these promises to my father, David, with His mouth and fulfilled them with His hands:

> 5Since the day I brought My people from the land of Egypt *and traveled in the desert with them,* I did not choose one city from among the Israelite tribes in which to build a temple where the people could worship Me, nor did I choose any man to lead My people Israel *because I had always been their leader.* 6But now I have chosen Jerusalem as the place where My reputation will be honored and David as the leader of My people, Israel.

Verses 14-42 record is a remarkable prayer by Israel's king. Solomon begins by confessing the Lord's attributes and character. Then he speaks of his humility for being given the honor of building this magnificent house, the Jerusalem temple. Solomon's public prayer before all the people brings to mind the conditional nature of this agreement between the Eternal and the people. The only way the temple can remain in operation and the people in the land is if they obey the Eternal's commands.

Solomon realizes that rebellion, pestilence, and foreign invasion will come; but if the people open their eyes and lives to God, then His ears and eyes will be opened to the plight of Israel. The centerpiece of the Eternal's relationship to Israel is the Jerusalem temple, and this is manifest at the moment when Solomon ends his prayer and divine fire comes from the heavens to consume the offerings and sacrifices.

7 *Shortly after he became king,* my
father, *our beloved King* David, wanted to
build a house honoring the reputation of
the Eternal God of Israel. 8 But the Eter-
nal *did not agree to David's plan.* He told
my father David, "It is good that you
want to build a house honoring My repu-
tation; 9 however, you will not build the
house. Your future son will build that
house to honor My reputation."
10 Now the Eternal has fulfilled His
promise—I have succeeded my father
David as king of Israel and have built
the temple honoring the reputation of
the Eternal God of Israel. 11 In that house
I have placed the chest that holds the
covenant between the Eternal One and
the Israelites.

12 Solomon stood before the assembly of
Israel in front of the altar of the Eternal
and spread out his hands. 13 Then he stood
on the bronze platform he had built in
the center of the court (90 inches long,
90 inches wide, and 54 inches high),
knelt down, spread out his hands toward
heaven, 14 and prayed.

Solomon: Eternal God of Israel, You are
unparalleled among the gods of heaven
and earth. You honor Your covenants
with Your servants and give *limitless*
loyal love to those who faithfully fol-
low You. 15 Until now, You have honored
Your covenant with my father David,
Your servant *and our beloved king,* by
doing all that You promised him. 16 Now
*that David is no longer king and I have
replaced him,* remember what You prom-
ised to my father David, Your servant:
"As long as your descendants follow My
laws as you have done, one of them will
always be a king of Israel." 17 Eternal God
of Israel, honor this promise which You
made to Your servant David.
18 How can I think that this temple
I have built will be suitable lodging
for You when the heavens *You created*
are not vast enough? *Certainly we are
not worthy* to have You live among us
humans. 19 *Yet we hope that* You will hear
and address our prayers and our pleas,
Eternal God, and 20 that You will watch
this *humble* temple day and night. *This
will be the place for us to communicate
with You.* Here Your reputation will be
honored, so You will be able to hear
the prayers Your servants offer here.
21 Listen to these prayers when we, Your
people Israel, pray, looking toward this
temple, *Your earthly house;* hear *these
prayers* from Your house in heaven, and
forgive us.
22 If a man *breaks one of Your com-
mandments by* sinning against his
neighbor, making an oath, and confesses
the oath before Your altar in this *earthly*
house, 23 then hear *his oath* from *Your
house in* heaven. Judge his actions and
act upon Your judgment—either punish
the wicked man with the consequences
of his actions or forgive the righteous
man proportionate to his own righteous-
ness.
24 If Your people Israel break Your
commandments, are crushed by an
enemy, and return to You, praying for
forgiveness in Your *earthly* house, 25 then
hear *their prayers* from *Your house in*
heaven. Forgive the sins of Your people
Israel and return them to the land You
have given to their ancestors and their
descendants.
26 If Your people *Israel* break Your
commandments, are punished by a *dev-
astating* drought, and return to You after

their punishment by praying for forgiveness in Your *earthly* house, 27then hear *their prayers* from *Your house in* heaven. Forgive the sins of Your servants, Your people Israel, teach them how to follow Your ways, and send rain to Your land that You have given as an inheritance to Your people.

28If *disasters,* plague, or disease strike Israel—famine, pestilence, blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or military attacks at their gates—29-30then hear from Your house in heaven the prayers of every man (for his own sins) and the prayers of all Israel *(for the sins of the nation)* offered up with outstretched hands toward Your *earthly* house. Forgive or punish each man (whose intentions and heart only You know) proportionate to his behavior, 31so that man will fear and obey You as long as he lives in the land that You have given to his ancestors.

32If a foreigner (who is not one of Your people in Israel) travels to see this Your *earthly* house and pray toward it because of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, 33then hear *his prayers* from Your house in heaven. Grant the foreigner's request so that all nations may recognize Your name, fear You as we do, and recognize this temple as Your name's dwelling place.

34If Your people pray to You, facing Jerusalem and Your earthly house, while they are away fighting their enemies, 35then hear their prayers and requests from heaven. Grant them victory.

36When Your people sin against You (as everyone does), angering You so that You give them to their enemies and into foreign captivity, 37if they pray to You and repent while in that land, admitting, "We have sinned, we have distorted Your ways, and we have acted wickedly," 38if they genuinely repent while captive in that foreign land and pray facing Israel (that You gave to our ancestors), and the city Jerusalem that You have chosen, and Your *earthly* house (which I have built to honor Your reputation), 39then hear their prayers and requests from Your house in heaven. Sustain their cause and forgive their sins carried out against You.

40-41Eternal God, may Your eyes witness and Your ears hear my prayer in this temple: Come to Your resting place, both You and the covenant chest of Your power. Let Your priests, O Eternal God, dress themselves in salvation. Let Your godly ones rejoice in goodness. 42Do not turn away from Your *newly* anointed *king*; remember the loyal love You promised to Your servant, *my father* David.

7 As Solomon finished his prayer, fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the other sacrifices. *At that moment,* the glory of the Eternal filled the house.

The presence of God comes down and rests above the seat of mercy on the covenant chest with the winged guardians as His footstool.

2The Eternal's glory filled the temple *so overwhelmingly* that the priests could not enter. 3When all the Israelites saw the fire and the Eternal's glory, they fell prostrate before the temple, worshiping and praising the Eternal One.

Israelites: He is good! His loyal love lasts forever!

4-5*Having prayed and worshiped God,* the king and all the people made sacrifices to the Eternal and dedicated the temple. King Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

This is an enormous offering that signifies the importance of the occasion.

6All of Israel stood, and the priests and the Levites played their instruments to the Eternal One while other priests standing across from them played trumpets. (King David had made these instruments and used them to praise the Eternal, whose love endures forever.) 7Solomon consecrated the middle of the court in front of the Eternal's temple by giving burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings. The bronze altar was not large enough to hold the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fat.

8Solomon and all of Israel (from the border with Hamath *in Aram* to the river of Egypt) feasted for seven days, *celebrating the temple dedication and Succoth, the Festival of Booths.* 9On the eighth day, after the dedication of the altar and the feasting had concluded, the people held a solemn assembly. 10On the twenty-third day of the seventh month, Solomon sent the people home, rejoicing over the goodness that

the Eternal had shown to David, Solomon, and His people Israel.

11In this way Solomon successfully finished the Eternal's house and the house of the king so that everything Solomon had in his heart to do for the divine and royal residences he accomplished. 12The Eternal appeared to Solomon one night.

True God: *As promised,* I have chosen this temple as *the place where My name will dwell and* where I will receive sacrifices *and prayer.* I heard your prayer, *and I will honor it.*

13If I close up the heavens and their rain and send *any of the disasters you described—drought,* locusts, pestilence—to ravish the land and people; 14and My people (who are known by My name) humbly pray, follow My commandments, and abandon any actions or thoughts that might lead to further sinning, then I shall hear *their prayers* from *My house in* heaven, I shall forgive their sins, and I shall save their land *from the disasters.* 15Now I will witness with My eyes and hear with My ears the prayers offered in this temple 16because I have chosen and consecrated this temple as the eternal *resting* place for My reputation, My eyes, and My heart.

17If you follow My ways as your father David did, do all that I ask you to do, and follow My laws and commands, 18then I will establish your royal throne and keep My covenant with your father David: "One of your descendants will always be a king of Israel."

Just as the Eternal makes a covenant with David, so He will not remove David's offspring from the Jerusalem throne, as long as David's sons follow the Lord.

19If you *and the Israelites* ignore My ways and disregard My laws, if you serve other gods and worship them, 20then I will remove you *all* from My land, the land I gave to you *and your ancestors,* and I will destroy this temple, which I have consecrated for My reputation, making it a proverb and a byword among the nations. 21Everyone who passes by this exalted temple will be astonished: "Why has the Eternal destroyed His land and His house?" 22They will conclude, "*He has done this* because they abandoned the Eternal, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they served other gods and worshiped them. He is the One who has brought this evil upon them."

8 After 20 years of constructing the Eternal's house and his own house, 2Solomon built cities *in the regions* which Huram, *king of Tyre,* had given to Israel and settled the Israelites in them.

3Then Solomon conquered Hamath-zobah *in Aram.* 4He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the storage cities in Hamath. 5He also built upper Beth-horon and lower Beth-horon (fortified cities with walls, gates, and crossbeams *in the territory of Ephraim*), 6Baalath *(in the territory of Dan),* all his storage cities, and all the cities for his chariots and his horsemen. Solomon built these in Jerusalem, in *the region of* Lebanon, and in all the lands he ruled *to defend Israel's territory.*

7-8All of the non-Israelites who remained in Solomon's kingdom, including descendants of Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, became conscripted laborers to this day. 9But Solomon did not enslave the Israelites for his building projects. The Israelites were warriors, Solomon's leaders and commanders of his chariots and horsemen, 10and 250 of them were his chief officers who ruled over the people.

11Then Solomon moved *his wife,* Pharaoh's daughter, from the city of David *and away from the temple* to a separate house which he built for her. Solomon thought, "My *foreign* wife will not live in the palace of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy where the Eternal's covenant chest has entered."

12*So that it pleased God and followed the provisions of his father,* Solomon gave burnt offerings on the Eternal's altar, which he had built in front of the porch. 13He did this daily (according to the commandment of Moses), *weekly* (on the Sabbaths), *monthly* (on the new moons), and at the three annual feasts (the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths). 14Following the plans of his father David, Solomon assigned the *temple* duties to the priests, the Levites' daily duties of praise and ministering before the priests, and the gatekeepers' gate divisions. These plans had been laid out by David, a man who followed the True God. 15The priests and the Levites followed all the commandments of their king, even those regarding the

storehouses. 16Solomon finished all this work, beginning with the groundbreaking of the Eternal's temple and ending with its completion.

17Then Solomon went to Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the coast in Edom. 18Huram sent his seafaring servants in ships to help Solomon's servants sail to Ophir. There the servants took 450 talents of gold and brought them to King Solomon.

► Solomon's wealth and wisdom are so well-known that other monarchs in the region come to him to receive advice and to offer gifts. Huram, king of Tyre, may give Solomon great gifts during the construction of Israel's infrastructure, but his aid is not nearly as memorable as the gifts of the queen of Sheba, who visits from the Arabian peninsula.

9 The queen of Sheba entered Jerusalem with an impressive entourage and camels carrying spices, a large amount of gold, and gems. She had heard about Solomon's famous *wisdom,* so she came to ask him difficult questions that addressed her personal concerns. 2Solomon answered these questions openly and honestly where nothing about the queen was hidden from Solomon's knowledge. 3-4His wisdom *and frankness impressed and astonished the queen,* as did the palace, the meal, the servants, the guests and their clothing, the cupbearers and their clothing, and the stairway* that led to the Eternal's temple. After viewing all these things, the queen was *mesmerized and* breathless.

Queen of Sheba: 5-6Although I did not believe the reports of your greatness—*it seemed impossible that anyone could have* your wisdom, *power, and justice*—your reputation as a well-spoken and wise king is justified. I have witnessed only a portion of your wisdom, yet even that portion surpasses the stories that are told *about you.* 7Those who surround you, your men and your servants, are blessed to be near you and to hear your wise musings daily. 8Blessed be the Eternal One your God, who favored your potential as a great ruler and placed you on His throne. He has demonstrated His love for Israel by ensuring the nation's future with you as their just and righteous king.

9The queen of Sheba gave to Solomon *in recognition of his prestige* 9,000 pounds of gold, vast quantities of gems, and a large amount of spices previously unknown in Israel. 10When Solomon's and Huram's servants had brought gold from *the land of* Ophir, they also brought algum wood and costly gems. 11Solomon had used this *nonnative* algum wood to build the steps to the Eternal's temple and the king's palace and to make lyres and harps for the musicians. These were all unmatched by anything that had existed in the land of Judah.

12Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all that she had traveled *to Israel* to receive, in addition to gifts equaling those that she brought to him. *Contented with her visit,* the queen returned home with her servants.

In addition to the gifts of Huram and the queen of Sheba, Solomon collects a substantial treasury from the gifts of other nations.

13Annually Solomon received about 25 tons of gold 14in addition to what the traders and merchants brought. The Arabian kings and the local governors also brought gold and silver to him.

15Solomon *used some of this metal to* make weapons: 200 large shields (each weighing 7½ pounds of beaten gold) 16and 300 small, *rounded* shields (each weighing 3¾ pounds of beaten gold). All the shields were stored in the house made of wood imported from Lebanon.

17Solomon then constructed a large ivory throne and gilded it. 18-19At the base of the throne were 6 steps and a golden footstool, and at the sides were armrests. The throne was guarded by *14* lions: one next to each armrest, and one on either side of each step. This throne was unlike any other monarch's throne.

20In King Solomon's house, made of wood from Lebanon, the drinking cups and dishes were of gold (since silver was not recognized as a precious metal in Solomon's days).

* 9:3-4 Difficult text; another possible reading, "roof chamber."

21Both Solomon and Huram owned
ships which traded with *the coastal city*
of Tarshish every three years, bringing
gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks* *into*
Israel. 22All this made King Solomon richer
than all other monarchs, and his wisdom
was equally immeasurable. 23All the kings
of the earth wanted an audience with
King Solomon, to hear the wisdom which
God bestowed upon him, *as the queen of*
Sheba had. 24Each visitor brought gifts *to*
Solomon every year: silver, gold, garments,
weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

25Solomon's horses and chariots
stayed in 4,000 stalls along with the 12,000
horsemen who resided with him in Jerusa-
lem or *in Israel's* other fortified cities.

26*During his reign,* Solomon ruled the
region between the Euphrates River *in the*
east and to the land of the Philistines *all the*
way to the Mediterranean Sea in the west,
and southward to *north of* the border of
Egypt. 27He made Jerusalem *so wealthy* that
silver was as common as stones *in the rocky*
regions and cedars were as plentiful as syca-
more trees in the lowland. 28Solomon also
imported and was given *expensive* horses
from Egypt and from other countries.

29The actions of King Solomon, from
his birth until his death, are recorded in
the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, in
the prophecies of Ahijah the Shilonite, and
in the visions of Iddo the seer (*specifically*
those concerning Jeroboam, son of Nebat).

30Solomon's rule over all Israel lasted
40 years—*during which time* he governed
from *his capital city,* Jerusalem. 31And
after he joined with his ancestors in death
and was laid with his father, *our beloved*
King David, in Jerusalem, Solomon's son
Rehoboam ruled *Israel* in his place.

► After the death of King Solomon, nothing is ever the same in Israel. Many of the Israelites rebel against God, no longer follow God's elected Judahite kings, and form the new Northern Kingdom with their own kings and heretical temples.

10 *After his father died,* King
Rehoboam went to Shechem *in*
Northern Israel to be coronated
before all the Israelites. 2The news *of the*
impending coronation reached Jeroboam,
the son of Nebat, where he was living as
an exile in Egypt, so he hastily returned *to*
Israel.

King Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam when the prophet Ahijah predicted that Israel would divide into two countries with Jeroboam leading the Northern Kingdom.

3The Israelites requested that Jeroboam
meet them *in Shechem at the corona-*
tion. Together, they made a request of
Rehoboam, *who would be their new king.*

► This next conversation between Rehoboam and the tribes is pivotal for the nation of Israel and the twelve tribes. The prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite in the 1 Kings 11 story foreshadows that God is going to give Judah—and neighboring Benjamin—to Rehoboam, but Jeroboam in the north gets ten tribes. The story is ironic since it appears that the Eternal favors Jeroboam by giving him most of the Israelite tribes and territory, and Rehoboam is portrayed as a despotic fool. In the end, the Davidic offspring, King Rehoboam, has a disastrous reign, and Jeroboam sets up Dan and Bethel as temple sites to worship the Eternal One. It seems that a king, whether in the Northern or Southern Kingdom, is a bad deal for the people.

Israelites *(to Rehoboam)***:** 4Your father
made us work very hard *for the building*
of Israel. We built cities and palaces and
temples and roads for him. We are tired
of this constant work which your father
required. If you will reduce the amount
of work we are required to perform *for*
the nation, then we will *coronate you as*
king and serve you *as your people.*

Rehoboam: 5*Let me think about this*
for three days. Then I will give you an
answer.

As the Israelites left, 6King Rehoboam
asked older men who were his father

* 9:21 Difficult reading; possibly "baboons" or "monkeys."

Solomon's advisors for advice *about the situation.*

Rehoboam: What do you think I should tell the people?

Solomon's Advisors: 7Listen to their concerns, show them kindness, and please them. Then they will be your subjects and will always respect you.

8But Rehoboam did not listen to the advisors' recommendation. Instead he asked the opinions of his childhood friends *who were more likely to give him the advice that he wanted to hear.*

Rehoboam: 9How do you think I should answer these people's request that I reduce the amount of work my father required of them?

These younger childhood "counselors" encourage Rehoboam to be a stronger, more dominant ruler instead of a kinder, more respected ruler.

Rehoboam's Friends: 10Tell those who want a reduced workload, "I am stronger and more virile than my father ever was! 11*You will long for my father's leniency.* He made you work hard, but I will make you work even harder. He disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with *the sting of* scorpions."

12On the third day, Jeroboam and the Israelites returned to Rehoboam as the king had requested. 13-14The king followed the advice of his young friends, answering harshly and ignoring the advice of his father's advisors.

Rehoboam: *You will long for my father's leniency.* He made you work hard, but I will make you work even harder. He disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with *the sting of* scorpions.

15By ignoring the Israelites' desires, the king fulfilled the Eternal God's prophecy that was spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam, son of Nebat. 16*Just as predicted, the Northern tribes formed a nation separate from Judah* because the king did not listen to them.

Israelites *(to Rehoboam)***:** *God promised the kingdom of Israel to David and his sons.* Why should we follow David's descendants when we do not share in the inheritance of Jesse's son? *Let us form our own nation in the North, and so* every Israelite should return to his house. *In the same way,* let the *Judahites and the Benjaminites* continue by themselves as the house of David *in the South.*

Most of the Israelites left *Shechem to form a new Northern Kingdom,* 17but *a few* Israelites remained in the cities of Judah, *the Southern Kingdom, because they recognized that* Rehoboam was their *rightful* king.

18*In a final attempt to reunite his father Solomon's kingdom,* King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, the superintendent of *Solomon's* forced labor, *into Israel to compel the Northern Kingdom to accept Rehoboam as their king.* But the Israelites stoned Hadoram to death. *Realizing the anger of the Northern Kingdom,* King Rehoboam fled in his chariot to Jerusalem. 19Thus *the Northern Kingdom of* Israel has rebelled against *the Southern Kingdom,* the Davidic kings *in Judah,* until today.

11 Having returned to Jerusalem, King Rehoboam assembled 180,000 warriors from the territories of Judah and Benjamin *in the South, and he charged them* to fight against Israel and to reunite *both kingdoms* under one king, Rehoboam. 2But the Eternal spoke to Shemaiah, the True God's servant *and prophet.*

Eternal One: 3Tell Rehoboam, Solomon's son and the *new* king of Judah, and all the Israelites living in Judah and Benjamin, 4what I am telling you: "I have decided *to allow Israel to divide into two kingdoms.* You will not fight against your *Northern* relatives and *their king,* Jeroboam. Return to your homes."

The Southerners did as they were told, 5and Rehoboam began to fortify Judah from his capital in Jerusalem. 6He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, 7Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, 8Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, 9Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, 10Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, all of which are walled cities in *the territories of* Judah and Benjamin. 11He reinforced the fortresses, staffed the defenses with leaders, and stocked the storage houses with food, oil, and wine. 12In all the cities, he provided shields and spears *for the citizens* to protect them *in case of attack.* With these provisions,

Rehoboam protected *the Southern Kingdom in the territories of* Judah and Benjamin.

13-15Meanwhile, Jeroboam and the ruling family *in the Northern Kingdom* prohibited the priests and Levites from performing their duties for the Eternal. Jeroboam appointed his own priests to serve the religious centers *of the Northern Kingdom,* which honored *false* gods in the forms of goats and calves. So the priests and Levites left their homes *among the Northern tribes,* moved to the Southern Kingdom and Jerusalem, and supported Rehoboam *as their king.* 16*Likewise,* those Israelites *living in the Northern Kingdom* who were dedicated to the Eternal One, the only True God of Israel, also moved to Jerusalem to make sacrifices to the Eternal One, True God of their fathers. 17Those who moved south strengthened the Southern Kingdom *with their dedication to the True God* and *His chosen King* Rehoboam (son of Solomon) for three years. These people *were faithful to God and* followed the example of *our beloved kings* David and Solomon for three years.

As his nation is growing and strengthening, so is Rehoboam's family.

18His *first* wife, Mahalath, the daughter of Jerimoth (son of David) and Abihail (daughter of Jesse's son Eliab) 19gave birth to *three* sons: Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham. 20Rehoboam's second wife, Maacah (granddaughter of Absalom), had *four sons:* Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. 21Rehoboam loved *his second wife,* Maacah, more than all his other 18 wives and 60 concubines, who gave him a total of 28 sons and 60 daughters. 22*Of those children,* Rehoboam appointed Abijah (*eldest* son of *his favorite wife* Maacah) as the leader among his brothers and as the crown prince. 23Rehoboam then wisely made some of his other sons governors of the territories and fortified cities in Judah and Benjamin. He *ensured their contentment and loyalty,* giving them food and selecting their wives.

12 After *three years of* prosperity and *military* strength, Rehoboam and all Israel *living in the Southern Kingdom* rejected the Eternal's laws. 2Their unfaithfulness resulted in Shishak, king of Egypt, attacking Jerusalem during King Rehoboam's fifth year. 3Shishak's army included 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and countless mercenaries from Libya, Suk, and Ethiopia.* 4He conquered the fortified cities in Judah, and as he approached Jerusalem 5Shemaiah the prophet brought another message from the True God to Rehoboam and Judah's governors (who had fled to Jerusalem at the threat of Shishak's *army*).

Eternal One *(through Shemaiah)***:** Because you have abandoned Me *to follow your own gods,* I have abandoned you *and allowed you* to *be defeated by* Shishak.

Rehoboam and the Governors *(humbling themselves)***:** 6The Eternal's *punishment of us* is just.

Eternal One *(through Shemaiah)***:** 7Because you have humbled yourselves, I will not destroy you. I will save Jerusalem from My wrath, to be administered by Shishak. 8But you will serve him *since you no longer serve Me,* and you will remember *the pain of* serving foreign kings and long for *the ease of* serving Me.

9Then Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem and plundered the Eternal's temple and the palace of the king. He took every treasure, including Solomon's golden shields.

► Shishak, a Libyan general who took over the Egyptian throne, has been interested in Israel's affairs for some time. First, he harbored Jeroboam when he rebelled against Solomon. Now, Pharaoh is conquering the region. Although God does not allow Shishak to destroy Jerusalem, the Israelites lose a precious part of their heritage and a significant amount of wealth when he raids the palace and temple. This incident is enough to remind Rehoboam and the people of their ancestors' servitude in Egypt and of God's love of His people. If they don't want to return to lives of bondage, they must humble themselves and resume proper worship of God.

* 12:3 Hebrew, *Cush*

10To replace his father's golden shields,
King Rehoboam cast bronze shields
and gave them to the commanders who
guarded the palace entrance. 11The com-
manders carried those shields whenever
they accompanied the king to the Eternal's
temple, then they returned the shields to
the guardroom.

12Because Rehoboam had humbled
himself, the Eternal subdued His anger
and did not destroy him. Things were
good in the Southern Kingdom 13when
41-year-old King Rehoboam began his
strong 17-year reign in Jerusalem (the city
the Eternal had chosen from all the tribes
of Israel to establish His reputation).

Rehoboam's mother was Naamah the
Ammonitess. 14*During his reign,* he aban-
doned the ways of the Eternal and did evil.
15The actions of King Rehoboam, from
his birth to his death, are recorded in the
chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet and *in
the visions* of Iddo the seer (according to
the genealogies).

Rehoboam and Jeroboam were
constantly fighting one another. 16After
Rehoboam joined his ancestors in death
and was laid *with his fathers* in the city
of David, *Jerusalem,* his son Abijah ruled
Israel in his place.

13 1-2Abijah, the son of *Rehoboam
and* Micaiah* (daughter of Uriel
of Gibeah), became king over
Judah during Jeroboam's 18th year as king
of the Northern Kingdom. He ruled for 3
years from Jerusalem and battled against
Jeroboam. 3Abijah, who initiated the war,
had an army of 400,000 heroic men, *but he
was drastically outnumbered by* Jeroboam's
army of 800,000 heroic men. 4Abijah stood
on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the
hill country of Ephraim, *and addressed
Jeroboam and all of the soldiers from the
Northern Kingdom.*

Abijah: Listen to me, Jeroboam and all
Israel! 5Do you *in the Northern Kingdom*
not know that the Eternal One, the True
God of Israel, gave the rule over all of
Israel, *both the Northern and Southern
Kingdoms,* to David and his descendants
by a covenant of salt?

Salt in the ancient world not only serves as a preservative, but it also hinders the spread of yeast and reminds those eating a treaty meal of a mutual oath.

6Yet Jeroboam, Nebat's son and the ser-
vant of David's son Solomon, rebelled
against his master.

► Jeroboam and all of the Israelites from the North follow false gods and rebel against God's authority. When they deny David's descendants as the rightful kings, they deny God and His choice.

Abijah: 7*In his rebellion,* Jeroboam sur-
rounded himself with worthless men
and scoundrels who took advantage of
Solomon's own son, Rehoboam, when he
was young *and impressionable* early in
his reign. He had no hope of defending
himself *and the nation* against them.

8Not only have you rebelled against
the Eternal's kingdom ruled by the
descendants of David, but you have
allowed your great numbers *to make you
arrogant. You have also rebelled against
His laws* by worshiping *and relying on*
the golden calves which Jeroboam cast
as gods for you. 9You even drove the
priests of the Eternal (the sons of Aaron
and the Levites) *from your midst* and
replaced them with *non-Levite* priests
from foreigners in the land! Anyone who
wants to be a priest of your false gods
needs only pay *for his commission* with
the sacrifice of a young bull and seven
rams.

10The Eternal One is our True God,
and we have not rebelled against Him *in
favor of idols and illegitimate priests.* The
sons of Aaron continue *in their divinely
appointed duty of* serving the Eternal as
priests, and the Levites perform their
work as well. 11Every morning and
evening they give to the Eternal *what
He prescribed during the time of Moses:*
burnt offerings, fragrant incense, unleav-
ened bread on the clean table, and light
from the golden lampstand. Unlike you,
who have rebelled against Him, we are
vigilant in obeying the Eternal One, our
True God.

12Remember, *as you prepare to fight
against us,* that the True God *is on our
side and* is leading us. His priests will
blow the signal trumpets to alert Him
that you are here to fight us, *and He will*

* 13:1-2 In 1 Kings 15:2 she is Maacah, daughter of Abishalom.

*rescue us from our enemies as He promised.** O Israelites, *God's chosen people,* do not fight against the Eternal One, the True God of your fathers, because you will not succeed.

13*During Abijah's appeal to the Northern Israelites,* Jeroboam *was not paying attention.* Instead, he was dividing his forces into two fronts—one to meet Judah in front of them and one to ambush them from the rear.

14-16When Judah realized what the *Northern* forces had done, the men shouted to the Eternal and the priests blew their *signal* trumpets *just as Abijah promised. God was faithful to His promise;* He crushed Jeroboam and his forces. As they fled, the True God gave the victory over Israel to Abijah and Judah. 17Abijah and his army slaughtered 500,000 of the Israelite warriors. 18The *Northern* Israelites were defeated because the people of Judah trusted in the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors. 19Abijah pursued *the fleeing* Jeroboam and captured several *Northern* cities and their surrounding towns *and regions*: Bethel *(one of the Northern Kingdom's shrine cities),* Jeshanah, and Ephron.

20Jeroboam *was weakened by his battles with Judah, and* he never regained his former strength. The Eternal struck him, and Jeroboam died. 21But Abijah's strength increased, and he married 14 wives and fathered 22 sons and 16 daughters. 22The actions of Abijah, his works and his words, are recorded in the chronicles of Iddo the prophet.

14 After Abijah joined his ancestors in death and was laid *with his fathers* in the city of David, *Jerusalem,* his son Asa ruled *the Southern Kingdom* in his place. During Asa's reign, the country was quiet for 10 years *as it had been during Solomon's rule.* 2Asa obeyed the Eternal One, his True God, *and led the nation in reformation** 3-5by removing *remnants of idol worship* in Judah: foreign altars and high places, incense altars, sacred pillars, and *statues of* Asherah. Asa commanded Judah to seek the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors, and to obey His laws and commandments. The kingdom was peaceful during Asa's reign.

► Asa must have learned from his father Abijah's battle against the Northern Kingdom. Asa knows how important God's support is to the success of the Southern Kingdom, so as king he makes proper worship of God the first priority of his reign. Proper worship of God surely leads to national stability.

6Asa utilized this peaceful time which the Eternal had given to build fortified cities in Judah since he was not preoccupied with wars.

Asa *(to Judah)*: 7Because we have followed the Eternal One, our True God, He has allowed us to keep our land and has given our nation a time of peace. *Let's use this time to strengthen what He has so graciously given us.* Let's build *strong* cities, defend them with walls, *guard them* with towers, *secure them* with gates, and *lock them* with cross-bars.

The Judahites agreed, so they built *the cities* and prospered. 8Asa built an army of heroic men including 300,000 Judahites, who carried large shields and spears, and 280,000 Benjaminites, who carried shields and bows.

9When Zerah from Cush* came to Mareshah *in the Judean highlands* to attack Judah with an army of one million men and 300 chariots, 10Asa went to meet the challenge. The two armies faced each other in the valley of Zephathah* at Mareshah.

Asa *(praying to the Lord)*: 11Eternal One, only You can help the powerless when they fight the powerful, so help us, Eternal One, our True God, because we trust You and we are facing this innumerable army for the honor of Your reputation. O Eternal One, You are our True God. Do not let mere mortals win *in a battle* against You.

12*Just as Asa requested,* the Eternal defeated the Cushites on behalf of Judah, and the Cushites fled. 13-14Asa and his men pursued the Cushites as far as Gerar

* 13:12 Numbers 10:9 * 14:2 Deuteronomy 7:5 * 14:9 May refer to Ethiopia in Africa or Cushan (a.k.a. Gerar) in southwest Judah. * 14:10 Greek reads, "north of Mareshah."

in southwestern Judah. So many of the Cushite army died that they could not recover; they were decimated by the Eternal and His army. The Judahite army was able to crush all the cities around Gerar because the people of Gerar feared the Eternal, and the army plundered each city they destroyed. 15*In the villages and pastures,* they crushed the herdsmen and seized large numbers of sheep and camels. Then the Judahite army returned to Jerusalem.

15 The Spirit of the True God gave a prophecy to Azariah, the son of Oded, *who relayed it to Asa and his people.*

Azariah: 2Asa and all of *the tribes of* Judah and Benjamin, listen to me! *God responds to you as you respond to Him:* If you are with the Eternal, then He is with you. If you look for Him, then He will let you find Him. But if you abandon Him, then He will abandon you. *So learn from the mistakes of your ancestors.* 3For a long time, *the tribes of* Israel were without the True God, His priests, and His laws. 4But when they were distressed *by wars and oppression,* they returned to the Eternal One, the True God of Israel. They sought Him, and He let them find Him. 5In those times *before the monarchy,* no one traveling had a peaceful life. Everyone in the lands had numerous difficulties; 6nations and cities *fought back and forth,* destroying each other *again and again.* Because *of their disobedience,* the True God troubled them constantly. 7But you, *who are devoted to being with God and searching for God,* be strong and do not lose courage because your actions will reap rewards.

8Asa responded to the message of Azariah the son of Oded the prophet with that courage *and strength.* He removed the abominable idols from *the Southern Kingdom of* Judah and Benjamin and from the cities he had conquered *from the Northern Kingdom* in the hill country of Ephraim. Then he repaired the Eternal's altar in front of the porch of His *temple.* 9-10*During the Festival of Weeks* in the 3rd month of the 15th year of his reign, Asa assembled in Jerusalem all of Judah and Benjamin and those from *the Northern territories of* Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who had moved to the Southern Kingdom when they realized the Eternal One, his True God, was with Asa. 11That day, they sacrificed to the Eternal 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the wealth they gained *during their war against Cush,* 12signifying their covenant agreeing to seek the Eternal One, True God of their ancestors, in everything they did. 13*They decided that* anyone (man or woman, young or old, *important or insignificant*) who would not seek the Eternal One, the True God of Israel, should be executed *in accordance with His command,** 14and they promised this to the Eternal with loud voices, shouting, trumpets, and horns. 15All of the Southern Kingdom rejoiced at *their decisions and* their vow because *they had acted on Azariah's prophecy:* they had promised to look for Him *and only Him* earnestly and entirely, and *they knew* He would let them find Him. *In response to the promises,* the Eternal gave peace in their lives *and with their neighbors.*

16*Asa continued his reforms even after this.* He also removed his own mother, Maacah, from her position as queen mother because she had *continued in her idol worship,* making a carved image of Asherah. Asa cut down the cultic statue, crushed it, and burned it beside the brook Kidron. 17In spite of *his work against idol worship,* he did not remove the high places in the Northern Kingdom. Asa followed His ways throughout his reign, 18and he returned the silver, gold, and utensils which he and his father had dedicated to the house of the True God. 19Until the 35th year of his reign, the Southern Kingdom did not fight any wars.

► Even in the wake of military success, during a period when most kings would become conceited, Asa continues to focus on God. Eliminating the remnants of idol worship and practicing the festivals in the Southern Kingdom are not enough for him—he insures that all political leaders are role models of proper worship. Asa punishes his own mother and makes an example of her apostasy by stripping her title and destroying her cultic objects in front of the nation. This sends a strong message to the people

* 15:13 Deuteronomy 13:9

There are two significant reasons why the Eternal is always opposed to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms forging alliances with other nations, even if for self-preservation. First, any political alliance is also a religious alliance. Each king and his group of diplomats bring their national deities to witness and support the treaty. The Eternal never stands for setting up other divine rivals, even to witness military agreements. Often treaty members recognize and worship their respective patron idols to show political and religious friendship between the countries.

Second, a political alliance is also a spiritual alliance. King Asa—and the majority of Israelite and Judean kings—demonstrates a lack of trust in the Eternal's provision and protection when seeking out pragmatics (such as food and land) from the surrounding Gentile nations. It is a constant challenge to seek God for personal and national existence when all the other nations are bigger and stronger. The sad reality is that Judah is often a vassal people to the more wealthy and powerful Israel, and both nations are taken captive and deported by those in whom they will seek refuge: Assyria and Babylonia.

that everyone is accountable for his actions.

But not even Asa is perfect. He neglects to destroy the high places in the areas he conquers in the Northern Kingdom, so his reign will not be completely peaceful.

16 But in the 36th year of Asa's reign, King Baasha of Israel invaded Judah, *conquered* Ramah, and fortified it *as his outpost in the Southern Kingdom.* By controlling Ramah, Baasha controlled access *to Jerusalem and* to Asa king of Judah.

Asa retaliates by hiring out Aram to fight Baasha.

2 Asa took silver and gold from the treasuries of the Eternal's temple and his own palace, and he sent them to Ben-hadad, king of Aram, who lived in Damascus.

Asa *(in a letter to Ben-hadad)***:** 3 Let's renew the treaty which our fathers shared with each other. Please take this silver and gold which I have sent to you, and use it *to attack* Baasha, king of Israel. If you will break your treaty with him, then he will withdraw *his troops* from my country.

4 Ben-hadad accepted King Asa's offer and sent the commanders of his armies to conquer cities in Israel *and to add them to the nation of Aram*: Ijon *(a fortified city in Naphtali),* Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities *in the region* of Naphtali. 5 When Baasha heard that Aram was attacking him, he stopped his work of strengthening Ramah *and returned to the Northern Kingdom to fight.* 6 Then King Asa and his people in Judah pillaged Ramah, removing Baasha's stones and wood and using them to fortify Geba and Mizpah.

These cities are along the Israelite border, so they guard major trade routes between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

7 At that time, Hanani the seer shared his vision with Asa, king of Judah, *interpreting the king's mistakes and predicting Israel's future.*

Hanani: Because you trusted the king of Aram instead of the Eternal One, your True God, you missed your opportunity to conquer the Aramean army! 8 Do you remember that the Cushites* and the Libyans had immense armies with many chariots and horsemen? *You could not have conquered them with your own army or your own cunning,* but because you trusted the Eternal, He gave them to you *so you could crush them.* 9 The Eternal watches everything that happens on earth so that He may strongly support those who follow Him. *By hiring mercenaries,* you have acted foolishly *and proven that you are not following Him.* From now on, *peace will elude you and* you will surely fight wars.

* 16:8 May refer to the people of Ethiopia in Africa or Cushan (a.k.a. Gerar) in southwest Judah.

10Asa was enraged by the seer's vision. He imprisoned Hanani and *cruelly* oppressed some of his people.

11The actions of Asa, from his birth to his death, are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12In the 39th year of his reign, Asa contracted a severe foot disease. Once again, he had the opportunity to look to the Eternal, but instead he relied on physicians.

► What happens to Asa's faith at the end of his life? As Hanani points out, Asa began his reign as a devoted follower of God who trusted Him in battles and worshiped Him in peace. But after neglecting to destroy the altars in the Northern Kingdom, Asa's faith diminishes. He trusts foreign armies and human physicians over his own God, so he dies a painful death.

13So Asa joined his ancestors in death *three years later,* in the 41st year of his reign. 14The people buried him in his own tomb, which he had cut out for himself in the city of David, *Jerusalem,* and filled with spices prepared by a perfumer. Then the people built a large fire honoring him.

17 Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king and demonstrated his authority over *the Southern Kingdom of* Israel *by strengthening Judah's defenses.* 2He stationed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah and built barracks throughout the territory of Judah and the cities of Ephraim, which his father Asa had conquered. 3The Eternal was with Jehoshaphat because he ruled as David had *throughout his reign* and as his father *Asa* had at the beginning of his reign. Jehoshaphat did not seek the lords *of foreign religions*; 4instead, he looked for the True God of his father *as Azariah told Asa to do,* followed His commands, *and was faithful to God,* unlike *the Northern Kingdom of* Israel. 5Because of his virtues, the Eternal gave control of the kingdom to Jehoshaphat. The people living throughout Judah brought gifts to *their new king,* Jehoshaphat, and he had abundant riches and honor. 6Jehoshaphat prided himself on supporting the ways of the Eternal by cleansing Judah of *foreign cultic symbols*: high places and Asherah figures.

7-9In his third year, Jehoshaphat sent his *most worthy* officials (Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah), *some of* the Levites (Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah), and *some of* the priests (Elishama and Jehoram) to all the people in Judah to teach them from the Eternal's laws.

► Asa began reforms by destroying cults, and Jehoshaphat continues the reforms by building the true religion. His focus is not just on ridding the nation of improper worship; he intends to teach everyone about proper worship. Therefore, Jehoshaphat embarks on a massive project of sending his best officials throughout the nation to teach the people.

10All the kingdoms and lands surrounding Judah feared the Eternal, so they would not attack Jehoshaphat. 11Some of the Philistines even brought gifts and silver as tribute to Jehoshaphat, and Arabians brought him flocks: 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats.

Jehoshaphat is the first king to command such foreign respect since Solomon, four generations earlier.

12-13Jehoshaphat grew stronger *at home and abroad,* he built fortresses and store cities with great supplies in Judah, and he stationed his heroic men in Jerusalem 14according to their families: From Judah, the commanders of their divisions were Adnah, the commander of 300,000 heroic men; 15then Johanan, the commander of 280,000; 16then Amasiah (son of Zichri who volunteered to serve the Eternal), and with him 200,000 heroic men. 17From Benjamin, Eliada, a valiant warrior, and with him 200,000 archers and those carrying shields; 18then Jehozabad, and with him 180,000 equipped for war. 19These men served the king *in Jerusalem,* and others served him in other fortified cities throughout Judah.

18 In spite of his great wealth and honor, Jehoshaphat *still wanted an alliance with the Northern Kingdom.* So he arranged *for his son, Jehoram,* to marry *Athaliah, the daughter of* Ahab, *the king of Israel.* 2Several years later, Jehoshaphat traveled *north* to Samaria *(Israel's capital city)* to visit Ahab, and Ahab prepared a feast. He used this feast of sheep and goats to entice Jehoshaphat and his entourage into attacking Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab *(to Jehoshaphat)***:** 3*I want to recover* Ramoth-gilead *from the Arameans and return it to my own country.* Will you help me attack it?

Jehoshaphat: You and I and all of our people are brothers, *descended from the same ancestor, Jacob.* We will certainly help you in the battle. 4But first I want to know if the Eternal agrees *with your aggression. Let's consult some of His prophets.*

5Then Ahab assembled 400 *court* prophets, *who wanted to appease their king.*

Ahab *(to the prophets)***:** Should we fight Ramoth-gilead or not?

Prophets: Go up *to Ramoth-Gilead. You will win* because the True God will give the city to you.

Jehoshaphat: 6Is there a prophet of the Eternal, *not just one of your own court prophets,* whom we can ask?

Ahab: 7There is *only* one prophet of the Eternal here, Micaiah, son of Imla, but I hate him *and distrust his prophecies.* He always prophesies evil about me *and my country,* never anything good.

Jehoshaphat: You should not say such a thing *about a prophet of the Lord.*

Ahab *(to an officer)***:** 8Bring Micaiah, Imla's son, to us quickly.

9*While they waited for Micaiah to arrive,* Ahab and Jehoshaphat each sat on his own throne in his *unique* robes on the threshing floor inside Samaria's gate. All the prophets were revealing their divine insights to the kings, 10and Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, cast iron horns *to illustrate his prophecy.*

Zedekiah *(with the horns)***:** The Eternal says, "With these *horns* you will stab the Arameans until they are destroyed."

Prophets: 11Go up to Ramoth-gilead. You will win because the Eternal will give the city to the king.

12When the messenger who went to summon Micaiah *found him,* he told Micaiah of the other prophets' unanimous blessing *for the battle.* The messenger asked that Micaiah agree with the other prophets and support the battle. 13Micaiah swore by the Eternal that he would only speak what the True God told him. *He would not go along with the crowd just to please Ahab.*

Ahab: 14Micaiah, should we fight Ramoth-gilead or not?

Micaiah: Go up *to Ramoth-gilead.* You will win because the city will be given to you.

Ahab: 15How many times must I persuade you to tell me nothing but the truth when you *claim to* use the authority of the Eternal?

Micaiah: 16I saw all Israel wandering aimlessly on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd. Then I heard the Eternal say, "These have no master. Let each of them *go his own way and* return to his own house in peace."

Ahab *(aside to Jehoshaphat)***:** 17Didn't I tell you that he prophesies only evil about me?

The prophets often use the "bad shepherd" metaphor to demonstrate how Israelite and Judean kings do not rule their people well.

Micaiah: 18Hear what the Eternal One says. I saw Him sitting on His throne, with the armies of heaven flanking Him, 19asking, "Who will entice Ahab, king of Israel, to go up to Ramoth-gilead and die there?"

The heavenly soldiers were murmuring to each other 20when a spirit stepped before the Eternal and answered, "I will entice him."

The Eternal One questioned, "How?"

21"I will mislead all of his prophets *so that he will go to his death willingly and unaware.*"

Then He said, "You will indeed entice him. Go, and do as you have said."
22In this way, the Eternal has deceived your prophets and proclaimed your death.

23Then Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, slapped Micaiah.

Zedekiah: Which way did that *enticing* spirit from the Eternal pass when he left me and entered you, *prompting your ridiculous oracle*?

Micaiah: 24*Seer,* you won't see anything until the day when you enter an inner room to hide yourself.

Ahab: 25Take Micaiah to Amon (the governor of the city) and to my son Joash. 26Tell them I said to imprison this man and feed him only a little bread and water until I return *from this battle* safely.

Micaiah: 27If you do return safely, then the Eternal has not spoken through me. Everyone, listen *to me and remember my words*.

28So *Ahab,* king of the Northern Kingdom, and Jehoshaphat, king of the Southern Kingdom, attacked Ramoth-gilead together.

Ahab *(to Jehoshaphat)*: 29I will wear a disguise when we go into battle, but you should wear your royal robes.

Both men did as Ahab suggested, Jehoshaphat in his robes and Ahab in his disguise, and they attacked *Ramoth-gilead.*
30Meanwhile, the Aramean king *(who occupied Ramoth-gilead)* had commanded the captains of his chariots to target only Ahab. 31When they saw Jehoshaphat *in the royal robes,* they assumed that he was the king of Israel, *not knowing that Judah had joined Ahab in the battle.* The Aramean chariots pursued Jehoshaphat, but he called out to the Eternal for help. The True God diverted them. 32When the captains of the chariots realized he was not Ahab, they retreated.
33Meanwhile, an archer randomly shot an arrow that landed in a joint of Ahab's armor.

Since Ahab has not worn his royal robes on the battlefield, the archer never knows whom he has hit.

Ahab *(to his chariot driver)*: Turn around, and take me away from the battlefield. I am severely injured.

34The battle continued all day, but Ahab could only prop himself up in his chariot. So he watched from his chariot in front of the Arameans. At sunset, he died.

19 Then Jehoshaphat returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. 2*When he arrived,* Jehu (the son of Hanani the seer *whom Asa imprisoned for predicting wars against Judah*) greeted the king.

Jehu: Should you aid the wicked and align yourself with those who hate the Eternal? If you do, you will bring the wrath of the Eternal upon yourself. 3*In spite of helping God's enemies,* there is still some good in you—you did remove the Asherah idols from Judah and seek the True God.

4*Unlike his father Asa, Jehoshaphat did not punish the seer for his message.* Instead, the king *dedicated himself to* drawing his nation closer to the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors. He lived in Jerusalem, but he traveled among his people from Beersheba *in the South* to the hill country of Ephraim *in the North.*
5Jehoshaphat, *whose name means "the Lord judges,"* appointed judges throughout the land—in the fortified cities of Judah, one at a time.

Jehoshaphat *(to the judges)*: 6When you are rendering your judgments, consider them carefully. When you judge, you are representing the Eternal, who is with you when you render a verdict, not man *or any institution.* 7Be guided by your fear of Him. Act carefully because the Eternal One, our True God, is never associated with unrighteousness, partiality, or bribery.

8In Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat appointed judges from *three specific groups*: the Levites, the priests, and the tribal leaders of Israel. They enacted the Eternal's judgments and presided over the daily disputes among the citizens of Jerusalem.

Jehoshaphat *(commissioning his judges)*:
9You will faithfully and wholeheartedly perform these duties in the fear of the Eternal: 10instruct your brothers about

the various laws (so they and you will be innocent before the Eternal and all of you will avoid His anger) whenever any city dweller brings you *subjective cases where the right decisions are not apparent,* cases where you must choose who is justified in bloodshed or how to interpret the laws and commandments. 11Amariah, the chief priest, will be in charge of all that pertains to the Eternal; Zebadiah, the son of Ishmael and leader of the Judahites, *will be in charge* of all that pertains to governance; and the Levites will be your officers. If you act decisively, then the Eternal is a part of your good actions.

20 *After Jehoshaphat had solidified his throne by fortifying the nation and appointing regional judges,* the Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites* decided to attack him. 2Jehoshaphat heard about their plans.

Messengers: A huge army is *quickly* approaching *Jerusalem.* They are coming from Edom* beyond the *Dead* Sea, but they have already reached Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi *on the shore of the Dead Sea, about two days southwest of Jerusalem*).

3Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he sought the Eternal and required all Judah's citizens to fast. 4-5Everyone gathered together in Jerusalem from cities all over Judah to seek help from the Eternal. Jehoshaphat joined the assembly in the newly restored court at the Eternal's house and 6prayed before the people.

Jehoshaphat: O Eternal One, the True God of our ancestors, You are the True God in the heavens and the ruler over all the kingdoms and nations! You are so strong that none can survive when they oppose You. 7O our True God, You *demonstrated that power when You* exiled inhabitants of this land for Your people, Israel, and gave it to Your friend Abraham's children forever. *Please demonstrate it again, now, as we are attacked.* 8We have lived here and built a sacred house honoring Your reputation. *Now we will remind You of Solomon's words:* 9"If we encounter disaster *or disease* from wars, judgment, pestilence, or famine, then we will come to this house where You are and where your reputation is honored and beg for Your help. You will hear our cries and rescue us."

10Now *is the time to ask for Your help.* Men from Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir (*the region in Edom* which You stopped Israel from destroying when they left Egypt) 11are rewarding *our ancestors' mercy* by coming to steal our inheritance, which is Your land and which You gave to us. 12Our True God, won't You judge them? We can do nothing to stop this huge army from attacking us; we don't know what to do, so we are asking for Your help.

13All Judah (*men and* women, children, and infants) were waiting in front of the Eternal's *temple when Jehoshaphat asked this.* 14There, the Spirit of the Eternal descended on *a Levitical singer,* Jahaziel (son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite son of Asaph).

Jahaziel: 15Listen *to me,* all Judah, citizens of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat. The Eternal has responded to your *pleading*: "Do not fear or worry about this army. The battle is not yours to fight; it is the True God's. 16Tomorrow, they will travel through the ascent of Ziz. Meet them at the end of valley before the wilderness of Jeruel. *There, I will be watching.* 17Stand and watch, but do not fight the battle. There, you will watch the Eternal save you, Judah and Jerusalem."

Do not fear or worry. Tomorrow, face the army *and trust that* the Eternal is with you.

18Jehoshaphat bowed his head low, and all the assembly fell prostrate before the Eternal and worshiped Him *with reverence. They trusted the Lord completely.* 19Meanwhile, the Levite families of the Kohathites and Korahites stood up to praise the Eternal One, True God of Israel, with very loud voices.

20Early the next morning they went out to the wilderness of Tekoa. There Jehoshaphat's message *to Judah was not about courage in battle.*

Jehoshaphat: Listen to me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Trust in the Eternal One, your True God, *not in your own abilities,* and you will be supported.

* 20:1 The Hebrew text reads, "some of the Ammonites." The Greek reads, "some of the Meunites." * 20:2 Hebrew reads, "from Aram," which is north of Jerusalem.

Put your trust in His *words that you heard through the* prophets, and *we will* succeed.

21Having addressed his people,
Jehoshaphat asked those who sang to the
Eternal to lead the army and praise His
magnificence and holiness.

Chorus *(singing)*: Give thanks to the Eternal because His loyal love is forever!

22As they sang and praised, the Eternal was ready *to cause great confusion in battle* for the men from Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir *(in Edom)* who had come to attack Judah. They were utterly defeated, *turning on one another*. 23The Ammonites and Moabites attacked the men from Mount Seir, destroying them completely. Then, the Ammonites and Moabites turned on each other. 24When *all was quiet,* Judah looked out of the watchtower in the wilderness and saw a great army of corpses fallen *on the battlefield.* No one had escaped. 25Then Jehoshaphat and his people took various goods, clothing, and valuables *off the dead bodies and seized the abundant livestock.* There was so much that it took three days to recover it all. 26On the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Beracah, where they had blessed the Eternal *and where He had blessed them with a victory,* and named the place, "The Valley of Beracah," as it is still known today.

27Every man of Judah and citizen of Jerusalem followed Jehoshaphat back to Jerusalem, joyous because the Eternal defeated their enemies. 28They paraded into Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets and up to the Eternal's house.

29-30For the rest of his reign, Jehoshaphat's kingdom was peaceful because the Eternal had fought the Southern Kingdom's enemies, making all the surrounding kingdoms fear the True God.

► Although Jehoshaphat is fully committed to God, his reign is not without trials. He fights many battles against his neighbors and is successful because of his reliance on God. God uses these battles to give him greater power and more territory in the region.

35But Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, acted wickedly, making a *trade* alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel. 36They decided to build ships to go to Tarshish, constructing them in Ezion-geber. 37Eliezer (son of Dodavahu of Mareshah) interpreted Jehoshaphat's actions and predicted the future.

Eliezer: Because you made an alliance with Ahaziah, the Eternal will destroy your works.

Jehoshaphat found that the ships were broken and could not go to Tarshish *as they had intended.**

31*This is an account of* Jehoshaphat's reign over Judah. He was 35 years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem 25 years. His mother was Azubah (daughter of Shilhi). 32Jehoshaphat did as his father Asa had done, obeying the Eternal. 33In spite of his intentions, the high places remained and the people had not yet looked to the True God of their ancestors. 34The other actions of Jehoshaphat, from his birth to his death, are recorded in the annals of Jehu (son of Hanani) in the book of the kings of Israel.

21 When Jehoshaphat joined his ancestors in death and was laid to rest with his fathers in the city of David, *Jerusalem,* his son Jehoram succeeded him to the throne. 2Jehoshaphat, king of *the true* Israel,* had a number of sons in addition to Jehoram: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael, and Shephatiah. 3Jehoshaphat made each one a wealthy *governor* with silver, gold, and costly gifts over his own fortified cities in Judah and appointed Jehoram as the *future* king since he was the firstborn. 4Once Jehoram had taken over his father's kingdom and had established himself, he killed all his brothers and some rulers of Israel *so they could not challenge his right to rule.*

5Jehoram was 32 years old when he ascended to the throne, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6*But he was not a righteous king as his father was before him.* He married Ahab's daughter and *was tempted to* worship *her pagan gods* as the kings of the Northern Kingdom did. He did evil instead of following the Eternal; 7now despite this *the Eternal upheld His promise to David.* In His covenant with David, He

* 20:37 Verses 35-37 have been placed before verse 31 to retain sequence. * 21:2 Greek, Syriac, and Vulgate read, "king of Judah"

This is a particularly bloody time for Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Each king—or queen in the case of Athaliah in Judah—has to watch his or her back constantly for international threats from Aram north of Israel, Egypt south of Judah, or Ammon, Moab, and Edom on the other side of the Jordan River and Dead Sea. As well, there is political and familial intrigue and deception in the palace households of some of these kings. Being a monarch is a very dangerous position, and some do not fare well.

In just a few years, King Jehu from Israel carries out a bloody campaign against anyone associated with the House of Ahab in order to eradicate idolatry and rebellion from the land. But this move by Jehu only buys Israel another century before the Neo-Assyrians move in and exile the people.

promised David's family would guide Israel forever, so He would not destroy *Jehoram or* his government. *But God punished him with revolts by Edom and Libnah.*

8Instead of following Jehoram's rule, the people of Edom revolted and elected their own king. 9Jehoram responded *to their disobedience* by attacking the Edomites with all of his officers and chariots. But the Edomites surrounded Jehoram with his army of commanders and chariots. Then Jehoram went out in the dark of night and struck down the Edomite rebellion. 10Edom has *continually* rebelled against the rule of Judah until this day. Likewise, Libnah *(a Levitical city in southwestern Judah)* revolted against Jehoram's rule at the same time because Jehoram had abandoned the Eternal One, the True God of his ancestors, *in favor of worshiping foreign gods.* 11He even built high places in the mountains of Judah *to honor those gods,* leading the citizens of Jerusalem and Judah to prostitute themselves *spiritually to other gods.*

12*Having heard about Jehoram's actions,* Elijah the prophet sent a letter to the king.

Elijah's Letter: I received this message from the Eternal One, True God of your ancestor David: "You have not followed Me as Jehoshaphat, your father, and as Asa, *your grandfather,* did during their reigns 13but have instead followed the gods of the kings of Israel. You have caused *the people of* Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves *spiritually* as Ahab and his family did. You have murdered your brothers, your own family, who were better men than you. 14Because of your *evil* actions, the Eternal will severely punish your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions. 15And you will suffer with an intestinal disease until your bowels come out, *ending your life.*"

16*Fulfilling His promise,* the Eternal incited the Philistines and the Arabs who bordered the Cushites to attack Jehoram 17and Judah. They invaded the nation and plundered the palace, taking all the possessions including the king's children and wives. When they had finished, all that remained was Jehoahaz,* Jehoram's youngest son. 18Then the Eternal infected the king with a terminal intestinal illness. 19He died painfully two years later with the prolapse of his intestines. *After he died,* the people did not *honor his memory by* lighting a fire for him as they had done for his ancestors. 20He was 32 years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem for eight years. No one was sorry when he died. They buried him in the city of David, *Jerusalem,* but not in the tombs with the other kings *and his ancestors.*

22 Since the *Philistines and* Arabs had killed all of Jehoram's older sons *when they plundered the palace,* the citizens of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king. 2Ahaziah was 22 years old* when he became king, and he ruled for only one year in Jerusalem.

Ahaziah was the son of Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri *and daughter of Ahab.* 3-4Since his mother and her relatives were his counselors *during his reign,* Ahaziah *followed the gods worshiped by the Northern Kingdom, and* performed evil deeds before the Eternal as the house of Ahab did. *By following this bad advice,* Ahaziah ensured his destruction. 5-6He *repeated the mistake of Jehoshaphat and*

* 21:17 Also called "Ahaziah" (22:1) * 22:2 The Hebrew text says Ahaziah was 42 years old. Most follow the Greek text and the parallel reference in 2 Kings 8:26.

followed Jehoram, the son of Ahab king of the Northern Kingdom, to fight Hazael, king of Aram, at Ramoth-gilead. When the Arameans wounded Joram, he returned to Jezreel to heal his wounds and Ahaziah went to visit him there.

7Ahaziah's destruction by the True God was decided when he visited Joram because his visit coincided with the attack Jehu, the son of Nimshi, executed *on Jezreel*. (The Eternal had incited Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab.) 8During his assault, Jehu found Ahaziah's sons and nephews who served him and killed them. 9Then Jehu looked for Ahaziah and found him cowering in Samaria. Jehu's forces brought Ahaziah to Jehu, killed him, and buried him.* *He was given a burial only* because of his descent from Jehoshaphat, who looked for the Eternal and followed His commands. *Because of Jehu's slaughter,* no one from Ahaziah's *immediate* family lived to inherit the kingdom.

10When Athaliah realized that her son Ahaziah had died *along with all of the royal line,* she decided to kill *her opponents*—the remaining royal offspring of the Southern Kingdom.

She decides to fill the power vacuum herself and become queen as her husband, Jehoram, did years before.

11But *little did she know that* Jehoshabeath, King *Jehoram's* daughter, had stolen Ahaziah's son Joash from among the king's sons when Jehu's soldiers were killing them. She hid Joash and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and the sister of *King* Ahaziah, *saved the Davidic line by* protecting him from Athaliah's murderous rage. Since she was the wife of Jehoiada the priest, Jehoshabeath 12was able to hide Joash and his nurse in the temple of the True God during the six years of Athaliah's reign.

23 During the seventh year *of Athaliah's reign,* Jehoiada *the priest* prepared to revolt and conferred with the commanders over divisions of warriors: Azariah (son of Jeroham), Ishmael (son of Johanan), Azariah (son of Obed), Maaseiah (son of Adaiah), and Elishaphat (son of Zichri). These men made an agreement with Jehoiada, *promising to fight against Athaliah's illegitimate government.* 2They traveled through Judah *telling the people about the coming revolt.* Then all the Levites and all the Israelite tribal leaders came to Jerusalem 3to make another contract with the *rightful* king, *Joash,* in the house of God.

Jehoiada: Remember when the Eternal promised David *that his sons would be king? Athaliah's reign has disrupted that promise.* Look now on the son of the king! 4This is what you will do: One-third of you priests and Levites who work on the Sabbath will guard the gates *to the temple,* 5-7one-third will guard Joash's house, and one-third will guard the gate of the foundation. Those posted at the king's house will surround him with drawn weapons. If anyone enters Joash's house, kill him. If Joash leaves his house, kill anyone who approaches him.

All the people will wait in the courts of the Eternal's house and guard His temple. Kill anyone who comes into the Eternal's house (except, *of course,* for the priests and ministering Levites who are consecrated).

8The Levites and the people did as they were told by Jehoiada the priest. Everyone worked that day, even those who were typically off duty on Sabbath, because Jehoiada reenlisted them all *in the rebellion.* 9He armed the divisions under the commanders of hundreds with King David's spears and large and small shields which were offerings to the house of the True God, 10and he stationed all the people, who were armed with their own weapons, to surround both the temple and Joash. 11*Once everyone was in place,* they publicly made Joash king: the people crowned him and gave him *a copy of* the covenant laws; Jehoiada and his sons anointed him and said, "Long live the king!"

12Hearing the commotion of her people running and praising a *different* monarch, Athaliah entered the Eternal's house where all the people were stationed. 13There she saw King Joash standing by his pillar at the entrance, flanked by the commanders and the trumpeters. All the people of the land rejoiced and blew trumpets as the singers led the people in *songs of* praise with their musical instruments.

Athaliah *(tearing her clothes in sorrow)***:** Treason! Treason!

* 22:9 A different place of death and burial for Ahaziah is given in 2 Kings 9:27-28.

Jehoiada *(to the commanders of divisions in response to Athaliah and her violation of the temple)***:** 14Take her and her followers out between the ranks, and kill them with the sword. Do not kill her in the Eternal's house.

15So they took her to the entrance of the Horse Gate at the palace and executed her.

16Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself, all the people, and the king, promising to follow the Eternal. 17*Because of this covenant,* all the people demolished Baal's temple, destroyed the altars and icons there, and killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars. 18Then Jehoiada restored the organization of the temple as David had intended: He appointed the Levitical priests* to the offices of the Eternal's temple, where they gave the burnt offerings to the Eternal (as Moses' law required) with rejoicing and singing. 19He preserved *the sanctity of* the Eternal's temple by stationing gatekeepers there so ritually unclean people could not enter.

Having restored the temple, Jehoiada properly restores the Davidic monarchy.

20He and the commanders of the divisions, the nobles, the rulers of the people, and all the people of the land took the king from the Eternal's temple through the upper gate to the palace. There, they put Joash on his royal throne. 21Since *their rightful king was restored and* Athaliah had been killed, all the people of the land rejoiced and were at peace.

► It is significant that the chronicler does not end Athaliah's story with a summary of her reign or the location of her burial as all other kings' stories end. She is a usurper who is not destined to rule Israel because she is not part of the Davidic line. But her reign does not nullify God's promise to David. In spite of her actions, one of David's descendants survives her slaughter of the royal house to ascend to the throne. This story is one of hope for the Jews during the Babylonian exile, reminding them that God's promises always supersede humans' actions, good or evil.

24 Joash, whose mother Zibiah was from Beersheba, was *only* seven years old when he became king. He reigned 40 years in Jerusalem 2and followed the ways of the Eternal *only* as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive. 3Jehoiada *was like a father to Joash,* finding two wives for the king, who would father sons and daughters *and reconstitute the Davidic line.*

4After he had established his family, Joash decided to restore the Eternal's temple 7because the wicked Athaliah's subjects had broken into the True God's temple and used its dedicated contents to worship the Baals.*

Joash *(to the priests and Levites)***:** 5Collect money from all the Israelites living in the cities of Judah so you can repair your True God's temple each year. Begin this work quickly.

The Levites did not act quickly *as their king had demanded,* 6so Joash rebuked Jehoiada the chief priest *for not properly leading them.*

Joash *(to Jehoiada)***:** Why have you not *obeyed my request and* required the Levites to collect money from Judah and Jerusalem? Moses, the Eternal's servant, decided that all Israel should pay this money *each year* to provide for the tent of the covenant law.

Since the priests and Levites do not collect the money as Joash commands them, he finds another way to collect the money.

8He had a chest placed outside the Eternal's temple near the gate 9and told everyone in Judah and Jerusalem to bring the money that Moses, the servant of the True God, commanded Israel to bring to the Eternal while they were in the desert. 10All the officers and all the people were excited *to help restore the temple, as they had been when it was initially constructed,* so they all

* 23:18 Greek and other sources read, "the priests and the Levites." * 24:7 This verse is placed before verse 5 to aid in the continuity of the passage.

put their money in the chest until it was full. 11*Each day* the Levites returned the chest to the king's officer, where the king's scribe and the chief priest's officer would empty the chest and return it to the temple gate. They emptied the chest every day because the people gave so much money.

12-13Joash and Jehoiada gave the money to the Eternal's temple servants, who contracted masons, carpenters, and iron and bronze workers. These workers worked to repair, restore, and strengthen the True God's temple to *King David's original* specifications. 14*So much money had been collected that* the workers were able to return the extra to Joash and Jehoiada and make gold and silver vessels and utensils for services and burnt offerings in the Eternal's temple. *Having completed the renovations,* everyone *was faithful to God and* gave burnt offerings in the Eternal's temple for the rest of Jehoiada's life.

15Jehoiada was rewarded *for his faithfulness to God* with a long life. He was 130 years old when he died, 16and the people buried him in the city of David, *Jerusalem,* among the kings, recognizing how he had helped Israel, his own extended family, and the True God.

► Jehoiada not only helps to overturn the usurping Athaliah and restore the Davidic monarchy, but he also ensures that Joash and Israel follow God. The people recognize how Jehoiada has helped their nation, so they honor him in his burial by placing him among the dead kings. Traditionally, corpses were placed among their own ancestors, with whom they would spend eternity. By burying Jehoiada with the kings, the people indicate that he deserves to be remembered among the greatest of all men.

17-18Then the officials of Judah (who had abandoned the house of the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors, to follow Asherim and other idols) came and bowed down to the king, convincing him to listen to their advice. *Joash,* in the absence of Jehoiada, *then led the nation to abandon God.* God was infuriated with Judah and Jerusalem. 19In spite of His anger, the Eternal sent prophets to tell the people how they had sinned and that they should repent. But they did not listen.

20Then the Spirit of the True God possessed Zechariah, Jehoiada the priest's son, giving him a message for the people.

Zechariah *(standing above the people)***:** The True God has a message for you: "Why do you disobey the Eternal's commands? You will not have prosperous lives *as long as you continue this.* Since you have abandoned Him, He has abandoned you."

21The new advisors *were so infuriated by his message that they* conspired against him. Joash then commanded that they stone Zechariah inside the Eternal's temple courts. 22By murdering Zechariah, Joash ignored how kind Jehoiada had been to him.

► Joash has been saved by Jehoiada's wife from certain death at the hands of Athaliah. He also has been taught by her to follow God and obey His law. Zechariah's death inside the temple is ironic since Joash's own chief priest and Zechariah's father, Jehoiada, refused to kill Athaliah in the temple because of God's law; and here Joash is violating the law, for stoning should occur outside of town and most certainly outside of the temple. This is also strange in that stoning is an execution method reserved primarily for treason and not for eliminating a priest who speaks out against sin.

Zechariah *(dying)***:** Eternal One, see *how Joash has abandoned You* and seek judgment *on him*!

God hears Zechariah's last words and punishes Joash.

23At the end of the year, the Aramean army attacked Judah and Jerusalem. It obliterated each of the officials *who had advised Joash badly* and sent the spoils to the king of Damascus, *the capital city of Aram.* 24Although the Aramean army was vastly outnumbered *by the Judaean army,*

the Eternal exercised His judgment on Joash by giving the Arameans an impressive victory over the people who had abandoned the Eternal One, True God of their ancestors.

25-26When the Arameans left Judah, Joash was severely wounded. *Now that the king's supporters were dead,* his own servants (Zabad, son of Shimeath the Ammonitess, and Jehozabad, son of Shimrith the Moabitess) conspired to kill him. They remembered how he had killed *Zechariah,* Jehoiada's son. The servants murdered Joash while he rested on his bed and buried him in the city of David, *Jerusalem.* However, they did not entomb him with the kings, *his own ancestors. The good things that he did while Jehoiada advised him were forgotten.*

27More about Joash's reign (including the names of his children, the oracles against him, and the details of the temple's restoration) is written in the commentary of the book of the kings.

Amaziah, his son, succeeded Joash as king.

25 Amaziah, son of *Joash and* Jehoaddan of Jerusalem, was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem.

Like his father Joash, Amaziah's reign begins well but ends in intrigue and assassination.

2He followed the Eternal, but was not completely devoted to Him *for his entire life.*

3As soon as he took power in the *Southern* Kingdom, Amaziah *solidified his throne by* executing *his opponents,* the servants who had assassinated his father Joash. 4But Amaziah followed Moses' law, which the Eternal had commanded, and had mercy on their children: "Everyone is responsible for his own sins. *Therefore,* parents will not be killed for their children's actions and children will not be killed for their parents' actions."*

5Then Amaziah *prepared for battle by* gathering the Judahites and appointing commanders from each family in Judah and Benjamin. He took a census of the men 20 years old and older, and there were 300,000 ready to fight with spears and shields. 6*To enlarge his army,* Amaziah also hired 100,000 heroic men from the Northern Kingdom for 7,500 pounds of silver. 7But Amaziah was warned *against hiring mercenaries from the Northern Kingdom* by a man who followed after the True God.

Prophet of God: O king, do not let the army of Israel fight with you. The Eternal does not support the Northern Kingdom, these Ephraimites. 8But if you do *take the mercenaries with you,* prepare yourself well for the battle. The True God will support your enemy rather than supporting you because God has the power to both build *you* up and tear *you* down.

Amaziah: 9But I have already paid 7,500 pounds of silver to the Northern Kingdom's troops. What should be done?

Follower of God: *Don't worry about the money.* It is nothing compared to what the Eternal has to give you.

10So Amaziah dismissed the Northern Kingdom's mercenaries *as the man had advised him to do,* and they returned home. The mercenaries were furious at Judah *because they would lose their portion of the spoils of victory,* 13so they raided the cities in Judah (from Samaria *in the north* to Beth-horon *in the south*), killing 3,000 and taking spoils.*

11But Amaziah *was rewarded for obeying God's message.* He strengthened himself and led only Judahite soldiers into battle at the valley of Salt. There they killed 10,000 *Edomites* from *the city of* Seir and 12captured 10,000. The Judahites then threw the prisoners from the top of a cliff, crushing them *on the rocks below.*

14*Unfortunately,* Amaziah *did not remain faithful to God and His messages.* When he returned from fighting the Edomites, he brought the gods of Seir *back to Jerusalem* where they worshiped them—bowing down and burning incense—*as he had worshiped God.*

15Furious with Amaziah, the Eternal sent a message to the king through a prophet.

Prophet: *What are you thinking?* Why would you choose to follow gods that cannot save their own people from your armies *after I gave you victory*?

Amaziah *(interrupting)*: 16When did you become my advisor? Stop prophesying, or your life will be taken from you.

* 25:4 Deuteronomy 24:16 * 25:13 Verse 13 has been moved before verse 11 for the continuity of the passage.

Prophet: *I may not be one of your court advisors,* but you should still listen to my counsel. If you do not, the True God will destroy you because you *have worshiped other gods and* ignored my warning.

17Then Amaziah, king of Judah, listened to *his royal counselors'* advice *and decided to address the Northern Kingdom's invasion of Judah.* He sent a message to Joash (son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu), the king of the Northern Kingdom asking for a face-to-face meeting.

Joash's Response: 18The thornbush in Lebanon sent a message to the cedar in Lebanon: "Give your daughter to my son in marriage." But a wild beast in Lebanon trampled the thornbush.

19You defeated the Edomites, and now you have become haughty. *For your own good,* stay where you belong. Do not provoke me to destroy both you and your people, Judah.

20But Amaziah would not listen *to Joash's warning* because the True God *had allowed him to become stubborn. God* intended to give Joash a victory over the Southern Kingdom because they worshiped the Edomite gods. 21Then Joash, king of the Northern Kingdom, traveled *south* to the *interior of the* Southern Kingdom to face Amaziah, king of the Southern Kingdom, at Beth-shemesh. 22*As predicted,* the Northern Kingdom defeated the Southern Kingdom, and the Judahites fled to their homes. 23Joash captured Amaziah, son of Joash who was the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shemesh and took him to Jerusalem where the Northern forces tore down 600 feet of the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate. 24Joash took all the gold, silver, and utensils from the True God's temple from the service of Obed-edom. He then returned to Samaria with the *temple treasures,* palace treasures, and hostages.

25Amaziah (son of Joash, king of the Southern Kingdom) lived 15 years longer than Joash (son of Jehoahaz, king of the Northern Kingdom). 26All the events of Amaziah's reign are included in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel, from his ascension to *his assassination.* 27From the moment Amaziah stopped following the Eternal *to follow the Edomite gods,* the people of Jerusalem plotted against him. He fled to Lachish, where the people followed and killed him. 28They brought his body back to Judah on horseback, where they buried him. *But Amaziah was not honored in his burial. He was not laid with the former kings, but* with just his ancestors in the *capital* city of Judah, *Jerusalem.*

26 1-3After Amaziah's death, the Judahites chose Uzziah, who was 16 years old, as their next king. During his reign he recaptured *the port city of* Eloth for Judah, *bringing economic growth to the nation.* Uzziah, son of Amaziah and Jechiliah of Jerusalem, reigned 52 years in Jerusalem. 4He acted just as his father Amaziah *and his grandfather Joash* had—following the Eternal *initially, then turning away from Him.*

5While Zechariah the seer was alive, Uzziah followed the True God, listening to Zechariah's messages from God *as Joash had listened to Jehoiada's counsel,* and the True God blessed the king *in battles, in building, and in wealth* as long as he was obedient. 6He attacked the Philistines and tore down the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. *To further weaken their nation,* Uzziah built cities around Ashdod, *the Philistine capital city,* and elsewhere among the Philistines. 7Just as the True God helped him against the Philistines, He gave Uzziah victory over the Arabians in Gur-baal and the Meunites. 8Then the Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his *political* strength was infamous all the way to Egypt's border.

9In Jerusalem, Uzziah commissioned the building of towers at the corner gate, the valley gate, and in the wall's corners to further fortify the city. 10In the wilderness, he commissioned more towers and the digging of cisterns for his many livestock in the lowland and plain. And because he so cared for the land, he employed plowmen in the fertile fields and vinedressers in the hills *to make the ground productive.*

11Uzziah maintained a *standing* army ready for battle with numbered divisions and *weapon* specialties. Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the official (supervised by Hananiah, a royal officer) maintained the records of the divisions. 12*Each division was led by* a tribal leader who was also a heroic soldier. The 2,600 heroic soldiers 13controlled a talented army of 307,500 soldiers who helped the king battle his enemies. 14Uzziah provided shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows, and sling stones to the army. 15In Jerusalem, he

positioned catapults to shoot arrows and great stones, a new invention by ingenious men, in the towers and on the corners *of the city wall.* Because of his impressive army, many of the surrounding nations knew about Uzziah and how *God* helped him win battles.

16But when Uzziah had built his army *and he no longer thought he needed God's help in battles,* he became prideful and corrupt. He was unfaithful to the Eternal One, his True God, entering the Eternal's temple to burn incense on the altar.

As the king, not even he has the right to burn incense on the incense altar. Only priests could lawfully do this.

17Azariah the priest and 80 other brave priests of the Eternal followed the king *into the temple* to stop him.

Priests: 18Uzziah, you cannot burn incense to the Eternal. Only the priests, the sons of Aaron, have been consecrated for that action. Leave the temple now. You have sinned and will no longer be blessed by the Eternal One, the True God.

19Uzziah was furious at the priests *for forbidding him, the king, to do something.* As he stood next to the incense altar in the Eternal's temple holding the censer, the king's forehead erupted with leprosy, *an inflamed skin disease.* 20Azariah the chief priest and all the priests saw how the Eternal struck the king with leprosy on his forehead. As Uzziah rushed for the door, the priests hurried him out *because the disease made him ritually unclean and unable to approach the temple.* 21For the rest of his life, King Uzziah was cursed with leprosy, so he was banned from the Eternal's temple and lived away from society. *During his absence,* his son Jotham was in charge and judged the Southern Kingdom.

► Uzziah's sin is a desecration of the temple. He is not consecrated, so he cannot burn incense there. By doing so, he makes the temple ritually impure. God responds with an appropriate punishment: Uzziah makes God's house impure, so He makes Uzziah's body impure.

22The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, wrote about the rest of Uzziah's actions. 23When Uzziah died, the people *with his family* buried him near his ancestors in a field that belonged to them. *He was not buried in the same tomb as his ancestors* because his skin disease made him unclean. Then his son, Jotham, succeeded him as king.

► Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah's reigns are all similar. Each begins by following God and being rewarded with a powerful reign. Then each sins and is punished with national struggles and an unusual death. None are honored with burials among the former kings. These three men exemplify a common theme in Chronicles: you reap what you sow. When they are faithful to God, He is faithful to them. When they abandon God, He destroys them.

27 Jotham, son of *Uzziah and* Jerushah (daughter of Zadok), was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. 2He followed the Eternal as his father had *at the beginning of his reign,* but he did not enter the Eternal's temple. In spite of his devotion, the people continued in corrupt lifestyles. 3He built the upper gate of the Eternal's temple and the large wall of Ophel *(the southern hill on the temple mount).* 4He built cities in Judah's hill country and fortresses and towers in the forests. 5Jotham conquered the Ammonite king, and the Ammonites gave him 7,500 pounds of silver, 62,000 bushels of wheat, and 10,000 of barley for 3 years. 6Jotham received all this *wealth and* power *for himself and for the country* because he followed the Eternal One, his True God.

7All the events of Jotham's reign, including his battles and other actions, are in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 8He was 25 when he became king and ruled for 16 years.* 9Jotham died, and his bones were *gathered and* buried along

* 27:8 This verse is omitted from several ancient manuscripts.

with his ancestors in the city of David, *Jerusalem*. His son, Ahaz, succeeded him as king.

► Jotham is a welcomed relief for Israel. Finally they have a king who is faithful to God and who credits Him with the Southern Kingdom's prosperity. Unfortunately his righteousness does not make an impression on his son. Ahaz will prove to be one of the worst kings in the history of the Southern Kingdom. Not only does he ignore God's laws, but he also engages in so many pagan practices that he is like the kings of the Northern Kingdom whom God has abandoned.

28 Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he reigned 16 years in Jerusalem. But he did not follow the Eternal as his ancestor David had done. [2-4]Instead, he acted like the kings of the Northern Kingdom *and worshiped their gods.* He *polluted all the land with his idolatry,* cast idols of the Baals, burned incense in the valley of Ben-hinnom *(Jerusalem's refuse pit),* and sacrificed his own children. Such evil things *had not happened* throughout the land, on high places, hills, and under trees, since the Eternal conquered the previous inhabitants and gave the land to the Israelites. [5]The Eternal One, his True God, *was furious with Ahaz for his apostasy, so He* empowered the king of Aram to defeat the Southern Kingdom and take *Judean* prisoners of war to Damascus, *the capital of Aram. But this wasn't enough to satisfy God's anger.* He also empowered the Northern Kingdom to kill many of the Judeans: [6]Pekah (son of Remaliah) in one day killed 120,000 valiant warriors who had abandoned the Eternal One, the True God of their ancestors; [7]and Zichri (a Ephraimite warrior) killed Maaseiah (Ahaz's son), Azrikam (leader of the palace), and Elkanah (vice-regent). [8]Then the Northern soldiers took 200,000 Judean women and children and their possessions to Samaria, *the capital of the Northern Kingdom.*

[9]*As the Northern army approached Samaria,* Oded, a prophet of the Eternal ran out to meet them.

Oded: *Do not think that you have won this victory yourselves.* In fact, the Eternal One, the True God of your ancestors, was furious with Judah and used you to punish them. But now He is furious with you because your rage *was excessive and* has reached the heavens, [10]and you intend to make your captives from Judah and Jerusalem into your slaves. You are already guilty of sins against the Eternal, your True God, *so why do you want to anger Him even more?* [11]Instead of enslaving the Southern captives, return them to their nation and stop infuriating the Eternal.

[12]Then some Ephraimite chiefs—Azariah (son of Johanan), Berechiah (son of Meshillemoth), Jehizkiah (son of Shallum), and Amasa (son of Hadlai)—stopped the soldiers.

Ephraimite Chiefs: [13]*Stop!* Do not bring those prisoners back to our city, for we are all convicted of our guilt. If you do, the Eternal will be more furious with us due to our sins and guilt. There is now a fierce wrath against Israel.

[14]The soldiers obeyed. They left the prisoners and the spoils for the chiefs and the assembly *to decide what to do.* [15]The chiefs dressed the naked prisoners with clothes and shoes from the spoils, fed them, anointed their heads with oil *to refresh them after the journey,* and returned them to *the southern city of* Jericho (the city of palm trees) with *an envoy of Northerners and* the feeble riding on donkeys. Then the Northerners returned to Samaria.

► Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remain faithful in the Southern Kingdom while the other tribes forming the Northern Kingdom largely depart from the Eternal. But this exchange between Oded and the Ephraimites shows another side of the Northerners. Oded's request that they free the Judahites is based on their common heritage. And the chiefs' obedience to his request shows that they still remember God's power. Although the Northern Kingdom has strayed far from the Eternal One, they still remember their ancestral brothers in the South.

16-19The Eternal humbled Judah with continued attacks against them because of Ahaz's wicked rebellion against Him, which had infected the entire nation. The Edomites attacked Judah and took prisoners; the Philistines invaded the lowland and the Negev, capturing and settling in the cities and surrounding villages of Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, and Gimzo.

King Ahaz asked the Assyrians for help, 20but Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, *recognized an opportunity to expand his empire and* attacked Judah instead of helping Ahaz. 21*To save his kingdom from complete destruction by the Assyrian army,* Ahaz gave a tribute from his own palace and from the Eternal's temple to Tilgath-pilneser. But the tribute did not work.

The Assyrians still attack Judah, and Ahaz's tributes begin generations of Judean subjugation to the Assyrian Empire.

22During these disasters, King Ahaz *did not return* to the Eternal. Instead he persisted in his unfaithfulness 23by sacrificing to the *Aramean* gods of Damascus, *the gods of the first people* who had defeated him.

Ahaz: *Obviously* the gods of the kings of Aram *are more powerful than the Judean God.* Since they helped the Aramean army, surely they will help me if I sacrifice to them.

But these gods were the downfall of him and all Israel. 24He destroyed the vessels from the True God's temple and stopped all worship in the Eternal's temple. Then he built his own altars throughout Jerusalem 25and high places throughout Judah to burn incense to false gods. These actions infuriated the Eternal One, the True God of his ancestors.

26Ahaz's remaining actions, from his birth until his death, are contained in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27Ahaz slept with his fathers in Jerusalem, but not in the tombs of the kings of Israel. His son, Hezekiah, succeeded him as king.

29 Hezekiah, son of Abijah (Zechariah's daughter), became king when he was 25 years old and reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. 2He followed the Eternal, just as his ancestor David had.

He "strengthens" the relationship between God and the Southern Kingdom, just as his name implies.

3Hezekiah's first action when he began to reign was reopening and repairing the Eternal's temple. 4He called all the priests and the Levites into the square east *of the temple*.

Hezekiah *(to the Levites)***:** 5Listen to me. *First,* you must sanctify yourselves so that you can sanctify the temple of the Eternal One, the True God of your ancestors, and remove the immoral and ungodly items that are there.

6The previous generations forgot *the laws of* the Eternal One, our True God, and were unfaithful—abandoning the temple, ignoring Him with their backs turned, 7closing the doors of the front of the temple *so no one else could worship there,* extinguishing the *temple* lamps, and stopping the incense and burnt offerings to the True God of Israel. 8For these offenses, the Eternal has punished us, Judah and Jerusalem, as you have witnessed, with deaths, disasters, and derision. 9Our fathers were slaughtered *in the wars with the Arameans and the Northern Kingdom,* and our wives and children are still prisoners of those wars.

10But I want to renew a covenant with the Eternal, God of Israel, *and follow His ways again* so that he will not continue to be angry with us. 11Now *that we have made this commitment,* we must not abandon the Eternal, who expects us to be in His presence, serve Him, minister on His behalf *to others,* and burn incense *continually*.

12Then *seven* Levite families sent forward representatives. *From the main Levite lines:* Mahath (son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah) from the Kohathites, Kish (son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel) from the sons of Merari, Joah (son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah) from the Gershonites, 13and Shimri and Jeiel from the sons of Elizaphan. *From the Levitical singers:* Zechariah and Mattaniah from the sons of Asaph, 14Jehiel and Shimei from the sons of Heman, and Shemaiah and Uzziel from the sons of Jeduthun.

15The representatives gathered all of their kinsmen, sanctified themselves, then

sanctified the Eternal's temple as the king commanded and as the Eternal desired.
16The priests cleansed the most holy place in the Eternal's temple, taking every unclean thing outside into the temple courts, from where the Levites then took them to the Kidron Valley *to be discarded.*
17This cleansing began on the first day of the first month and ended on the eighth day of the month, when they were finally able to enter the Eternal's *temple* porch. Then they blessed the Eternal's temple, which took eight *more* days and ended on the sixteenth day of the first month.
18Then they told King Hezekiah *all they had done.*

Levites: We have cleansed all of the Eternal's temple: the altar of burnt offering, the table of unleavened bread, and all of the utensils. 19Also we have recovered and sanctified all the utensils which King Ahaz disposed of during his despicable reign. Now they, too, are at the Eternal's altar.

20King Hezekiah woke up early and assembled the city leaders at the Eternal's house.
21The men brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats as sin offerings *representing the atonement* of the *entire* kingdom, the sanctuary, and Judah. Hezekiah then ordered the priests, the sons of Aaron, to sacrifice *for the Southern Kingdom's sins* on the Eternal's altar,
22-24slaughtering the bulls, rams, and lambs and sprinkling their blood on the altar. Then they sacrificed for the atonement of all of Israel, *the North and the South,* as Hezekiah requested by offering the male goats. The priests brought the goats before the king and the leaders, laid their hands on the animals, slaughtered them, and covered the altar with their blood.

Having cleansed the nation and the temple, Hezekiah prepares to celebrate.

25-26He assigned the priests to play their trumpets and the Levites to play King David's cymbals, harps, and lyres in the Eternal's temple as the Eternal had commanded them to do through the words of David, Gad (David's seer), and Nathan the prophet. 27Then Hezekiah commanded the burnt offering be offered on the altar. During the offering, the musicians played their trumpets and David's instruments, performing the song to the Eternal. 28The people worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpets sounded until the burnt offering was consumed. 29Then the king and all the people there bowed down and worshiped.

Hezekiah and the Leaders *(to the Levites)***:** 30Sing the songs of David *the king* and Asaph the seer, praising the Eternal One *with their lyrics.*

So the Levites praised Him joyously and bowed before Him in worship.

Hezekiah *(to the people)***:** 31Now that you have cleansed yourselves *with the blood offerings,* show your gratitude by bringing your sacrifices and thanksgiving and burnt offerings to the Eternal's temple.

The people did as Hezekiah suggested,
32-33offering 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep, and some also brought burnt offerings to the Eternal: 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs. 34Because of the large number of offerings, the priests could not prepare all of the burnt offerings and the Levites had to help them skin the animals until all had been sacrificed and the priests had all sanctified themselves (which the Levites *had already done since they* were more concerned with cleansing than the priests were). 35The quantity of the burnt offerings, the fat of the peace offerings, and the libations for the burnt offerings were enough to restore the Eternal's temple and its practices, 36so Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over how quickly the True God had changed the hearts of the people *and brought them back to following Him.*

30 1-5Since the people could not gather in Jerusalem immediately and since not enough priests were sanctified in time to celebrate the Passover holiday *during the first month of his reign,* Hezekiah, the leaders, and the people of Jerusalem decided to celebrate during the second month.

After restoring the temple, Hezekiah's first opportunity to celebrate Israel's renewed connection with God is Passover.

So he decided to send word to everyone—from Beersheba *in the far south* to Dan *in the far north*—to come to the Eternal's temple in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover honoring the Eternal One, True

God of Israel. *Until Hezekiah,* Judah had not celebrated as frequently as they should have.

6So messengers carried letters written by the king and his leaders throughout the kingdoms.

Hezekiah's Letter: People of Israel, return to *the ways of* the Eternal One, True God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to those of you who escaped the conquering kings of Assyria *to follow Him.* 7Don't be like your relatives who ignored the Eternal One, the True God of their fathers; they were destroyed and became a horrific spectacle *to other nations.* 8Do not be stubborn as they were. Obey Him, come to His sanctuary, and serve the Eternal One, your True God, so that He will not be angry with you. 9If you return to His ways, then your families who were exiled by the Assyrians will receive compassion and will return to their homes because the Eternal One, your True God, is gracious and compassionate and will return to you if you return to Him.

10-12When the messengers took this message throughout the Northern Kingdom, most of the Northerners ridiculed and ignored the message. But some people from *the Northern tribes of* Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun obeyed *Hezekiah and the leaders* and humbly traveled to Jerusalem just as all of the Southern Kingdom were given one mind and obeyed under the guidance of the True God via the command of the king and his officials.

13Vast numbers of people *responded to the king's message and* traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the second month. 14*As part of the festivities,* the people destroyed the *Canaanite* altars in Jerusalem and threw the incense altars into the Kidron Valley.

Having purged the city and cleansed the temple, the people are ready to celebrate.

15They slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth of the second month.

The priests and Levites humbled themselves, sanctified themselves, and brought burnt offerings to the Eternal's temple. 16There they attended to their assigned duties, as Moses the follower of the True God had described, sprinkling the blood *of the animals* which the Levites sacrificed. 17The Levites slaughtered the Passover lambs that were offered by the unclean people in the assembly *while those who had sanctified themselves slaughtered their own lambs* to the Eternal. 18Many of the people from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves as prescribed, but they were able to eat the Passover feast because Hezekiah prayed on their behalf.

Hezekiah: Eternal One, because You are good, cover their sins for 19everyone here who has neglected to ritually cleanse himself in order to properly enter the temple of the True God, the Eternal God of our ancestors. Everyone here wants to follow You.

20The Eternal One heard Hezekiah's prayer and healed them *from the threat of disease for not approaching God as instructed.* 21So the Israelites who had traveled to Jerusalem joyously celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days while the Levites and the priests played their instruments praising the Eternal daily. 22Hezekiah commended the Levites who had remained faithful and prudent toward the Eternal, and everyone celebrated for seven days: feasting, sacrificing peace offerings, and offering praise to the Eternal One, True God of their ancestors.

23Everyone decided to celebrate for another seven days, and they celebrated with joy. 24*By the time the festival ended,* Hezekiah, king of the Southern Kingdom, had donated 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep, and the leaders had donated 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep *for the people to sacrifice.* Also many priests had sanctified themselves. 25Everyone in Judah rejoiced: priests, Levites, Northerners who had traveled for the festival, and Northerners who had moved to Judah permanently. 26Nothing like this celebration had happened in Jerusalem since the reign of Solomon, son of David, so the people were joyous. 27Finally the Levitical priests concluded *the festival* by blessing the people. And He heard their prayer from His sacred dwelling in heaven.

► Such a celebration has not happened since Solomon dedicated the temple. This celebration is reminiscent of that time in several ways: all of

Israel gathers for the occasion, the king makes lavish donations for the celebration, and the festival lasts an extra week. Like Solomon, Hezekiah focuses on his nation's relationship with God by making the temple and proper worship central to Israelite life.

31 When the Passover was finished, all the Israelites who had attended the festival left *Jerusalem* for the cities of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. There they *continued Hezekiah's zeal* by destroying all cultic statues and carved images of Asherah. Having purged the nation of *idolatrous symbols like* the high places and altars, the Israelites returned to their own homes.

2 *Meanwhile* Hezekiah *continued structuring the temple activities.* He reorganized the divisions of priests and Levites according to their duties, such as making burnt or peace offerings, ministering, worshiping, or praising near the gates to the Eternal's camp.

► This camp is, of course, the temple, but the chronicler refers to the temple here as "the camp" to remind the people of their early connection to the Lord when their ancestors fled Egypt and followed Him in the desert.

3 *Just as his ancestors David and Solomon did before him,* Hezekiah donated a portion of his animals for the morning, evening, Sabbath, new moon, and other festival burnt offerings as the Eternal's law requires.* 4 He also commanded everyone in Jerusalem to offer a portion *of their possessions* to the priests and the Levites, so that each person could participate in the Eternal's law *by tithing.* 5 Once everyone had heard Hezekiah's request, the Israelites *in Jerusalem* gave more than was required from their best grain, wine, oil, honey, and produce, creating a surplus of offerings. 6 Those Israelites living in neighboring Judahite cities brought tithes *and offerings* of oxen, sheep, and other sacred gifts, which were cleansed and piled high for use by the Eternal One their God. 7 The offerings continued from the third month until the seventh month when the offerings were *so plentiful that they* lay in stacks *around the temple yard.* 8 Seeing the heaps *of tithes,* Hezekiah and his officers praised the Eternal and blessed the Israelites *who had answered their obligations.* 9 Hezekiah *wondered why all the gifts had not been offered to God, so he* asked the priests and Levites what would happen to the offerings. 10 Azariah, the chief priest and a Zadokite, answered.

Azariah: The Eternal One has favored His people, and they have shown *their thankfulness with* immense generosity. Since the Israelites began bringing their gifts to the Eternal's temple, there has been more than enough to eat and have plenty left over *to sacrifice.*

11 *Having no place to put the abundance,* Hezekiah commanded the priests and Levites to prepare storage rooms in the Eternal's temple. Once the rooms were ready, 12 the people continued offering their gifts, which were organized by Conaniah (the Levite) and his brother and assistant, Shimei. 13 They supervised Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah, who were all appointed overseers *of the tithes* by both King Hezekiah and chief priest Azariah.

14 Kore (son of Imnah the Levite and the eastern gatekeeper) distributed the freewill offerings to the True God—both the contributions to the Eternal and the most sacred gifts. 15-16 He supervised Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah in the cities of the priests, and they fairly distributed the goods to the Levites by their divisions and gave an equal amount to all men 30* years old and older, regardless of the size of their division or their lineage, who entered the Eternal's temple to perform the daily duties. 17 *Kore and his men* also distributed goods to the priests according to their lineage and to the Levites 20 years old and older according to their duties and divisions. 18 (Included in those genealogical records were the Levites' and priests' wives and children who also cleansed themselves regularly to be holy before Him.)

19 Even the descendants of Aaron who lived outside the cities in the surrounding

* 31:3 Numbers 28:1–29:40 * 31:15-16 Hebrew, "three"

pasturelands *were provided for.* In each city men were designated to distribute goods to every male priest and every Levite included in a Levitical genealogy.

20Hezekiah organized the religious practices throughout all of Judah, just as the Eternal, his True God, considered right. 21Every idea Hezekiah had concerning the improvement of the True God's temple was begun by his commandments *and carried out by his people.* And Hezekiah did all out of a dedicated heart and was rewarded *for his work.*

► Typically, kings' good and faithful works before God are rewarded with peace and prosperity. But not Hezekiah's. His devotion to God is tested with an invasion by the most powerful army in the world—the Assyrian Empire, led by Sennacherib. Sennacherib is not just another bully coming to take the temple treasures; he intends to conquer the world, and Israel is a bump on his road to Egypt. Sennacherib is ample temptation for Hezekiah to abandon God and surrender Jerusalem in return for his own life. But Hezekiah is more faithful than that.

32 After his acts of faithfulness *toward God, Hezekiah faced the greatest challenge of his reign.* Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities intending to conquer them for himself. 2Realizing that Sennacherib would eventually reach Jerusalem, Hezekiah *prepared the city for a long siege.* 3-4*First,* the king's officers and warriors with a large number of the people dammed the water sources, both springs and rivers, outside the city so that when the Assyrians came they could not readily use the water sources. 5*Second,* Hezekiah reinforced the city by repairing the existing wall structure *which surrounded the city,* building towers *for offensive position,* and erecting another wall far outside the main city wall. *Between the two walls,* he strengthened the city's millo.

► This millo is an immense earthen rampart that supports the structure of the main city wall and prevents the attackers from tunneling under it to attack the city from the inside, should they destroy the new outer wall.

Third he cast new weapons and shields in abundance. 6*Finally* he appointed the military leaders over the people and commissioned them at the city gate.

Hezekiah: 7*We can* be strong and courageous because of the One who fights with us. Don't be discouraged or fearful of the Assyrian king and the multitude of his people, for greatness is with us more than with them. 8Sennacherib will fight with an arm of flesh *and bone,* but we will fight with the Eternal God's help and His warfare.

The people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

9While Sennacherib, with his forces, was busy besieging Lachish *in a bloody battle,* the king of Assyria sent messengers to Jerusalem to persuade Hezekiah and all the Judahites *to surrender.*

Sennacherib's Message: 10Why are you remaining in Jerusalem *when you know I am about to come destroy your city*? What could you possibly be trusting that could save you from my army? 11Hezekiah must be entertaining you with lies, telling you how the Eternal God will save you from my conquest. If you listen to him, *we will certainly conquer you* while you die of hunger and thirst *inside those walls.*

► Sennacherib cleverly poses the question to those inside the walls of Jerusalem: Do you really think your God will defend a king who has made it harder for His people to worship Him?

Sennacherib's Message: 12Hezekiah removed His high places and altars from all over the country, forcing everyone to come to Jerusalem to worship. 13-14Haven't you heard how my empire's army has destroyed peoples and nations

for years? *We even conquered your own brothers in the Northern Kingdom.* Where were their gods when their nations needed defending? Where will your True God be when you are being tortured and murdered? 15Stop listening and being deceived by Hezekiah. He is only giving you false hope. No god has ever rescued his people from me or my *royal* fathers *before me,* so what makes you think your God will?

► Of course, Sennacherib completely misunderstands the nature of God and the reforms of Hezekiah. Hezekiah is only ingratiating himself to God when he consolidates the religion in Jerusalem. Sennacherib's taunting of God, saying that He could never save His people, leaves the Assyrian king wide open for a display of God's power.

16Sennacherib's servants continued blaspheming Hezekiah and the Eternal God. 17-19The Assyrian king himself wrote *additional* letters insulting the Eternal God of Israel, reminding the people that no god had ever saved his people from the Assyrians, and Israel's God couldn't either. *Furthermore, Sennacherib wrote* that God was a creation of humans, just as all the other *pagan* gods are. These letters were shouted in the common Judahite language *of Hebrew* as the people of Jerusalem stood on the city wall *listening.* The messengers thought their words would terrify and disturb the people into surrendering the city.

20But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, son of Amoz, *were not threatened by the Assyrians' words. They relied on their God and* called to heaven for help. 21The Eternal *responded quickly,* sending a heavenly messenger to slaughter every Assyrian soldier, commander, and officer. *Having been decidedly defeated by the very God he had taunted,* Sennacherib, in shame, journeyed back to Assyria. In *the security of* his own god's temple, Sennacherib was stabbed to death by his own children. 22In this *decisive* way, the Eternal saved Hezekiah and Jerusalem from Sennacherib's attempted conquest and any other nation's *imperial* intentions. So God provided for His people by those around *Judah.* 23Many people brought gifts to the Eternal and Hezekiah in Jerusalem, so that other nations recognized the king's authority.

24-26Hezekiah became proud and neglected to appreciate the gifts he received. So the Eternal was angry with him and all of Jerusalem and Judah. When Hezekiah became deathly ill, *he realized what he had done wrong.* He humbled himself and prayed to the Eternal, who answered the prayer and *healed him as* a sign. The people of Jerusalem *and Judah* also humbled themselves so that He was no longer angry with His people during Hezekiah's days. 27-29*In fact,* the True God blessed them with great wealth and honor. Hezekiah filled his treasuries with silver, gold, gems, spices, shields, and other valuables. He filled his storehouses with grain, wine, and oil. His stables contained all kinds of cattle and flocks. Then Hezekiah built more cities and acquired more flocks and herds. 30He also dammed the Gihon *River* and diverted its waters to the west side of Jerusalem. Hezekiah was successful at all his endeavors.

31*Later,* when the rulers of Babylon sent diplomats to learn about the miraculous sign *given at Hezekiah's healing when the sun moved backwards,** the True God left Hezekiah and tested the king's heart and devotion *to Him.*

► Near the end of Hezekiah's reign, Mesopotamia is in turmoil. The Assyrian Empire is weakening due to internal struggles and a string of impotent kings. But the Babylonians are slowly gaining power and testing the strength of their surrounding nations. Soon Babylonian leaders will come to Jerusalem again. But the next time will not be a friendly visit.

32The other actions and devotion of King Hezekiah, *from his birth to his death,* are recorded in the vision of Isaiah the prophet (son of Amoz) in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 33Hezekiah joined his ancestors in death and was laid in an upper tomb, *a place of honor,*

* 32:31 2 Kings 20:11

with the descendants of David. He was mourned by all Judah and all Jerusalem. Hezekiah's son Manasseh reigned in his place.

33 Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem, *the longest of any king in Israel.* 2He behaved wickedly before the Eternal, acting with the same abominations as the previous nations did before the Eternal gave their land to Israel. 3He *reversed the good deeds of Hezekiah,* rebuilding the high places and altars for the Baals and hoisting carved images of Asherah into the skies. He worshiped all the celestial bodies as *false* deities. 4-5He even desecrated the Eternal's temple, the place honoring His reputation which was to remain in Jerusalem forever, by building pagan altars in two courts there. 6In the valley of Benhinnom, Manasseh offered his children as burnt offerings *to those false gods* and used *every form of magic*: witchcraft, divination, sorcery, and necromancy. Manasseh's evil actions infuriated the Eternal, but the worst of his actions was 7his installation of an image of a statue in the True God's temple. *Many years before when His glory entered the temple for the first time,* God had spoken.

Eternal One *(to David and his son Solomon)***:** From among all the tribes I have chosen this house and this city, Jerusalem, from *all the cities* throughout Israel. This place will honor My reputation forever, 8so that I will never allow Israel to leave the land that I gave to your ancestors—as long as you and your descendants follow the laws and requirements I gave to you through Moses.*

9Manasseh corrupted Judah and the people of Jerusalem until they were more evil than the nations whom the Eternal had destroyed before the Israelites. 10*Their minds were so full of sin that* they didn't hear the Eternal asking them to return to His ways. 11So *to get their attention,* the Eternal used the Assyrian army *to express His anger.* The commanders captured Manasseh, forced a ring *through his nose,* bound his limbs with bronze chains, and carried him to Babylon *as if he were an animal.* 12From this position of complete powerlessness, Manasseh finally humbled himself and begged the forgiveness of the Eternal God of his fathers. 13He heard Manasseh's prayer and found it sincere; He returned Manasseh to the throne in Jerusalem. From that day forward, Manasseh never doubted that the Eternal was the True God.

► Unlike his evil predecessor Ahaz, Manasseh sees the error of his ways and returns to God. He even reinstates his father's reforms, further demonstrating his devotion to God. Manasseh's change of heart is rewarded with the longest reign of any Israelite king.

14Having returned *to proper faith, Manasseh continued his father's work.* He finished building the outer city wall from the west side of the Gihon *River* through the valley to the fish gate. Then he built high walls around the hill of Ophel* and stationed commanders at each fortified city in Judah. 15*Then Manasseh began to purge the nation of the sin he had brought there.* He tore out the idols from inside the Eternal's temple and the *foreign* altars from the temple mount and in Jerusalem, disposing of them outside the city. 16He then restored the Eternal's altar and gave grateful offerings of peace and praise there. Even though Manasseh ordered the Judahites to serve only the Eternal God of Israel *in the way that He commanded,* 17they continued to sacrifice to the Eternal God at other high places *instead of only in Jerusalem.*

18The other actions of Manasseh, *from his birth to his death,* including his prayer to his True God and the oracles of the seers, those proclaiming the reputation of the Eternal God of Israel, are recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 19His prayer, the True God's compassion, and a record of his sins, unfaithfulness, and the locations of the high places and cultic statues, before he humbled himself, are written in the chronicles of Hozai.*

20But when Manasseh joined his ancestors in death, the people buried him in his house, *not in the tombs with his*

* 33:7-8 2 Samuel 7:10 * 33:14 Possibly the temple mount * 33:19 Greek, "seers"

ancestors. His son Amon reigned in his place.

21Amon was 22 years old when he began his *short* two-year reign in Jerusalem. 22Like his father, Manasseh, Amon committed evil acts before the Eternal by serving and sacrificing to Manasseh's carved *cultic* images. 23But unlike his father, Amon did not *recognize his sins and* humble himself. In fact, his guilt was so prolific 24that his own servants murdered him in the palace.

Regardless of his popularity, ethics, or effectiveness, Amon is the king, and kings cannot be killed by commoners.

25So the people killed the conspirators *for their betrayal* of King Amon and anointed Amon's son Josiah as king instead.

► Amon's horrible reign makes his burial unimportant. No one knows if his bones are with his ancestors in the kings' tomb or outside the city walls with his father's discarded altars and icons. With a reign as destructive as his, it is appropriate that, like his bones, Amon is forgotten.

34 Josiah was 8 years old when he became king, and he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. 2He *was one of the few great kings of Israel, who* determinedly obeyed the Eternal and followed the example of his ancestor David. 3-4His zeal for the True God of David began in the 8th year of his reign while he was still a child *of 16,* but he did not begin his reforms of Judah and Jerusalem until he was 20 years old. Then he removed the high places, chopped down the sacrificial altars and incense altars of the Baals, and smashed the carved and molten images of Asherah and other gods. He then took the broken pieces of the icons, crushed them into powder, and sprinkled that powder on the graves of the people who had worshiped them. 5He even burned the bones of the priests *who had served those gods* on the cultic altars to completely purge Judah and Jerusalem. 6He then continued *his reforms* throughout the region, including Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali and their surrounding villages, 7where he *personally* smashed the carved images of Asherah and other gods into powder and chopped down the incense altars. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

8By the 18th year of his reign, Josiah had cleansed the nation and the temple. *Now it was time to repair them both by rebuilding the temple.* He sent Shaphan (son of Azaliah), Maaseiah (a city official), and Joah (son of Joahaz the recorder) to the temple of the True God, the Eternal, in order to organize repairs there. 9*First,* they took the money *from the temple coffers* and gave it to Hilkiah, the high priest, *so he could oversee the funds for the temple repairs.* The money had been collected at the temple by the Levite doorkeepers from those remaining in the Northern Kingdom, including Manasseh and Ephraim, and from all those in *the Southern Kingdom, including* Judah, Benjamin, and the city of Jerusalem. 10The money went to the Eternal's temple construction supervisors who then subcontracted the work to tradesmen and craftsmen. 11Those subcontractors purchased cut stone, timber, and couplings to rebuild the portions of the temple that had become ruined because of the neglect by the kings of Judah. 12The subcontractors were dependable workers, following the guidance of their supervisors: Jahath and Obadiah (Levites from the clan of Merari), Zechariah and Meshullam (*Levites* from the clan of Kohath), and the Levite musicians. 13These supervisors guided everyone on the job, *from the subcontractors and foremen* to the unskilled laborers, while performing their regular duties of record keepers, officials, and gatekeepers.

14As Josiah's *three* servants were bringing out the money from the Eternal's treasury, Hilkiah the priest made an unexpected discovery. *Deep inside the temple storerooms, long forgotten, was* the Eternal's law book, rules He had given *to the Israelites* through Moses.

Hilkiah *(to Shaphan the scribe)*: 15Look at what I have found. This is the Eternal's law book, which was buried inside the temple.

Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, 16who took it to the king and affirmed that they were proceeding *with the temple repairs.*

Shaphan *(to Josiah)*: All the repairs you planned for the temple are going well.

17Your *three* servants have taken the money from the Eternal's temple treasury and allocated it to the supervisors and subcontractors. *In the midst of temple restoration works,* 18Hilkiah the priest *made a discovery.* He found this book.

Shaphan then read these laws in the presence of the king.

This is the first time God's law has been in the palace in generations.

19When the king heard those words, *he realized how far his nation had drifted from God's path, and* he tore his clothes *in mourning.* 20He then summoned *five of his high-ranking officials*: Hilkiah, Ahikam (son of Shaphan), Abdon (son of Micah), Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant.

Josiah: 21You must intercede for me and for all those who remain in Israel and Judah. *Ask the Lord* about these laws which we have just found. The Eternal must be furious with us because our ancestors disobeyed His laws in this book. Soon He will unleash that anger and punish us all.

22The *four* men including Hilkiah went straight to Huldah the prophetess in Jerusalem's Second Quarter *because they knew He would speak through her*. Huldah was the wife of Shallum (son of Tokhath, son of Hasrah, the keeper of the wardrobe).

Huldah: 23-24These are the words of the Eternal God of Israel: "Tell *Josiah,* king of Judah, that I will indeed curse this nation and these people, just as the book says I will, 25because they have disobeyed Me and made sacrifices to other gods intending to infuriate Me by their actions. The pain and suffering you are about to experience will be *unbearable and* unending.

26"But to the king of Judah who sent you to Me, I, the Eternal God of Israel, *have noticed your reforms.* 27Because you recognized the True God's laws, which convicted your nation of their sins, and you humbled yourself and mourned *your nation's actions* by tearing your clothing, I have heard you *and will have mercy on you.* 28You will die and lie with your ancestors in peace *before I unleash My anger on this nation,* so your eyes will not witness the great disaster that I am about to bring forth on this place and those dwelling here."

The four servants gave the king this message, 29and he immediately summoned all the elders in Judah and Jerusalem. 30The entire nation (great and small, priest and layman, man and woman) went up to the Eternal's temple where Josiah read to them the laws from the book of the covenant that was found in the Eternal's temple. 31-32There, the king and the entire assembly in Jerusalem, people from Benjamin *and Judah,* stood and renewed *Israel's* covenant with the Eternal, promising to follow His ways, obey His laws with all diligence, and perform the duties of the covenant described in the book. Then all the people in Jerusalem respected their covenant with the True God, the God of their ancestors, 33and Josiah purged all the lands of Israel of false worship, making certain everyone in Israel served the Eternal God. The people remained faithful to the Eternal God of their ancestors throughout Josiah's reign.

► Passover is Josiah's first opportunity to demonstrate his renewed devotion to God. Therefore, each detail perfectly follows His mandates for the event, from the day the offerings are slaughtered to the Levites' specific duties. Although there is devotion in the land, apostasy will return once Josiah dies. The punishment of Israel is not averted, just delayed.

35 On the 14th day of the first month *after Josiah had rededicated the nation to God,* the king instituted the Eternal's Passover feast in Jerusalem by slaughtering the Passover animals. 2Josiah appointed the priests and encouraged them in performing their duties for the Eternal's temple. 3Then he commissioned the Levites, Israel's teachers and the Eternal's most holy servants, *in their various duties for the feast.*

Josiah: You no longer need to carry the holy covenant chest on your shoulders. Bring it to the temple which Solomon, son of King David, built and leave it there. From now on, *your primary*

responsibility is serving the Eternal God and His people, Israel. 4Cleanse yourselves, as King David and his son Solomon described for you in writing, according to your lineage and duties. 5Then stand with your kinsmen inside the temple, dividing yourselves by the tribes and your fathers' households under whom you serve. 6*Once you are organized,* slaughter the Passover animals, cleanse yourselves, and prepare your people to participate in the ceremonies as the Eternal's law by Moses describes.

7Josiah donated 30,000 lambs and young goats and 3,000 bulls from his own herds and flocks for the people to sacrifice as the Passover offerings. 8Then his officers in the True God's temple voluntarily gave offerings for the people, priests, and Levites: Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel donated 2,600 sheep and 300 bulls for the Passover; 9Conaniah, Shemaiah, Nethanel and his brothers, Hashabiah, Jeiel, and Jozabad, all officers of the Levites, donated 5,000 sheep and 500 bulls to the Levites for the Passover.

10Once the service was prepared, the priests were ready to perform their duties, and the Levites stood in their division as the king commanded. 11-13They offered the Passover animals. The Levites skinned all the animals, the priests sprinkled the animals' blood, and then they roasted the animals on the altar. Once the animals were roasted, they took down the carcasses and distributed them to each tribe for offerings to the Eternal, just as the book of Moses prescribed. The Levites then boiled the other holy offerings in containers and took them to the people. 14*Once the people of the nation were enjoying the feast,* the Levites prepared *meals* for themselves and for the priests (the Aaronites, who were busy with the burnt and fat offerings until late in the evening), 15the singers (the sons of Asaph), Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun (the king's seer), and the gatekeepers so that none of them needed to leave their prescribed duties to enjoy the feast.

16On that day, all the Eternal's servants completed preparations for the Passover, giving burnt offerings on the Eternal's altar as Josiah commanded, 17and all the Israelites who were present *in Jerusalem* celebrated the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for a full week. 18This was the first Passover feast since Samuel was judging Israel. No other king's festival was ever as precise or as well-attended by the priests, Levites, and all the Israelites. 19It took place during Josiah's 18th year as king.

20After *the incredible success of* the Passover and Josiah's organization of the temple operations, the Egyptian king, Neco, passed through *Israel* on his way to attack Carchemish (*a Babylonian possession* on the Euphrates) *because of his alliance with the Assyrians.* When Josiah marched out to meet Neco, 21the Egyptian king sent his messengers.

Neco's Message: Why are you getting involved in this dispute, king of Judah? I am *simply passing through your region* on my way to attack another nation, as God has asked me to do. I am not attacking you. Stop your forces from interfering with my army, or God who is with me will destroy you.

► Josiah may assume that Neco is referring to his pagan gods, but what he misunderstands is that Neco is being sent into battle by the same God whom Josiah served. There aren't Egyptian gods behind this encounter. The Lord is about to use Neco to judge Josiah.

22But Josiah ignored Neco's message and his warning that were from the mouth of God. Josiah disguised himself and attacked Neco's army on Megiddo Plain. 23Neco's archers *quickly* wounded King Josiah.

Josiah *(to his servants)***:** Get me off of this battlefield. I am badly injured.

24His servants took him out of his *battle* chariot and carried him to another chariot that they could drive to Jerusalem. There Josiah died and was laid to rest with his fathers. All of Judah and Jerusalem mourned his death. 25*The prophet* Jeremiah even composed a lament for Josiah, which all singers remember when they sing their lamentations today, *during our exile from Israel.* This lament became a state anthem and is recorded in the *book of* Laments.

[26-27]The other actions of Josiah and his loyal deeds, from his birth to his death, are recorded in the Eternal's law and the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

► The grand tradition of Israel has such a disappointing ending. Certainly God reveals to Josiah that exile is inevitable, but no one can predict the barrage of incompetent kings who usher in that foreign exile.

36 The Israelites chose Josiah's son Joahaz, *also named Jehoahaz,** as his father's successor in Jerusalem. [2]He was 23 years old when he ascended to the throne, but his reign in Jerusalem only lasted 3 months. [3-5]Neco *conquered Israel,* deposed Joahaz as the king, exiled him to Egypt, and made Israel *a vassal state required to* pay 3,750 pounds of silver and 75 pounds of gold *annually to Egypt.*

The Egyptian king appointed 25-year-old Eliakim, Joahaz's brother, as *acting* king of Judah and Jerusalem, changing his name to Jehoiakim. He reigned 11 years in Jerusalem, and he was evil before the Eternal God. [6]Then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Israel, carried Jehoiakim bound in bronze chains into exile in Babylon, [7]plundered the Eternal's temple, and put the temple possessions in his own Babylonian temple. [8-9]The rest of Jehoiakim's rebellions are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Jehoiachin was only 8 years old when he succeeded his father as king in Jerusalem. He, *too,* did what the Eternal considered as evil and reigned only 3 months and 10 days. [10]Just after the new year, King Nebuchadnezzar had Jehoiachin exiled to Babylon as well. He also took more valuables from the Eternal's temple.

Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Zedekiah the Babylonian as *acting* king of Judah and Jerusalem [11]when he was only 21 years old. He reigned 11 years from Jerusalem [12]and he *also* did what the Eternal One saw as evil. He refused to listen to the guidance of Jeremiah, who advised the king to humble himself before the Eternal. [13]Furthermore, he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he had sworn allegiance in the name of God, [14]then led the rest of the nation to abandon the Eternal One, God of Israel. All the leaders and priests mimicked the other nations, following pagan gods and desecrating the Eternal's house, which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. [15]Again and again, the Eternal God of their ancestors, because of His compassion for His people and His temple, sent messengers to His people, *convicting them of the wrong doings and telling them to return to His ways,* [16]but the people mocked the True God's messengers, hated His messages, and laughed at His prophets. Their actions further infuriated the Eternal, until there was no way to contain His anger.

[17]The Eternal empowered the king of the Chaldeans *(who were part of the Babylonian Empire)* to attack Israel. *This army was merciless,* sacrificing Israel's children in their temples and slaughtering everyone else without regard to gender, age, or health. [18-19]They plundered every treasure in the Eternal God's temple and burned God's temple to the ground. They stole the king's and the officers' possessions, tore down the wall of Jerusalem, burned the fortified buildings, and destroyed anything of value in Jerusalem. [20]Anyone who managed to survive the invasion was exiled to Babylon, where they remained servants of the Babylonian court until it was conquered by the Persian Empire. [21]This exile fulfilled the Eternal's message through Jeremiah that Israel would lie quietly at rest and be desolate for 70 years to make up for *the generations* where they did not observe Sabbath.

► In spite of the generations of sin and hatred, God does not exile His people permanently. He leaves them with the hope of return to their homeland when He gives Jeremiah that prophecy. And their return is not too far away. In less than two generations, the Jews (as the Israelites become known during the exile) return to the land and rebuild His temple.

[22]As soon as Cyrus, the king of Persia, took over *the former Babylonian Empire,*

* 36:1 2 Kings 23:31

the Eternal fulfilled His own words (which were relayed by Jeremiah) by compelling Cyrus to send a written proclamation throughout his empire.

Cyrus' Proclamation: [23]The Eternal, the God of heaven, has decided to give me all the kingdoms of the world *to rule as my own. In return for this,* He has told me to build Him a *new* house in Jerusalem of Judah. Any of His people living in my empire may return *to Jerusalem of Judah* with the help of the Eternal One and True God.

EZRA

The Jews return to the land of promise

By Ezra, the priest

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The Book of Ezra picks up where 2 Chronicles leaves off and continues the dramatic story of God's dealings with His displaced people. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book entitled Ezra-Nehemiah; but the Christian canon separates them into two different books located together toward the end of the historical books and before the great books of wisdom and poetry. According to tradition, Ezra is the author of this book as it stands, and there are parts of it (7:28–9:15) that appear to be his memoirs. However, the book is anonymous; and as with most things ancient, it is difficult to say for certain who is responsible for its final form.

The story behind Ezra and Nehemiah involves a gracious God who is ready to give His people another opportunity to follow Him. He hears their cries from foreign soils and answers them by making a way for the exiles to rebuild their nation, their lives, and their connection with Him. As the true force behind history, the one true God inspires a series of Persian kings not only to allow the exiles safe passage home but to support them financially. To assist them further, God raises up a number of great leaders—such as Zerubbabel, Jeshua the high priest, Nehemiah, and Ezra—from their own community to direct the Jews once they are back in their homeland. Now, if His people will only commit themselves to following Him, God is ready to bless their efforts and raise His nation from its ruined foundations.

One of the first tasks the former exiles attempt is to rebuild the temple, a project completed—despite a great many setbacks and much opposition—in 515 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Ezra, a priest and scribe with impressive credentials, returns to his ancestral lands in 458 B.C. to find a nation in peril because the people have forgotten God's instructions contained in Scripture. So Ezra guides the nation to rediscover who they are and to return to Scripture, particularly the five books of Moses called the Torah. Like many of the prophets and priests of his day, Ezra is concerned that his people follow God's covenantal obligations so that they will not face another national disaster.

The exile experience has changed God's people in profound ways; they even answer to a new name. Prior to the exile, they are known as "the nation of Judah" or "Judahites." But after the Babylonian conquest and their long season of exile, the world now knows them as "Jews."

1 During the first year of King Cyrus of Persia's reign *in 539 B.C.*, the Eternal One influenced the spirit of the Persian king to send a proclamation and written letter throughout his empire, fulfilling the Eternal's earlier message through *the prophet* Jeremiah.*

King Cyrus actually rules the Persian Empire from 559-530 B.C., but it is in 539 B.C. when Persia finishes its conquest of Babylonian territory and Cyrus sends a decree that the Jews might return to Judah.

Cyrus' Proclamation: 2The Eternal One, the God of heaven, has decided to give me all the kingdoms of the world *to rule as my own. In return for this,* He has told me to build Him a *new* house in Jerusalem of Judah. 3Any of His people living in my empire may return to Jerusalem of Judah with the help of the Eternal God. There you may rebuild the temple of the Eternal, Israel's God, *with my resources and blessing,* because He is the God who lives in Jerusalem. 4Every Jew who lives here or in any other part of my empire *and wishes to return to Jerusalem* should be supported by his neighbors. They should give him silver, gold, goods, and cattle *for his journey* and should send a freewill offering to the True God's temple in Jerusalem.

5The tribal leaders of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites, and everyone motivated in his or her spirit by the True God prepared to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Eternal's temple. 6All their neighbors gave them silver, gold, goods, cattle, and valuable things *for the journey, just as Cyrus had requested,* and sent freewill offerings. 7-8Even King Cyrus commanded his treasurer, Mithredath, to return the vessels from the Eternal's temple (which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and stored in his gods' temple) to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. 9The vessels included 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 extra dishes, 10 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a different pattern, and 1,000 other articles. 11Sheshbazzar and the exiles carried a total of 5,400 gold and silver vessels from Babylon to Jerusalem.

► When Nebuchadnezzar conquered any nation, he plundered the temples of the local gods and took their treasures as trophies. Judah was no exception. He plundered the Lord's temple and put the treasures in the Babylonian gods' temple along with the treasures of the conquered pagan gods. By returning the temple treasures to Jerusalem, Cyrus recognizes and supports the development of the Jews' renewed government while maintaining governmental control over the nation.

2 1-2These *leaders* of Israel followed Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah back to the province of Judah, to their ancestral cities or *the city of* Jerusalem, from their Babylonian exile at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon: 3The descendants of Parosh (2,172), 4Shephatiah (372), 5Arah (775), 6Pahath-moab of the families of Jeshua and Joab (2,812), 7Elam (1,254), 8Zattu (945), 9Zaccai (760), 10Bani (642), 11Bebai (623), 12Azgad (1,222), 13Adonikam (666), 14Bigvai (2,056), 15Adin (454), 16Ater of Hezekiah (98), 17Bezai (323), 18Jorah (112), 19Hashum (223), and 20Gibbar (95); 21the citizens of Bethlehem (123), 22Netophah (56), and 23Anathoth (128); 24the descendants of Azmaveth (42); 25Kiriath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth (743); and 26Ramah and Geba (621); 27the citizens of Michmas (122) and 28Bethel and Ai (223); 29the descendants of Nebo (52), 30Magbish (156), 31the other Elam (1,254), 32Harim (320), and 33Lod, Hadid, and Ono (725); 34the citizens of Jericho (345); 35The descendants of Senaah (3,630).

36These priests *returned to Jerusalem*: the descendants of Jedaiah the Jeshuite (973), 37Immer (1,052), 38Pashhur (1,247), 39and Harim (1,017).

40These Levites *returned to Jerusalem*: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel the Hodaviahites (74).

41These singers *returned to Jerusalem*: the descendants of Asaph (128).

42These sons of the gatekeepers: the descendants Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai (139).

43These temple servants *returned to Jerusalem*: the descendants of Ziha,

* 1:1 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10

Hasupha, Tabbaoth, [44]Keros, Siaha, Padon, [45]Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, [46]Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan, [47]Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, [48]Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, [49]Uzza, Paseah, Besai, [50]Asnah, Meunim, Nephisim, [51]Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, [52]Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, [53]Barkos, Sisera, Temah, [54]Neziah, and Hatipha.

[55]These descendants of Solomon's servants *returned to Jerusalem*: the descendants of Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, [56]Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, [57]Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth-hazzebaim, and Ami. [58]All the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants totaled 392.

[59-60]*But not everyone was readily accepted into Jerusalem.* These people returned *to Jerusalem* from *the Babylonian provinces of* Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda (652). These people could not produce genealogies to prove their identities as Israelites.

[61]Three priestly lines—the descendants of Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai (so called because he married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite)—[62]could not be located in their genealogies. Therefore they were considered ritually impure and excluded from the priesthood *in case they should taint the Lord's new temple.* [63]The governor decided they should abstain from eating the most holy things until the *high* priest could divine answers using the Urim and Thummim. [64]This *decision* affected 42,360 people, [65]in addition to 7,337 male and female servants, 200 male and female singers, [66]736 horses, 245 mules, [67]435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

[68]When some of the tribal leaders arrived at the Eternal's temple in Jerusalem, they gave their offerings willingly, hoping to rebuild the True God's house on the same site *Solomon had used.* [69]Their gifts, which the treasury used to finance the construction *of the new temple,* amounted to about 1,000 pounds* of gold, 3 tons* of silver, and 100 priestly garments.

[70]*From that time forward,* the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their *ancestral* cities.

► When the Jews return to Jerusalem, they are ready to reconstitute the nation and reclaim God's promise to Abraham and their ancestors. All families are asked to prove their lineage before they return to their ancestors' cities, and all priests are asked to do the same before they begin service at the temple. The Jewish leaders are careful that the right people return to the right places so that the new nation resembles the nation under the great kings David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

Just as the Southern Kingdom's kings made the restoration of proper worship the priority of their reforms during the monarchy, the reconstruction of the altar is the first order of business when the Jews return to Jerusalem. But they cannot be overzealous in their rebuilding. The few Israelites who have remained in the land while most of the population was exiled revere the site of the destroyed temple as holy. To immediately build the temple on the old foundations could be considered apostasy, so the Jews proceed in their reforms with caution. They don't want to incur the wrath of God or of their new neighbors.

3 In the seventh month, *the month of Tishri,* when the Israelites had settled into their towns and when all of the returning Jews had gathered together in Jerusalem *in preparation for the festivals,* [2]Jeshua (son of Jozadak) and his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel) and others *of those returning home* built a new altar *of uncut stone* for burnt offerings to the True God of Israel following the law of Moses, the man of the True God. [3]The men built the altar on the *ruined* foundation *of Solomon's altar* because they feared those who were left behind in the land *during the exile.* Jeshua and the priests burned offerings to the Eternal each morning and evening [4]and celebrated the Feast of Booths just as *Moses had* prescribed, offering the required number of burnt offerings each day. [5-6]The daily burnt offerings to the Eternal began on the first day of the seventh month, and when the Feast of Booths

* 2:69 61,000 drachmas * 2:69 5,000 minas

ended, our continual offerings did not. They gave burnt sacrifices for the new moons and all of the Eternal's prescribed festivals, and everyone's freewill offerings were given to Him.

But the foundation of His temple had not been laid. 7Jeshua, Zerubbabel, and their fellow returning expatriates exercised King Cyrus of Persia's permission to pay masons and carpenters and send food, drinks, and oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians in exchange for a shipment of Lebanese cedar by sea to Joppa.

8In the second month of the second year after they had begun preparations for the True God's temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel), Jeshua (son of Jozadak), and the priests and Levites and all who had been exiled, began construction of the Eternal's temple. The Levites 20 years old and older oversaw the construction, 9and Jeshua and his relatives, Kadmiel and his sons, the descendants of Judah, oversaw the True God's temple laborers, the descendants of Henadad and their brothers the Levites.

10After the laborers had laid the Eternal's temple foundation, the priests and Levites praised the Eternal as their *beloved* King David of Israel had prescribed. The priests dressed in their vestments and played trumpets, the Levite descendants of Asaph played their cymbals, 11and together they sang praises and gave thanks to the Eternal.

Priests and Levites: *We praise him* because He is good and because of His continual and loyal love for Israel.

All the people joined in, shouting praises to the Eternal because the foundation of His temple was complete. 12But in the midst of those praises, the priests, Levites, and tribal leaders who remembered the first temple wept loudly when they saw it *because they knew this temple could never be as grand as Solomon's.* 13There were shouts of joy intermingled with cries of sorrow, and the entire ensemble grew so loud it could be heard a great distance away.

4 When the *residents of the former Northern Kingdom, who were* enemies of *the Southern Kingdom tribes of* Judah and Benjamin, heard that the exiled Jews had returned to build the Eternal God of Israel's temple, 2they asked Zerubbabel and the tribal leaders *if they could help.*

Northern Enemies: Let us help you build *this temple* to the True God, whom we both follow. You see, our families began sacrificing to Him when King Esarhaddon of Assyria sent us *to colonize the Northern Kingdom after he conquered it.*

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the Tribal Leaders: 3You have nothing in common with us! *You are not heirs to the Lord's promise to Abraham.* King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us to build the Eternal God of Israel's temple, so we will do it by ourselves.

4To intimidate the returning Jews from building, the people of the land made the returning exiles afraid to build 5and bribed counselors to hinder the Jews' efforts throughout the reigns of Cyrus and Darius, the kings of Persia.

► The elders recognize that the Assyrian colonists have impure motives. They don't want to help the Jews; they want to inhibit the reconstruction of the nation. But foreigners aren't the only ones interested in hindering the progress. Those people who remained in the Southern Kingdom while the Jews were exiled try many times to disrupt Israel's tender alliance with the Persian emperors. The Jews have to fight to rebuild the temple during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius, and decades later they will fight to rebuild Jerusalem.

6When Ahasuerus *(also known as Xerxes I)* ascended to the Persian throne *in 485 B.C.*, they wrote a letter to him accusing the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem *of crimes.* 7*They did it again* during Artaxerxes' reign; Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and their coconspirators wrote a letter to the Persian king in Aramaic, which was *later* translated *into Hebrew.* 8-10*A third time, they wrote a letter* to *the Persians. This time,* Rehum the commander, Shimshai his scribe, and their associates (the judges, the lieutenant governors, the officials, the

secretaries, the Babylonians, the Elamites of Susa, the residents of Erech, and the other colonists who were relocated by the great *Assyrian King* Osnappar in Samaria and beyond the Euphrates) drafted a letter to King Artaxerxes I slandering Jerusalem.

Northern Enemies' Letter:

11 King Artaxerxes,
We, your servants who live beyond the *Euphrates* River, *are compelled to* report to you *the treasonous actions of the Jews.*
12 The Jews whom your predecessors sent to Jerusalem are busy rebuilding the city, its fortifications, and its foundations with the intention of rebelling *against you.* 13 If they succeed, *dear* king, they will stop paying *your required* tribute, customs, and tolls, and your revenue will suffer.
14 Since we are your servants *and the government's representatives to these foreigners,* we are offended by any actions taken against you and are informing you of these actions. 15 *We suggest that if* you read your predecessors' court documents and learn *about the history of the Jews of Jerusalem,* you will find that they are notoriously rebellious, harming kings and provinces and instigating revolts. Their actions caused your ancestors to destroy Jerusalem *and exile its inhabitants.*
16 We recommend that you, our king, *act quickly*. If those fortifications are completed, then you will lose your provinces west of the Euphrates *to a Jerusalem-led rebellion.*

Artaxerxes' Reply *(to Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the associates)*:

17 *Loyal ones* in Samaria,
Greetings. 18 Your letter was *carefully* read and translated in my court, *and I have addressed your concerns.*
19 I issued a decree that my servants investigate *the history of Jerusalem.* They discovered *that your fears are not unfounded.* In the past Jerusalem has indeed rebelled and revolted against kings—20 mighty kings who ruled Jerusalem, governed provinces west of the Euphrates, and required tributes, customs, and tolls *from their subjects.*
21 Now *you must* issue a decree *of your own.* Order the Jews to stop building in Jerusalem until I tell them otherwise. 22 Do not be indifferent in your handling of this matter. This threat cannot be allowed to harm the empire.

23 As soon as they heard King Artaxerxes' letter, Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their associates rushed to Jerusalem and stopped the Jews' work with the threat of violence.
24 *The continual efforts of our neighbors to thwart the temple building were rewarded.* The Jerusalem temple site lay deserted and unfinished until the second year of King Darius of Persia's reign.

► The Jews cannot imagine that such opposition to their rebuilding exists within the very government sanctioning and financing their work. The support of a pagan government is not enough to enable and maintain the building of the Lord's temple. While Darius struggles with political unrest throughout his empire, God incites the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the Jews to resume work on the building.

5 1-2 The prophets Haggai and Zechariah (descendant of Iddo) spoke to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem with the words of the True God of Israel encouraging Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel) and Jeshua (son of Jozadak) to resume the reconstruction of the True God's temple in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God gave them assistance. 3 *Questioning the sudden commencement of the work,* Tattenai (governor of the *Persian* province west of the Euphrates), Shethar-bozenai, and their associates approached the working Jews.

Persian Officials: Who told you to rebuild the temple?

4 We gave them the names of the people who were doing the work, *fearing they might end our construction.* 5 But the True God protected the Jewish elders. The Persians did not *intend to* stop the laborers

until Darius received a letter concerning the situation and sent his written reply. 6Tattenai (governor of the *Persian* province west of the Euphrates), Shethar-bozenai, and their fellow officials drafted that letter.

Officials' Letter:

7To our King Darius, we wish you peace.

8It should be known that we have visited the great God's temple in the province of Judah. The Jews are busy carefully laying huge stones and hoisting beams into the walls, and the work is progressing well. 9*When we saw their progress,* we asked the elders who told them to resume the construction: 10what were the names of *the laborers and* the superintendents. 11They responded *by telling us about Cyrus' decree:*

We are the servants of the True God of heaven and earth; we are rebuilding His house—a house that was originally crafted by one of the greatest kings of Israel *early in our nation's history.* 12Our ancestors *disobeyed* the True God of heaven and provoked His anger. He empowered Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean king of Babylon, to capture our *rebellious* ancestors, deport them to Babylon, and destroy His temple.

13*We languished in captivity for more than a generation,* until King Cyrus, in his first year as king over *Persia and* Babylon, allowed us to rebuild the True God's temple. 14Cyrus returned the gold and silver vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the True God's temple in Jerusalem and displayed in the Babylonian temple, to Sheshbazzar, a recently appointed governor. 15Cyrus told him to put the vessels back into the temple in Jerusalem and rebuild the True God's temple on the foundations of the first temple. 16So Sheshbazzar traveled to Jerusalem and laid the foundations of the True God's temple. We have been working on the building, *either gathering supplies or building the structure,* ever since, but it is far from finished.

17We suggest that you command a thorough search of *the archives in* your treasure house in Babylon, if that please you. If *you find that the Jews' story is correct and that* King Cyrus' original decree commissioned the rebuilding of the True God's temple in Jerusalem, then send us your decision *as to whether or not the Jews should continue their work.*

6 King Darius did *just as his officials recommended.* He commanded that his archives and the treasure houses in Babylon be searched *to determine the validity of the Jews' story.* 2A scroll was found of a decree *by King Cyrus* in the fortress at Ecbatana, *the summer residence of the Babylonian and Persian kings,* in the province of Media.

3In his first year as king, King Cyrus issued this decree:

The temple of the True God at Jerusalem, where sacrifices are offered, is to be rebuilt on its original foundations. It shall be 90 feet tall and 90 feet wide 4with *walls made from* three layers of large stones and one layer of timbers. The royal treasury will finance this project, 5and the gold and silver vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the True God's temple in Jerusalem and displayed in Babylon, will be returned to their rightful places in the Jerusalem temple. You will place them in the True God's temple.

The Decree by King Darius to those in Jerusalem:

6-7Now, Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their fellow officials in the province west of the Euphrates should not interfere with the Jews' work on the True God's temple. Let the Jews' governor and elders rebuild His temple on the site of the first temple. 8Furthermore, the *Persian* royal treasury will immediately finance the rebuilding of the True God's temple with the taxes from all the provinces west of the Euphrates. You will see that all the Judahite elders' 9needs for *daily* sacrifices are met: give them young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings to the True God of heaven; give them wheat, salt, wine, and anointing oil for the Jerusalem priests to use without fail. 10With these provisions, they will be able to offer proper sacrifices to the True God of

heaven and pray for the well-being of *the empire*: the king and his children.

11If anyone violates any part of my command, then you will remove a beam from that person's house and impale him on it. The house will become a pile of rubble. 12If anyone attempts to change my command or destroy the True God's temple in Jerusalem, may the God whose reputation lives there destroy that king or nation.

I, Darius, command this. May it be done with diligence.

13Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their fellow officials followed King Darius' command diligently. 14-15The Jewish elders successfully finished the temple as the True God of Israel had commanded through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (son of Iddo) and with the decree of the Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of King Darius' reign, *515 B.C.* 16All the returning Jews—the priests, the Levites, and the laypeople—joyously celebrated the dedication of the True God's temple 17with dedication offerings of 100 bulls, 200 rams, and 400 lambs, and sin offerings of 12 male goats (one for each of the tribes of Israel so that all Israel, *exiled and in Jerusalem,* would be forgiven). 18*Having dedicated the temple itself,* the Israelites followed the book of Moses and organized the priests and Levites according to their duties so the True God in Jerusalem could be served.

19The exiles observed *their first* Passover Feast *in the new temple* on the 14th day of the first month. 20After the priests and Levites had purified themselves, the Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb on behalf of themselves and all the Jewish exiles. 21Then the Jewish exiles and the proselytes who had abandoned their pagan nations to follow the Eternal God of Israel *wholeheartedly* ate the Passover feast. 22For the next seven days, they all joyously participated in the Feast of Unleavened Bread because the Eternal had given them a reason to celebrate: He influenced the King of Assyria to encourage the Jews' rebuilding of the True God of Israel's temple.

► Israel's troubles started back in the eighth century when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom. God was furious with His people because of their sins, so He used that empire to punish them. Over the next two centuries, the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and the Persians conquered the Babylonians. Which foreign nation led the empire was of no consequence to Him; He could use their power whenever and however He liked. But God uses kings Cyrus and Darius in a different way—He uses them to restore the Jews. They have much to celebrate!

7 More *than 50 years* had passed *since the temple was completed by the first group of exiles,* and Artaxerxes I was ruling Persia. Ezra (son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, 2son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, 3son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, 4son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, 5son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest)—6this Ezra traveled from Babylon *to make a request of the king.* Ezra was a scribe, a scholar of the law of Moses that the Eternal God of Israel had given, who had the support of the Eternal God; so the king granted all his requests 7that more Jews (including laypeople, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants) *be allowed to* return to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes' *reign.*

► From the beginning, Ezra has influence. As a descendant of Aaron, he is of the highest and most respected priestly class in the Jewish community, so his own people will follow him. Even in the Persian Empire, his status as a priest makes him a valued political figure. These qualifications make him the perfect person to revitalize the waning religious reforms started by the first Jewish exiles who have returned to Jerusalem.

8-9On the first day of the first month of *Artaxerxes'* seventh year as king, Ezra

traveled from Babylon and arrived in Jerusalem on the first of the fifth month. *Ezra's exodus from this foreign empire was successful* because he was supported by his True God. [10]He *was a second Moses,* and tenaciously studied, practiced, and taught the Eternal's law to Israel.

[11]King Artaxerxes gave this copy of the letter to Ezra, the priest, teacher, and scholar of the Eternal's laws to Israel.

Artaxerxes' Letter:

[12]To Ezra, the priest and teacher of the law of the True God of heaven:

May you have perfect peace. I, Artaxerxes, the ruler of all kings, [13]have decreed that any of the Jewish exiles, priests, and Levites residing in my empire may go with you to Jerusalem if they want to. [14]I, the king, and my seven cabinet members are sending you to investigate how Judah and Jerusalem are following your True God's laws, the laws which you study and teach. [15]You will take the silver and gold—which we are freely offering to the True God of Israel who lives in Jerusalem—[16]all the silver and gold in the province of Babylon, and the freewill offerings of all the people and priests for their True God's temple in Jerusalem. [17]Use the money to buy bulls, rams, and lambs *for burnt offerings and sin offerings,* and offer the grain and drink offerings on the altar of your True God's temple in Jerusalem. [18]Use any leftover money as your True God intends for you and your fellow returning exiles to use it. [19]Deliver all the *new* vessels, which I have given you to use in the services of your True God's temple, to the True God in Jerusalem. [20]Whatever the True God's temple requires, the *Persian* royal treasury will pay for it.

[21]To the treasurers in the provinces west of the Euphrates: I, King Artaxerxes, command you to obey Ezra, the priest and teacher of the law of the True God of heaven, and give whatever he needs *to support the temple sacrifices for 2 years*—[22]up to 7,500 pounds of silver, 600 bushels of wheat, 600 gallons of wine, 600 gallons of oil, and salt. [23]Whatever the True God of heaven commands, do it eagerly for the True God of heaven's temple so that He will not be angry with my empire. [24]Also do not charge taxes, tributes, or tolls to any priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, priests' and Levites' servants, or temple servants.

[25]Ezra, appoint officials and judges over everyone in the province west of the Euphrates, including the Jews who follow your True God's laws, as the wisdom of your True God motivates you, and teach those who do not know His laws. [26]Anyone who does not follow your True God's law and my law will be judged harshly and punished by death, exile, foreclosure, or prison.

Ezra: [27]Eternal God of our ancestors, may You be blessed *by the praises of Your people* for motivating the king to fill and beautify the Eternal's temple in Jerusalem. [28]You have blessed me with Your loyal love and strengthened me with Your motivation *as I stood* before the king and his cabinet and his princes. *Because of You* I was able to convince the elders of Israel to accompany me *back to Jerusalem.*

8 These are the tribal leaders and the genealogies of those who traveled with me from Babylon *to Jerusalem* in the reign of King Artaxerxes:

[2]*From the priestly families:* Gershom of the Phinehas family and Daniel of the Ithamar family. *From the royal family:* Hattush of the David family [3]from the line of Shecaniah. *From the lay families:* Zechariah of the Parosh family and 150 men from that line, [4]Eliehoenai (son of Zerahiah) of the Pahath-moab family and 200 men, [5]Shecaniah (son of Jahaziel) of the Zattu family and 300 men, [6]Ebed (son of Jonathan) of the Adin family and 50 men, [7]Jeshaiah (son of Athaliah) of the Elam family and 70 men, [8]Zebadiah (son of Michael) of the Shephatiah family and 80 men, [9]Obadiah (son of Jehiel) of the Joab family and 218 men, [10]Shelomith (son of Josiphiah) of the Bani family and 160 men, [11]Zechariah (son of Bebai) of the Bebai family and 28 men, [12]Johanan (son of Hakkatan) of the Azgad family and 110 men, [13]Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah of the Adonikam family and 60 men, [14]Uthai and Zabbud of the Bigvai family and 70 men.

[15]I gathered everyone together on the banks of the river to Ahava, and we camped there for 3 days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I noticed that no Levites had joined our group. [16]I sent 9 tribal leaders (Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan,

Zechariah, and Meshullam) and *2* teachers (Joiarib and Elnathan) [17]to Iddo, the tribal leader in Casiphia, with instructions for Iddo, his coworkers, and the temple servants in Casiphia to bring ministers to *join our caravan and* work in the True God's temple. [18]Just as the True God intended, they brought Sherebiah and 17 of his sons and brothers, all of whom were descendants of Mahli (son of Levi, son of Israel); [19]Hashabiah and Jeshaiah and 18 of their sons and brothers, all of whom were descendants of Merari; [20]and 220 temple servants, a position David and the princes had created to serve the Levites, who are listed.

[21]I declared that the whole caravan should fast by the river of Ahava, humbling ourselves before our True God and asking for a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and our possessions. [22]*We needed His protection more than ever since* I had been ashamed to ask the king for a military escort of soldiers and horses on our journey after telling him, "Our True God takes care of anyone who follows Him, but He uses His power and anger against anyone who abandons Him." [23]We knew fasting and following our True God *would ensure that He helped us* travel safely to Jerusalem—and He did.

[24]I designated 12 priests *and Levites,* including Sherebiah and Hashabiah, *to care for the freewill offerings during our trip.* [25]I measured the silver and gold and counted the vessels, which King Artaxerxes, his cabinet, his princes, and the Jews in Babylon had sent to offer at our True God's house, *so no one could be accused of stealing the riches. We carried a tremendous offering back to Jerusalem:* [26]25 tons of silver *coins*; 7,500 pounds of silver vessels; 7,500 pounds of gold *coins*; [27]20 gold bowls weighing 19 pounds;* and 2 shiny copper vessels (as valuable as gold).

Ezra *(commissioning the priests and Levites):* [28]Everything dedicated to Him is holy to the Eternal: you, the vessels *for the temple,* and the silver and gold for the freewill offering to the Eternal God of our ancestors. [29]Guard these things until you reach the rooms of the Eternal's temple. There, the head priests, the Levites, and the tribal leaders already living in Jerusalem will weigh them *and make sure the same amount reached the temple as left Babylon.*

[30]The priests and Levites accepted *their commission* and carried the *carefully* measured goods to our True God's temple in Jerusalem. [31]We left the banks of the Ahava River on the 12th day of the 1st month. On our *4-month* journey to Jerusalem, the True God did indeed protect us—He saved us from any enemies or skirmishes along our journey.

[32]Once we reached Jerusalem, we rested 3 days. [33]On the 4th day, we took the measured silver, gold, and vessels to our True God's house. There, Meremoth (son of Uriah the priest), Eleazer (son of Phineas *the priest*), and the Levites Jozabad (son of Jeshua) and Noadiah (son of Binnui) [34]counted, weighed, and inventoried everything. [35]Then the exiles who had *joined our caravan and* left their captivity gave these burnt offerings to the Eternal God of Israel: 12 bulls (*1* for *each tribe of* Israel), 96 rams, 77 lambs, and 12 male goats (as a sin offering *for each tribe of Israel*).

[36]Meanwhile, they delivered the king's command that the leaders of the provinces west of the Euphrates should *fully* support the Jews and the True God's temple. Those governors obeyed the command.

► If Ezra expects to retain the support of the Persian king, he has to obey Artaxerxes' four commands. Within five months, Ezra completes the first two demands—he leads the Jews to Jerusalem, and he delivers all the offerings to the temple. His obedience to Artaxerxes is matched by the governors' obedience: they agree to support financially the Jews' efforts at reestablishing their nation.

Now that Ezra has addressed the religious situation in Jerusalem, he can tend to the legal situation as Artaxerxes requested. Ezra still needs to investigate how the Jews are practicing the law and appoint judges and teachers for the nation.

9 [1-2]After we had returned to Jerusalem, made our offerings to Him, and begun to settle, the leaders notified me *of a legal problem.*

* 8:27 1,000 darics

Jewish Leaders: The Israelites, priests, Levites, *and even our chiefs* have intermarried with the daughters of non-Jews and adopted the cultures of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. By mixing our families with theirs through marriage, our lineage is no longer pure, and the officials and rulers have been the worst offenders.

► The law does not forbid foreign marriages to keep bloodlines pure; it forbids them for religious reasons. David's own ancestor, Ruth, was a Moabite. This marriage was blessed because Ruth converted to the religion of Israel and was no longer considered an outsider by God. In spite of this success, Israel's history is a strong precedent against foreign marriages because more often than not, foreign marriages end badly. The great King Solomon was influenced by his Egyptian bride; Ahab (of the Northern Kingdom) completely dissociated himself from God in favor of his wife, Jezebel, and her gods. Such marriages tend to lead God's followers away from His path—and that is the real tragedy.

3When I heard their story, *I mourned for the Jews as if the nation were dead:* I ripped my clothes, I ripped hair from my head and chin, and I sat in stunned silence 4until the evening offering. All those who obeyed the True God of Israel's words and recognized the unfaithfulness of their neighbors joined me.

5At the evening offering, I stopped mourning *with the people and turned my attention to God.* In my torn garments, I knelt before Him and stretched out my hands to the Eternal God.

Ezra's Prayer: 6O my True God, witness my shame and embarrassment as I appeal to You. My True God, our sins are so great that they have flooded over us, and they have reached to the heavens. 7Our people are chronic sinners, our sin is greater than we could have imagined, and *You have tried to correct* our behavior by subjecting our kings and our priests to death, captivity, theft, and shame by foreign rulers. Those *pagans* continue to rule us today. 8Even though You, our Eternal God, have shown Your grace by preserving a remnant and by giving us a secure hold in Your holy place, may You, our God, brighten our eyes and grant us assurance even in our bondage *to the Persian rulers.* 9We are *still their* slaves. In this bondage, You, our True God, have not forgotten us; Your loyal love inspired the kings of Persia to allow us to rebuild Your house and the walls *to provide protection* in Judah and Jerusalem.

10But in spite of Your love, we have abandoned Your commands, and we have no excuse. 11You warned us through Your servants, the prophets, that the land of Canaan was polluted with pagans, that their evil actions had removed anything pure or good there, even filling up the land from end to end with horrible practices. 12*You warned us* not to marry our children to theirs, to seek treaties with them, or to covet their prosperity so that we would remain strong *as a nation and as individuals,* eating good foods from the earth and leaving that earth to Your children always.

13In spite of Your mercy toward us—You, our True God, did not punish us as much as our obvious guilt and our evil actions required and have freed these exiles—14once again we have ignored Your commands. We married pagans and have taken on their horrible practices, knowing that Your anger would motivate You to destroy every last Jew without leaving any remnant people.

15Eternal God of Israel, You are righteous *and justified in everything You do.* Today we are nothing but the preserved remnant who escaped *Your wrath,* and today we confess our guilt. None of us should be able to stand *and be acquitted* before You.

10 As Ezra was praying his confession and weeping and bowing on the steps of the True God's temple, a huge group of Israelite men, women, and children joined him in weeping. 2Shecaniah (son of Jehiel the Elamite) then spoke up.

Shecaniah and his family had returned to Jerusalem at the first opportunity 60 years earlier.

Shecaniah: *You are right.* We have forgotten our True God and have married foreign women from pagan nations. But there is hope for Israel yet. 3We shall make a *new* covenant with our True God, promising to banish our *foreign* wives and their children. You and the others who follow the laws of our True God must guide us in this, so that we obey the law. 4So stand up! Helping us follow the law is now your responsibility. Do not be afraid; we will support your actions.

5So Ezra stood up and persuaded the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel to swear an oath to banish their foreign wives and foreign children. When everyone had taken the oath, 6he entered the temple chamber of Jehohanan (son of Eliashib) and continued mourning the exiles' unfaithfulness by fasting from food and water.

7Those *who had sworn the oath* sent letters declaring it throughout Judah and Jerusalem telling all the *returned* exiles to assemble in Jerusalem 8within three days. The counsel of chiefs and elders agreed that anyone who was not here would forfeit all his possessions and his status within the assembly. 9*Not surprisingly,* all the men from Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem within three days, *in spite of the winter rains.* On the twentieth day of the ninth month, everyone sat in the courtyard in front of the True God's temple—shivering under the weighty matter and the heavy rain.

Ezra: 10*There is no doubt that* you have abandoned His ways and have married foreign women, adding to the list of Israel's sins. 11Now you must confess *these sins* to the Eternal God of your ancestors and do as He pleases: break away from the pagan nations and your foreign wives.

Assembly *(loudly)*: 12You are right. We must do what you've told us to do. 13*But look around.* There are too many people here *to house in this city,* and the rains will not allow us to stay outside *for very long.* Also our sins are too horrible to be adequately dealt with in a day or two. 14Allow our chiefs to represent everyone in this assembly *right now.* Then each person in every city who has married a foreign woman can come back with his civic leaders at a scheduled time. *We can then continue the inquiries* until our True God withdraws His wrath from us about these sins.

► Ezra is able to fulfill all of Artaxerxes' requirements and ensure his support. He leads the inquiry into the Jews' practice of God's laws, and he selects tribal leaders as judges over their people. This story of the legal system may seem unimportant when compared to the sweeping cultic reforms of Josiah and Hezekiah, but it is a microcosm of Ezra's work throughout Jerusalem and Judah. Throughout his reforms, Ezra focuses on God and takes deliberate steps to improve the nation's relationship with Him.

15-16With the exception of *four men,* Jonathan (son of Asahel), Jahzeiah (son of Tikvah), Meshullam, and Shabbethai (the Levite), everyone supported this plan. Ezra selected one leader from each tribe to represent his people and recorded their names. These tribal leaders then gathered on the first day of the tenth month to begin the inquiries. 17By the first day of the first month, the investigations of all men who had married foreign women was finished, *and the offenders were recorded.*

18These priests, *from the family of the high priest,* married foreign women: the descendants of Jeshua (son of Jozadak) and his brothers Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19They were found guilty, promised to expel their wives, and offered a ram of the flock as penance.

20*From the other priestly families:* Hanani and Zebadiah (descendants of Immer); 21Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah (descendants of Harim); 22Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah (descendants of Pashhur).

23From the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

24From the singers: Eliashib.

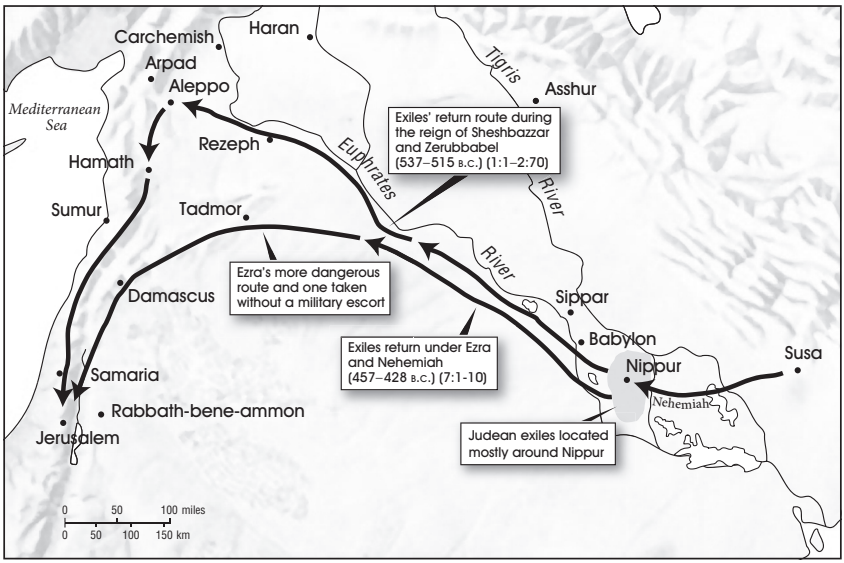
From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

25From *the laymen of* Israel: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar,

Hashabiah,* and Benaiah (descendants of Parosh); 26Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah (descendants of Elam); 27Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza (descendants of Zattu); 28Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai (descendants of Bebai); 29Meshullam, Malluch and Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth (descendants of Bani); 30Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh (descendants of Pahath-moab); 31-32Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah (descendants of Harim); 33Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei (descendants of Hashum); 34-42Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu (descendents of Bani); Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph (descendants of Binnui); 43Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah (descendants of Nebo).

44All these men had married foreign women, and some had fathered children by them.

* 10:25 Hebrew text reads, "Malchijah."



Exiles Return from Babylon to Jerusalem

NEHEMIAH

A personal memoir of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls

By Nehemiah, a leader with great vision

In the fifth century B.C., the Jews are continuing to emerge from their exile in the Persian Empire. Invaded in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C., and then conquered in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the people of God are scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire and eventually witness the Babylonians' own fall to Persia. Now that they are living under a new regime that is accepting of God's people and willing to let them return home to rebuild their nation, God raises up a series of leaders to take charge of that home going. Two of these are Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor of Judah.

The story of these two dynamic leaders and the rebuilding in Jerusalem stretches across two books in the Christian Bible, but the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are originally one volume. It is not advisable to read one without the other because together they provide a full account of God's restoration of Jerusalem. After the temple is rebuilt and dedicated in 515 B.C., Ezra returns to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. and restores God's law as the foundation to the new Jewish community. Nehemiah comes along a few years later and is responsible for fortifying the holy city, managing foreign affairs, and rebuilding the population. Together they build a new society that grows and changes into the precursor to the modern Jewish faith.

At the heart of the Book of Nehemiah is a memoir, written by Nehemiah himself and preserved and edited by later Jewish scribes. His story picks up in 445 B.C., when he is a trusted advisor to Artaxerxes I. When he learns that his countrymen are in trouble and that Jerusalem's walls and gates are still in ruins, Nehemiah gains permission to return to Jerusalem and fortify it. In only 12 years, he completes most of his work revitalizing Jerusalem (with the repair work on the Jerusalem walls taking only 52 days), giving as much of his own time and more of his own resources than he requires from anyone else. With the holy city secure, the people come together to celebrate and renew their commitment to God and His call on their lives. Nehemiah's story proves that energy, intelligence, unselfishness, and above all, trust are essential to living faithfully in covenant with God.

1 I, Nehemiah, am the son of Hacaliah. These are my words. *They tell my story.* During the *winter* month of Chislev in the 20th year *of Artaxerxes I's reign,* I was in the fortress of Susa [2]when one of my brothers, Hanani, came from Judah along with some other men. I asked them about those Jews who had escaped—who had survived the exile—and about *our city,* Jerusalem.

Hanani and the Judean Men *(to Nehemiah)*: [3]*It's a disaster.* The survivors of the exile who are in the *Persian* province *of Jerusalem* have been wronged and are hated. The wall of Jerusalem has been reduced to piles *of rock,* and its gates consumed by flame.

[4]Hearing this, I *was overwhelmed with grief and* could only sit and weep. For days I mourned *this news and sought the audience of* the True God of heaven, praying and fasting before Him.

Nehemiah: [5]Notice me—Eternal One, God of heaven, great and awesome God. You are the keeper of the covenant and loyally love those who love You and follow Your commands. [6]Now, pay attention with open ears and eyes to me and see how I, Your servant, plead day and night *for Your consideration.* I confess our wickedness, not just for Your servants the children of Israel, but for my family and the household of my father, *Hacaliah.* [7]We have acted extremely wickedly toward You. We have rejected Your commands, disregarding the regulations and judgments You gave to Your servant Moses *to show us how to live.* [8]*I ask that You* remember Your words to Your servant Moses, *even when we did not.* You told him, "If you are unfaithful *to Me and choose another,* then I will send you away *and you will live separate from Me—you will live as aliens* in strange lands; [9]but if you *have a change of heart and* return to Me and walk according to My commands, then no matter how far you have gone, even to the places beyond the horizon, I will gather you and bring you to the place of My choosing, where My very name dwells." [10]*They are Yours, God*—they are Your servants; they are Your people whom You liberated *from the exile* by Your initiative and power. [11]O Lord, hear Your servant praying to You and pay attention, and *not just to my prayers but also* to the prayers of these *very Jews* whose greatest joy is to live in fear and awe of You.

I am asking for success today, God; please make sure this man is compassionate to me, Your servant.

In that day, I was cupbearer to the king.

► Nehemiah's job is to taste the king's wine and food, checking for poison. Because of these duties, Nehemiah is constantly needed, so he must seek God's favor so that Artaxerxes I will allow him to travel to Jerusalem.

2 *Four months* later, in the *spring* month of Nisan *at the start of our New Year,* Artaxerxes had been king 20 years. *At a feast,* wine was brought to him, and *when it had passed my examinations,* I gave it to him. *Now, you must understand that* in the presence of the king it is not my custom to openly express *emotion, especially* sadness.

Artaxerxes *(to Nehemiah)*: [2]You look disturbed. I know you are not ill. The sadness *I see in you* is the sadness of the heart. *What is wrong?*

As I stood there before the king I was very afraid.

Nehemiah: [3]May your life *and reign* extend forever, King!

Why should my face look anything but sad? *My homeland is destroyed;* my city is a heap of rubble; its *once-mighty* gates are nothing more than charred *tinder.* This is the place where my ancestors are supposed to be at rest, *but the very ground where they lie is ruined!*

Artaxerxes: [4]What is it you want?

All at once, I prayed to the God of heaven [5]and made my request to the king.

Nehemiah *(to God and Artaxerxes)*: If I have won your favor, my king, and if it is your pleasure, send me to the city where my ancestors are buried. Let me rebuild *the city* in Judah.

[6]With his queen sitting beside him, the king continued to probe.

Artaxerxes: How long will your journey take, and when may I look for your return?

Then I knew: I had received his blessing. He was sending me. *In response to his question,* I set a time.

Nehemiah *(to the king)*: 7If it *continues to* please you, send me with letters *bearing your name. Send me* to those men you have appointed to govern the lands beyond the *Euphrates* River. Then I can be *assured I will be safe,* escorted to the borders of Judah *by your armies.* 8And *may I also ask you for* a letter to the warden of your forests, Asaph; he will supply timber to me so that I can build gates into the fortress around the temple *mount, gates and watchtowers in* the walls around the city, and a house for myself.

My True God *had heard my prayers and* rested His hand of favor *and love* upon me. The king gave me everything I asked for!

9And so I left, journeying to see the governors of the lands beyond the *Euphrates* River. I gave them the letters the king sent with me. Moreover, I traveled in the company of the king's army, surrounded by the officers and cavalry. 10In fact, when Sanballat (the Horonite *who governed Samaria*) and Tobiah (the Ammonite official *under him* there) heard about what was happening, they were unnerved, distressed that someone was seeking the good of the Israelites *left in the land.*

► When the Assyrians conquered Israel's Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., the Samaritans were exiled to other Assyrian provinces, and other Assyrian prisoners were settled in Samaria. Based on the etymology of their names, Sanballat's family is probably one of those relocated families who adopted the worship of the Eternal once they moved to Samaria.

Now, almost 300 years later, Sanballat is the first of his family appointed governor of Samaria under the Persians. Following 15 years of political unrest, he has managed to form a loose federation of Persian provinces in the area that includes Jerusalem. Tobiah is a Persian official who has taken care of Jerusalem until a new governor arrived. Now that Nehemiah has arrived, Sanballat's power over Jerusalem is uncertain. Nehemiah has not agreed to be part of his federation, so Jerusalem could become a threat to it.

11Nevertheless, my journey continued until I reached Jerusalem. After three days in the city, 12under the cover of darkness, I was accompanied by a small group of men. The True God had placed a *secret* plan on my heart, and there I had left it hidden *until the time was right.* No one knew what it was I imagined for Jerusalem. With my men walking beside me, I mounted and rode *around the city.* 13At night I went out of Jerusalem through the valley gate, heading toward the dragon well and down to the potsherd gate *where the city dumps its trash. As we went,* we examined the walls of Jerusalem: *they were as bad as we had heard.* No stones remained standing, and fire had consumed the gates. 14We continued on toward the fountain gate and the pool of the king, but *amid the rubble* I was unable to continue riding—there was simply no room—15and so I *dismounted and* followed along the valley, still under the cover of night, examining the wall *as I went.* Finally I *had seen enough and* turned back toward the valley gate, reentering the city the way I had left. 16Those who were in charge *of Jerusalem* did not know where I had gone, much less what I was up to. I had said nothing to anyone—even those who would shortly be doing the work *of rebuilding. Everyone was in the dark: common* Jews, priests, nobles, and leaders alike.

Nehemiah *(to all the Jews)*: 17Our trouble is obvious: *The wall of* Jerusalem has been reduced to piles of rock, and its gates consumed by flame. Let us begin by rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, and in doing so, we will demolish our disgrace *because of defeat and exile.*

18I told them how my True God had used His power to favor me, evidenced by what the king had said to me.

Jews: Get up *now*! It is time to rebuild.

And so they began the good work. 19*Our adversaries lost no time, either.* Joining *Samaritan Governor* Sanballat (the Horonite) and Official Tobiah (the Ammonite) was an Arab named Geshem. When they heard of our plans, they mocked and ridiculed us.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem: What do you think you are doing? Are you not rebelling against the king *again*?

Nehemiah: 20The True God of heaven will give us success. We are His people, servants who will begin the work of rebuilding *our city and this wall*. But you have no share *in this work* because Jerusalem is not yours—civically, legally, or religiously.

3 The sheep gate was first. Led by their brother, the high priest Eliashib, the priests began the work of rebuilding. They framed it,* then they set its doors in place. They proceeded to the tower of the hundred, and after dedicating it they made it as far as the tower of Hananel. 2The men of Jericho partnered with Eliashib, as did Zacur (Imri's son).

3Hassenaah's sons rebuilt the fish gate. They framed it, set its doors in place, *then secured it* with bolts and bars. 4Meremoth (Hakkoz's grandson and Uriah's son) partnered with Hassenaah's sons in repairing *the wall,* as did Meshullam (Berechiah's son and Meshezabel's grandson) and Zadok (Baana's son). 5Even the men from Tekoa partnered in the repairs; however, *Jerusalem's long-standing* noblemen didn't support the *new* leadership's plans.

6Joiada (Paseah's son) and Meshullam (Besodeiah's son) rebuilt the old gate. *In the same way,* they framed it, set its doors in place, *and secured it* with bolts and bars. 7The men of Gibeon and Mizpah (*that's the Mizpah* where the governor *of the Persian Empire* beyond the *Euphrates* River had his capital)—Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite—partnered with them. 8Uzziel the goldsmith (Harhaiah's son) partnered with them in the repairs, as did Hananiah, a perfumer. The wall they built was the broad wall. 9There, a half-district ruler of Jerusalem named Rephaiah (Hur's son) partnered with them in the repairs. 10Jedaiah (Harumaph's son) partnered with Rephaiah, working directly across from his own house, as did Hattush (Hashabneiah's son). 11Malchijah (Harim's son) and Hasshub (Pahath-moab's son) repaired another section and the oven tower. 12A half-district ruler named Shallum (Hallohesh's son) and his daughters partnered with Malchijah.

13Working with the residents of Zanoah, Hanun rebuilt the valley gate. *In the same way,* they framed it, set its doors in place, *and secured it* with bolts and bars. They were able to build the wall as far as the potsherd gate—a full 500 yards *past where they started.*

14The ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem rebuilt the potsherd gate. *In the same way,* he framed it, set its doors in place, *then secured it* with bolts and bars.

15Mizpah's ruler, Shallum (Col-hozeh's son) repaired the fountain gate, adding a roof while framing it, setting its doors in place, *and securing it* with bolts and bars. It fell to him to repair the wall of the pool of Shelah—of the king's garden—to the steps leading down and away from the city of David.

► Instead of repairing the old, these people build entirely new sections of wall inside the former wall's perimeter, because reterracing the steep incline and clearing the rubble would be far too time consuming.

16Nehemiah (Azbuk's son), who was ruler of the half-district of Beth-zur, built until he was directly across from David's tombs, which is also where the artificial pool is and the house of the heroes.

17Down the wall, the Levites worked: Rehum (Bani's son), then Hashabiah, the half-district ruler of Keilah who worked on behalf of his own people. 18Then came their brothers: Bavvai (Henadad's son), the other half-district ruler of Keilah. 19Ezer (Jeshua's son), who ruled in Mizpah, partnered with Bavvai on the section of the wall that faced the road leading up to the armory—as far as the point where the wall angles away.* 20Then came Baruch (Zabbai's son), who worked fervently on the section between the angle *of the wall* and the entrance to High Priest Eliashib's house. 21From that entrance all the way

* 3:1 Hebrew manuscripts read, "consecrated it." * 3:19 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

to the end of Eliashib's house, Meremoth (Uriah's son and Hakkoz's grandson) worked, *in addition to the work he had completed next to the fish gate.* 22Priests from the surrounding region repaired the next portion *of the wall.* 23Benjamin and Hasshub worked on sections directly in front of their homes, then Azariah (Maaseiah's son and Ananiah's grandson) worked on a section beside his home. 24From Azariah's home to the angle and the corner, Binnui (Henadad's son) completed a second section. 25Palal (Uzai's son) worked on the wall section at a point across from both the angle and the place where the upper tower comes out of the palace near the guards' court. Then came Pedaiah (Parosh's son) 26and servants from the temple living on the Ophel's hill making repairs as far as the point directly across from the water gate to the east and the upper *palace* tower. 27The men of Tekoa, *who worked without the support of their nobles,* worked from that same tower as far as Ophel's wall.

28Beyond the horse gate, each priest repaired the wall section in front of his own house, 29as did Zadok (Immer's son) and the guard of the east gate, Shemaiah (Shecaniah's son). 30Then Hananiah (Shelemiah's son) and Hanun (Zalaph's sixth-born son) worked on the next section, and Meshullam (Berechiah's son) worked on the section across from where he lived. 31Malchijah, a goldsmith, then repaired *the wall* all the way to the place where the temple servants and the merchants live, the place across from the inspection gate just beyond the room above the corner. 32The goldsmiths and the merchants were the ones responsible for *the final area* between that room and the sheep gate.

4 When word of our *progress in* rebuilding the wall reached Sanballat, he became enraged. His anger spilled over into mockery of the Jews, 2and before his companions and the Samaritan army, *he unleashed a torrent of ridicule and abuse.*

► It is hard to imagine the intense pressures and various points of opposition that Nehemiah has to deal with. First, he has an internal struggle with those Judeans who have married foreign wives—Babylonian, Edomite, Ammonite, Moabite, Samaritan—and have adopted their religious and cultural behaviors that are quite distinct from what is laid forth for Israel in the law of Moses. Further, Nehemiah has an external struggle with individuals like Sanballat the Moabite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab who are violently opposed to the restoration of Jerusalem and her people. These are ancient political, social, and religious enemies to the Jews, and they will stop at nothing to halt Nehemiah's rebuilding efforts.

Sanballat: What are these pathetic Jews up to? Will they appoint themselves to put the wall back together? Would offering sacrifices help them? Will this occur in a day's time? Do they mean to resurrect this charred rubble as a wall?

3Right beside him, Tobiah the Ammonite joined in *the scorn.*

Tobiah: What is it these Jews are building? Surely not a wall—a fox climbing upon it could get through their stone work.

Nehemiah: 4Do You hear this? *Are You paying attention,* our True God? We are worse than nothing *to these men.* Turn their curses back on them. Plunder them. *Pillage them* until they are captives in a *foreign* land. 5Do not cover over their wickedness or erase *the reality of* their sin before you—they have mocked *You right in front of* the men rebuilding *the city for You.*

6We returned to building, focused and determined to work as one people. We stacked *rock upon rock* until one end of the wall met the other and it grew to half of its *original* height.

7When the news that the *few remaining* gaps in the wall were rapidly closing and our city was beginning to heal reached *all the lands surrounding Jerusalem,* Sanballat, Tobiah, some Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites all became furious. 8*In fact, they were so upset* they devised a plot to attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9*Our response to this threat was twofold:* we prayed to our True God, and we set up a watch—day and

night—to look out for them. 10Even so, *everyone was afraid of another attack.*

Judeans: Our builders have grown too
weary to continue.
Look at all this *waste and* rubble
strewn about the ground.
We are not able to rebuild the wall *on*
this foundation.

11And our enemies spread the word.

Enemies: We will sneak in among them. Before they know what is happening, they will be dead. The work will end for sure.

12Next we were confronted by the Jews who lived near our enemies. Over and over again* they warned us.

Jews Outside Jerusalem: You must turn back to us.*

13*So I strengthened our defenses.* I placed men armed with *anything they had on hand*—the swords, spears, and bows *they used to hunt*—at the vulnerable low sections along the wall that were exposed. I organized them by families. 14I stood up and addressed those gathered: nobles, officials, anyone who was close at hand.

Nehemiah: Do not be afraid of these people! *Instead,* remember the Eternal, our great and awesome Lord. Fight for *your people: your sisters and* your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.

15Our enemies *had intended to defeat us through surprise, but they* learned we were aware of their plan *and ready for their attack.* The True God had frustrated them, and so we went back to work on the wall at our assigned places. 16From that day on, I divided my people into two groups. One group worked *on the wall* while the other stood *guard* fully prepared *for battle* in armor, shields, spears, and bows. Officers were *close at hand,* posted right behind the Judean builders. 17-18The builders did their work—now with swords strapped to their sides. Even *common* laborers carrying *building* materials did so while carrying a weapon. I kept the man whose responsibility it was *to warn everyone of attack by* sounding the trumpet with me *at all times.* 19Once again I addressed the nobles, the officials, and the gathered people.

Nehemiah: The massive scope of our important work here has caused us to be spread out across the wall. As a result, we are separated *and vulnerable.* 20Therefore if you hear the sound of the trumpet, *drop what you are doing and* join us where the alarm sounds. *Be assured* our True God will fight for us.

21From the time the sun broke over the horizon until *it set again and* stars filled the sky, we kept working—half of them holding spears.

Nehemiah: 22At night, every laborer and his helper must come inside Jerusalem. Work by day; guard by night.

23We all slept in our clothes—my kinsmen, my servants, and the guards I commanded. And we never set our weapons down, even when we went to get water.

5 As time went on *a different kind of conflict arose—common* men and their wives cried out against some of their fellow Jews.

Jews Without Land: 2Our families are large, and we need food so that along with our children, we will not starve. Let us have grain!

Jewish Landowners: 3As a result of the famine, we are pledging *livelihood,* even our fields, our vineyards, and our homes as a mortgage.

Other Jewish Landowners: 4We are borrowing money so that we can pay King *Artaxerxes'* tax on our fields and vineyards *because of the famine.*

All the Jews: 5Even though we *debtors* are of the same people *as our creditors*—the same flesh, *the same blood*—and even though our children are the same as their children, we are *raising this money for taxes by* selling our children into slavery. In fact, some of our daughters are slaves already. We are helpless *to do anything about it. Why?* Because our fields and our vineyards now belong to our creditors!

* 4:12 Literally, "ten times" * 4:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

Nehemiah is the picture of a benevolent ruler. As a Persian-appointed official, he has the right to exact a sizable tax on the people of Jerusalem. Previous governors have had special jars made for collecting grain and oil and fruit from the people. This food went to support the governor and all of his formal dinners. But Nehemiah does not exact this special tax because he realizes his people are already burdened by the Persians' heavy taxes.

As Artaxerxes' cupbearer, certainly Nehemiah is a wealthy man; therefore he has no need for additional resources from Jerusalem's people. On his own, Nehemiah is able to regularly host all 150 of Jerusalem's officials and frequent diplomats from other provinces, and the abundant meat and wine served at those functions proves that Nehemiah spares no personal expense. He manages to fulfill every duty assigned to him—those required of a Persian governor, and those required of a man of God.

6When I heard this outcry, these charges filled me with anger. 7After reflecting over what to do, I determined to confront *those responsible directly*: the *Jewish* nobles and the officials *who represented Araxerxes' interests in Jerusalem.*

Nehemiah: You are exploiting your own people by charging them interest!

And a great many people assembled to witness my sentencing of the leaders.

Nehemiah: 8At great expense we have been laboring to buy back our brothers *and sisters,* fellow Jews who have been enslaved to *pagan* nations. Now we discover that you are the ones selling them away in the first place—we are buying them from you!

There was nothing they could say; their silence *confirmed their guilt.*

Nehemiah: 9This thing you are doing is not good. Is it not good to walk *and live our lives* in fear *of the awesomeness* of our True God? Your actions cause our enemies, those *pagan* nations, to mock us. 10It is true that my brothers and I—even my followers—are lending money and grain to our *poor* brothers *and sisters so that they can feed themselves and their families. But from this point forward* we must stop charging interest. 11*In fact,* we must immediately return their collateral—fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses—and any interest of money, grain, new wine, and olive oil.

Jewish Nobles and Officials: 12We will give everything back. And *in the future,* nothing *more* will be demanded from them. We will do everything you have said.

I called the priests *to join us* and had these men make oaths *before the gathering* so that they would be held accountable to do what they promised. 13I shook out my robe.

Nehemiah: May the True God likewise shake out from his house and his property anyone who fails to keep his word. May he then be shaken out also, until he, *too,* is emptied.

Everyone *who had gathered in our assembly to witness this* praised the Eternal and *gave their benediction* saying, "So may it be."

All the people did as they promised. 14As long as I had been appointed governor in Judah—for the 12 years from the 20th to the 32nd year of King Artaxerxes' reign *over the Persian Empire*—no one in my family took a salary from the food *tax the empire levied.* 15Every governor who had come before me had *exploited his authority and* levied a stiff tax—a pound of silver a day—and taken food and wine *to supply his own table,* often using unmerciful servants *to extract this payment.* But my fear of the True God kept me from ever acting in the same way. 16(All my attention and resources were devoted to rebuilding the wall. Land acquisition was not the goal of my followers or me.) 17*I went beyond that, however.* I also supplied food for 150 Jews and officials—in addition to diplomats from the surrounding *pagan* nations. 18*All were fed at my table at my expense:* each day an ox, 6 of my best sheep, and some birds were prepared and served alongside a variety of wines that were resupplied every 10 days.

Even with all of this *expense and effort,* I never demanded the food tax which would have been mine to claim as governor because I could see how hard life was for the people and what these demands would cost them.

Nehemiah: 19Remember me for the good I have done, my True God, for how I have served Your people.

6 *Once again, we found that our progress had been reported to our enemies.* Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab (as well as the rest of our adversaries) heard that under my leadership the wall had been rebuilt. Not one gap remained (though the doors still had to be hung on the gates). 2Sanballat and Geshem sent messengers to me.

Sanballat and Geshem's Message: Come and meet with us in the plain of Ono, at *the border village of* Cheriphim.

They were planning to hurt me. 3So *instead of going,* I sent messengers back to them.

Nehemiah's Message: I am in the middle of a great work and cannot *be interrupted. I am not* coming down *to meet with you.* What is so important that I should suspend this great work we are doing to travel to see you?

4This same exchange played out four different times: *they asked for a meeting;* I refused.

5The fifth time I was approached by a servant of Sanballat. He came with the same message, but this time he also carried an unsealed letter in his hand.

Sanballat's Letter: 6A report has gone out to the *surrounding* nations that you are rebuilding the wall because you and your fellow Jews are planning to revolt *against Persia.* Geshem* confirms this report and suggests you are looking to be crowned as king. Rumor has it 7that you have even appointed prophets to announce in Jerusalem, "Judah has a king!" referencing you. *Be assured,* this very report will make it back to King *Artaxerxes.* Meet with us at once.

8My message back to him *was simple.*

Nehemiah's Message: There is nothing to what you are saying. You are making it all up.

9*We knew* our enemies' intent was to intimidate us *into stopping our work.* They reasoned, "These Jews will stop rebuilding out of *fear and* discouragement. Progress will grind to a halt." Instead I *renewed my dedication,* strengthened my hands.

10A little later, I went to see Shemaiah (Delaiah's son and Mehetabel's grandson) who was shut up inside his house.

Shemaiah: *It is not safe here.* Let us leave and go into God's house inside the temple and shut the doors. People are coming to kill you. They will come at night.

Nehemiah: 11Why would a man in my position run *for his life*? Why would a person like me use the temple to save his life *when such contact with God would surely kill me?* I refuse to go into the temple *under such circumstances.*

12-13While I was speaking these words, I realized God had not sent him to me. *God would never tell me to break His laws.* Shemaiah's prophecy was "inspired" by the money of Tobiah and Sanballat. After hearing his message, they thought I would be scared and thus vulnerable to sin. They hoped to use such a lapse in behavior to discredit me.

Nehemiah: 14O my God, remember *these two:* Tobiah and Sanballat. Remember what they have done. And *do not forget their accomplices*—the prophetess Noadiah and her prophetic associates—who have been trying to intimidate me.

15*Even with all that interference,* the wall was soon finished. It was the 25th day of Elul. The work had been accomplished in 52 days. 16When our enemies heard *the work was complete* and the surrounding nations saw *our wall,* their confidence crumbled. Only one possible conclusion could be drawn: it was not just our efforts that had done this thing. God had been working alongside us. 17These developments caused a flurry of correspondence between the nobles of Judah and Tobiah. 18Many *of these nobles* in Judah were tied to Tobiah by a *marriage* oath.

* 6:6 Hebrew, *Gashmu* this one occurrence

Tobiah has married into Jewish families while living in Jerusalem as interim governor, although he serves Sanballat in Samaria.

He was the son-in-law of Shecaniah
(Arah's son), and his son Jehohanan was
married to the daughter of Meshullam
(Berechiah's son). 19These men constantly
praised Tobiah in my presence, describing
his good deeds to me. They also reported
to Tobiah what I said. And still he sent me
his letters; his attempts to intimidate me
were ceaseless.

7 Later, when the wall was completed
and the doors had finally been set in
their places, the *temple* gatekeepers
were appointed *to protect the city,* with
the help of the singers and the Levites.
2I placed Hanani, my brother, in charge
of Jerusalem, along with Hananiah, the
captain of the fortress. Hanani was *honest
and* faithful, and in the fear of God he sur-
passed most men. 3I commissioned these
two men.

Nehemiah: Do not open the gates of Jerusalem while the sun is fully risen; make sure you close and secure the gates, and the gatekeepers will still watch over them. As for the guards, get men who live within Jerusalem. Have some stand watch at the regular stations and have those *whose houses abut the city wall* stand guard in front of their homes.

4While Jerusalem was large and open, its
population was still very small. In fact, no
homes had yet been rebuilt, *and without
people it seemed empty.*

5It was at that time that God inspired
me to gather *those people who were in the
city. I called* the nobles, the officials *of the
city,* and the common folk. I had found the
genealogical record of those who had been
the first to return *to Jerusalem*; this is what
the record showed:

6A list of the Jews exiled under Nebu-
chadnezzar, king of Babylon, living in the
province *of Jerusalem* who returned from
captivity *in Babylon.* They came back to
Jerusalem and other towns around Judah,
each returning to his home. 7*They were the
first to journey back,* following *the leadership
of* Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah,
Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan,
Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The men of the population of Israel,
listed by their family of origin—8Parosh's
descendants: 2,172; 9Shephatiah's descen-
dants: 372; 10Arah's descendants: 652;
11Pahath-moab's descendants (from Jeshua
and Joab's line): 2,818; 12Elam's descen-
dants: 1,254; 13Zattu's descendants: 845;
14Zaccai's descendants: 760; 15Binnui's
descendants: 648; 16Bebai's descendants:
628; 17Azgad's descendants: 2,322; 18Adoni-
kam's descendants: 667; 19Bigvai and his
descendants: 2,067; 20Adin's descendants:
655; 21Ater's descendants (from Hezekiah's
line): 98; 22Hashum's descendants: 328;
23Bezai's descendants: 324; 24Hariph's
descendants: 112; 25Gibeon's descen-
dants: 95.

*The men in the population of Israel
listed by their place of origin*—26the people
of Bethlehem and Netophah: 188; 27the
people of Anathoth: 128; 28the people of
Beth-azmaveth: 42; 29the people of Kiriath-
jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth: 743; 30the
people of Ramah and Geba: 621; 31the
people of Michmas: 122; 32the people of
Bethel and Ai: 123; 33the people of Nebo
(the other one): 52; 34the people of Elam
(the other one): 1,254; 35the people of
Harim: 320; 36the people of Jericho: 345;
37the people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono: 721;
38the people of Senaah: 3,930.

*The men in the population of Israel
listed by their responsibilities*—39the
priestly families—Jedaiah's descendants
(from Jeshua's line): 973; 40Immer's descen-
dants: 1,052; 41Pashhur's descendants:
1,247; 42Harim's descendants: 1,017; 43the
Levitical families—Jeshua's descendants
(from Kadmiel and Hodevah's line): 74.
44The singers—Asaph's descendants: 148.
45The gatekeepers—Shallum's, Ater's,
Talmon's, Akkub's, Hatita's, and Shobai's
descendants: 138. 46The temple servants—
Ziha's, Hasupha's, Tabbaoth's, 47Keros's,
Sia's, Padon's, 48Lebana's, Hagaba's,
Shalmai's, 49Hanan's, Giddel's, Gahar's,
50Reaiah's, Rezin's, Nekoda's, 51Gazzam's,
Uzza's, Paseah's, 52Besai's, Meunim's,
Nephushesim's, 53Bakbuk's, Hakupha's,
Harhur's, 54Bazlith's, Mehida's, Harsha's,
55Barkos's, Sisera's, Temah's, 56Neziah's,
and Hatipha's descendants. 57The
descendants of Solomon's servants—
Sotai's, Sophereth's, Perida's, 58Jaala's,
Darkon's, Giddel's, 59Shephatiah's, Hat-
til's, Pochereth-hazzebaim's, and Amon's
descendants. 60Combined, the temple
servants and descendants of Solomon's
servants added up to 392.

61*At the time of our reckoning,* people
from the *outlying* towns of Tel-melah, Tel-
harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer came

Much like the Urim and Thummim, the exact identity of this book of the law (8:3) cannot be positively known. Most assume this law is some form of the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Those books are the foundational principles for the Jews' proper worship of God, containing some 613 specific laws, so it is likely the text (or at the very least the knowledge) of the Pentateuch would have survived the exile because of its importance. Priests would have cared for it and not let the laws be completely forgotten among their people.

Because of their separation from Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, proper worship of God has been impossible during the exile. After 100 years in foreign lands, the layperson may have remembered to observe the major laws such as "Do not murder," but the details of festivals and Sabbath observance are surely forgotten. So, many years later, it only takes half a day of reading to remind the Jews of their covenant with God and reinvigorate them to serve Him.

into Jerusalem. Their names, however, could not be found in the official record, and they had no records of their own to prove they had descended from the families of Israel. This group included [62]the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda and totaled 642 people. [63]*Three families claiming to come* from priestly families *also returned*: Hobaiah's, Hakkoz's, and Barzillai's descendants. (Barzillai had married a woman descended from Barzillai of Gilead—he took her name as his own). [64]After searching the genealogical records they, too, were unable to find their names, and so they were considered impure and disqualified from *serving in* the priesthood. [65]As the governor *appointed by Persia,** *I* ordered them not to eat any of the sacred food set apart *for priests* until a priest could be found to consult *God on this matter with the sacred stones,* Urim and Thummim.

► Not much is known about these ancient divination devices called Urim and Thummim. They are first mentioned in Exodus 28:30 when God is giving Moses instructions on the clothing for the high priest. These tools were to be carried in the breast piece of judgment, and presumably were only used by the high priest. Suggestions as to their form and function come from the discovery of similar devices in other cultures of the ancient Near East. They may have been flat stones painted different colors, metal objects engraved with symbols, large dice, small sticks, or anything else imaginable. However they may have relayed God's will, they were clearly effective tools used to discover God's will in political situations.

[66]When our census was complete, we numbered 42,360, [67]as well as the 7,337 male and female servants, 245 male and female singers, [68]and *many animals*: 736 horses, 245 mules, [69]435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

[70]Some of the heads of families made contributions so that the work *we had begun could continue*. As the governor, *I* contributed 1,000 gold coins, 50 *gold* bowls, 30 priests' robes, and 630 *pounds of silver*.* [71]Then other family leaders began to give too: 20,000 gold coins and roughly 2,750 pounds of silver. [72]Together the rest of the community added 20,000 gold coins, 2,500 pounds of silver, and 67 priestly robes. [73]Then the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, many common folk, and the rest of Israel returned to live in their towns. This was finished by the beginning of the seventh month.

8 *When everyone had settled,* they regathered *in Jerusalem*. Everyone met in the square that is in front of the water gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the book of the law, *the word* the Eternal sent through Moses to Israel. [2]Ezra the priest did *as they asked,* bringing God's law *to Israel*. The community included both men and women—anyone who was able to understand *was welcomed*. This

* 7:65 Hebrew, *the Tirshatha* * 7:70 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

gathering took place on the first day of the seventh month. 3Facing *the people in* the square, next to the water gate, he began to read *excerpts. The document was massive, and just reading parts took him six or seven hours,* from daybreak until noon. Everyone who was there heard him: men, women—anyone with the ability to understand. *As he read,* they were focused and listened carefully to the book of the law.

4*And as he read,* Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform made for this very occasion. To his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. To his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5Standing above the people so they could see *and hear him,* Ezra opened the book of the law. As he opened the book, everyone stood. 6Then Ezra *called out and* blessed the Eternal, worshiping God's greatness. With their hands raised *to the heavens,* the people *called out loudly* in response, crying, "Amen! So may it be!" Then they fell *to their knees* and bowed. With their faces to the ground, they worshiped the Eternal. 7-8Ezra read the law, *the people listened,* and the Levites explained it to them. Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—these are the Levites* who interpreted what Ezra read for the people.

9Now, as God's law was read, the people began to weep. But Nehemiah (the *Persians' appointed* governor),* Ezra the priest and scribe, and all the ministering Levites said to the people,

Leaders: This day is sacred to the Eternal One, your God. It is not a day for mourning and weeping.

Ezra: 10Go *back to your homes, and prepare a feast.* Bring out the best food and drink you have, and welcome *all to your table, especially* those who have nothing. This day is special. It is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve *over your past mistakes.* Let the Eternal's own joy be your protection!

Levites: 11Be still. This is sacred time *and space.* Do not mourn.

12Then the celebration really began. The people had heard *God's* words and understood them. When the people went away to eat and to drink *in their homes,* no one was left out of the feasting, *not even the poor.*

13The next day, the heads of every family, along with the priests and the Levites, regathered around Ezra the scribe to further study God's law. 14As they studied the law, they discovered that through Moses, the Eternal had commanded Israel to live in temporary shelters during the Feast *of Booths* of the seventh month. 15So they issued a proclamation, and it went out to everyone in Jerusalem and in every town that people should go into the hills to gather branches from olive trees, wild olive trees, myrtle trees, palm trees—any kind of leafy tree they could find. *With these branches they were told* to build temporary shelters *to house them during the festival,* as God's law declared. 16So the people went out and gathered branches. They built temporary shelters *anywhere they could*—on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the temple courts, in the squares by the water gate and the gate of Ephraim. 17Everyone who had returned from exile—all *42,360* people—made the temporary shelters and lived in them. From the time of Joshua (Nun's son) until that very day, no one in Israel had observed the festival in this way, *remembering those from the Egyptian exile too.* So they celebrated, and their joy was great. 18Throughout everything, Ezra continued to read from the book of God's law, day by day. The celebration of the feast continued for seven days. On the eighth day, in keeping with the directions given, Israel gathered for a solemn assembly.

9 Later, on the 24th day of that same month, the Israelites came back together. Everyone fasted and wore sackcloth *to show their repentance.* They covered their heads with dust *to show their mourning.* 2They also separated themselves from the foreigners *who were living among them.* Then the Israelites stood up and confessed their sins and the sins of their *dead* ancestors. 3For three hours* they stood in their *designated* places and read from the book of the Eternal's law. Following that they confessed and worshiped the Eternal One, their True God, for another three hours. 4On the stairs *above them* stood the Levites: Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah,

* 8:7-8 Hebrew manuscripts read, "and the Levites." * 8:9 Hebrew, *the Tirshatha* * 9:3 Literally, one-fourth of the day (daylight hours)

Bani, and Chenani. With loud cries they called out to the Eternal, their True God.
5The *same* Levites (Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah) instructed *the people*.

Levites: Stand up! Worship the Eternal who is your God who exists from everlasting to everlasting.

May Your glorious name be praised—
even lifted up beyond all blessing and praise.
6You are the Eternal, the only One.
The skies are Your work *alone*—
You made the heavens above those skies
and the stars that fill them.
You made the earth and everything upon it,
the seas and all that lives within their depths.
Your creation lives and is sustained by You,
and those who dwell in the heavens
Fall down before You and worship.
7You are the Eternal God.
You chose Abram and drew him out from Ur of the Chaldees.
You changed his name to Abraham.
8In him You found *a true heart,*
a heart devoted to You.
With him You made a covenant that the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites,
The Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites
would belong *to him and* to his descendants.
And what You have promised, You have done
because You are righteous.

9When our ancestors suffered in Egypt,
You saw their misery.
When they were trapped at the edge of the Red Sea,
You heard their cries *for help*.
10-11Pharaoh and all who served him
and all his subjects were completely overwhelmed
by the signs and wonders You performed.
In their arrogance, they opposed Your people, *our ancestors*.
So You opened the sea, and Your people walked through the water on dry ground,
and no one has forgotten the name of the One who did it to this day.
But the Egyptians pursued our ancestors into the sea,
You threw those running after our ancestors into the depths *of the sea,*
like a *heavy* rock hurled into water.
12During the day, You led them by a cloud shaped like a pillar.
During the night, a pillar of fire lit the way, showing them where to go.
13*You led them* to Mount Sinai;
and when they arrived, You came down from heaven and spoke to them.
You gave them right decrees and good laws,
beneficial statutes and commands *revealing Your will for them*.
14You revealed to Your people Your sacred Sabbath
and how to keep it holy.
Through Your servant Moses You taught them how to live,
giving commands and decrees.
15When Your people were hungry,
You gave them food from heaven.
When they were thirsty, You made water flow out of a rock.
You told them to enter the land You promised them.
You told them to enter and take possession of it.
16-17But our ancestors *resisted following You*.
They were arrogant. They were proud.
They refused to obey Your commands, plugging their ears.
Knowing what You had done for them *in the past,*
They *willfully* forgot *it in the present*.
Stubborn. *Rebellious.*
Instead of following You,
They appointed their own leader to take them back to *the land of* their oppression—to Egypt!
But You are *not like us,* God.
You are filled with love, compassion, and forgiveness.
You endure much with your anger and display Your loyal love;
You did not abandon them,
18Even when they molded a cow *out of gold* for themselves, saying,
"This is the god who rescued us from Egypt."
They committed horrible atrocities.

19 In Your incomprehensible compassion,
You did not abandon them in the wilderness.
The pillar of cloud didn't evaporate;
day by day it guided them.
The pillar of fire was not extinguished;
night by night it led them along the right paths.
20 *In Your generosity,* You gave them Your good Spirit to teach them.
Not once did You hold back manna for their mouths
or drink for their thirst.
21 In 40 years *of living* in the wilderness,
You provided for every need they had:
Their clothing did not wear out,
nor did their feet swell *from endless walking.*
22 You gave them kingdoms and peoples
that they could divide up to the corners of their territory:
The country of Sihon (king of Hesbon)
and the territory of Og (king of Bashan).
23 The children of Israel multiplied
and rivaled the stars in the sky.
You brought them to the very land
You promised *Abraham's*
His descendants would come into and possess.
24 Into the land they went, and it became theirs.
For our forefathers You made sure
even the Canaanites there were powerless.
You subdued everything and everyone to their power—
land, kings, and people—to do with as they pleased.
25 They overwhelmed strong *and secure* cities.
They overtook fertile, *productive* land.
They claimed well-furnished houses, wells that were already dug,
vineyards, olive groves, and orchards filled with fruit.
They ate their fill. They grew fat.
They basked in Your generosity and goodness.
26 Even so, again they chose to defy You.
They rebelled.
They abandoned Your law.
They killed the prophets who spoke Your word,
who pleaded with them to return to You, *God.*
And *again,* atrocities multiplied *on top of atrocities.*
27 So You surrendered them to their enemies,
and Your people suffered at their hands.
And in pain, they cried out to You.
From heaven You listened,
And in keeping with Your *changeless and* compassionate character,
You sent them liberators,
Saviors who rescued them from their cruel adversaries.
28 As soon as they were at peace, they *began to wander and* abandoned You
and did evil things, so You abandoned them to their enemies.
Thus, *once more,* You allowed them to be conquered.
Somehow Your mercy is inexhaustible.
Once more You listened to them when they cried to You in heaven *for help.*
Over and over and over You intervened and saved Your people.
29 You also warned them to return to *Your ways*
and follow the laws You have given.
They arrogantly violated the very commands,
Which if they would obey them then they would live *by them.*
Stubborn, they turned away from You,
tensed their necks, and stopped listening.
30 Year after year, Your patience endured.
Your Spirit animated prophets, and they spoke *many* warnings to them.
In not listening *and turning away from the prophets,*
they turned directly into their advancing enemies.
31 It was because of Your great mercy
that they were not completely annihilated or forsaken.
You are a grace-filled and mercy-laden God;
32 Our True God—You who are great, majestic, and awesome,
You who always keep Your covenant of loyal love—
do not overlook the trouble we are facing *here today.*
This trouble confronts us all:
our kings and our princes,

our priests and our prophets,
our ancestors and all of Your people—
From the time of the Assyrian kings until today.
33You are righteous in all that You have done to us.
You have faithfully upheld Your part *of the covenant,*
but we have acted with evil.
34None of our kings, princes, priests, or ancestors followed Your law.
They actively rejected Your commands and ignored the many warnings You sent.
35*Even when they had everything*—
when they ruled in their own land without worry according to Your great generosity,
When they relaxed into the spacious and fertile land
You set before them—
Even then they refused to serve You or turn away from their wicked ways.
36And we are once again slaves in the bountiful land
You gave to our ancestors for our pleasure and enjoyment—
we are slaves in our own land!
37We have *sown* sin, and the labor we provide on this land feeds the kings You have placed over us.
Our bodies and our beasts do not belong to us,
But to them, and they do with us what they want.
Our distress is great.
38In light of it, we are writing a covenantal agreement.
It is sealed with the names of our leaders, our Levites, and our priests.

► So moved by the instructions Ezra reads in the book of the law, the Jews cannot help but respond to them. After honoring God with a lavish feast—the Festival of Booths—acknowledging His role in liberating the Hebrews from Egypt and the Jews from Persia, everyone confesses God's greatness and their own people's shortcomings. Ezra has reminded them that God is fair; He gives them the law to warn them of and protect them from His judgments. And even when they break that law, He is unendingly merciful and faithful. God always remembers His people, rescues them, and begins fresh relationships with them. It is no wonder that everyone is so eager and joyous to sign a renewed covenant with Him.

10 The covenant was *signed and* sealed with the following names: Nehemiah (the governor and son of Hacaliah), Zedekiah, 2Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests. 9The Levites *listed* were Jeshua (Azaniah's son), Binnui (one of Henadad's sons), Kadmiel; 10also their brothers: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu. 14The leaders of the people *listed* were Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

28Everyone else—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, and all those who separated themselves from their foreign neighbors in order to obey God's law, along with all their wives and sons and daughters who are old enough to understand—29everyone joins with their leaders and relatives and binds himself with an oath and a curse to carefully *observe and* obey the way God has placed before us through His servant Moses—with all its commands, rules, and decrees. These are the Eternal Lord's *laws and judgments*:

30Our daughters will not be married to the sons of any of our foreign neighbors. We will not allow our sons to marry their daughters.

31If any of our foreign neighbors come to sell their goods, their grain, *or their produce* on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them then or on any holy day.

Every seven years, every Jew *everywhere* will allow the land to rest *for one year*. We will not work on it; *we will not make it work*. We will also cancel all *outstanding* debts, *freeing any Israelite who has become enslaved to a creditor*.

32We are committing to tax ourselves as well. Every year *each man* will pay eight ounces of silver to care for God's temple. 33*This tax will pay* for bread for the table; for the daily grain and burnt offerings; for offerings made on Sabbaths, new moon festivals, and all other yearly feasts; *it will pay* for the holy offerings and for the sin offerings to cover Israel's sins. *We are obligating ourselves to provide* for everything that is necessary for the working of the temple of our God.

34The priests, the Levites, and the people have drawn lots to decide which ancestral family will be responsible for bringing the wood that burns on the Eternal's altar in God's temple. Each family will be appointed times *of the year,* in every year, *to fill this need* as the law says it should be done.*

35It is also our responsibility *to support the temple workers through our offerings.* We will bring to the temple the first part of every crop, *grain* from the earth and fruit from the tree alike, every year. 36We will also bring all of our firstborns and give them to the priests working at the temple—our *firstborn* sons and cattle, our firstborn from our flocks and our herds—as the law of God says.* 37-38We will bring to the priests the best of our coarse meal* (which is a sacred contribution), the fruit of our trees, and our new wine and oil—to be placed in the storerooms of our God's temple *instead of used in the sanctuary*. One-tenth of our crops will go for the Levites. When the Levites come to our towns to collect our offerings, we will make sure there is also a priest from Aaron's house with them who will bring the tithes to the house of the Eternal and its storehouse. 39The Levites and the Israelites must bring the offerings of grain, new wine, and *olive* oil to the storerooms *of the temple* where the sacred containers are kept, where the working priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers gather.

We all agree—we will not neglect the temple of our God.

11 The leaders of the people lived in the holy city of Jerusalem. The rest of the population drew lots, and one out of every ten of them came to live in Jerusalem also. The other nine-tenths stayed in their towns.

Living in Jerusalem at this time is not ideal for raising a family. Jerusalem in every way is the target of opposition, both from foreign nations and domestic enemies.

2So when others decided, on their own, to settle in Jerusalem willingly, the people *were grateful,* blessing *and thanking* them.

3These are the leaders of the provinces who came to live in Jerusalem. (Most of the people of Israel—*common folk,* priests, Levites, servants in the temple, and those who were descendants of Solomon's servants—continued to live in their own homes in towns around Judah, 4though some of the people from Judah and Benjamin decided to settle in Jerusalem.)

From Judah's tribe: Athaiah, Uzziah's son—who is the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel—the family line of Perez; 5Maaseiah, Baruch's son—who is the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of a Shilonite. 6There were 468 descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem, all of them courageous soldiers.

7From Benjamin's tribe: Sallu, Meshullam's son—who is the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah; 8Gabbai and Sallai followed him. There were 928 *men from the tribe of Benjamin.* 9They were led by Joel, Zichri's son. Judah, Hassenuah's son, was second in command over the city.

10From the priests: Jedaiah, Joiarib's son; Jachin; 11Seraiah, Hilkiah's son—the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub (who was supervisor of God's temple). 12There were 822 of their relatives who ran the temple. Also Adaiah, Jeroham's son—the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, 13and his relatives who were also the heads of families. They numbered 242 men. Amashsai, Azarel's son—the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, 14and their relatives. There were 128 courageous warriors, led by Zabdiel, Haggedolim's son.

* 10:34 Leviticus 6:12-13 * 10:36 Numbers 18:15-18 * 10:37-38 Literally, "dough"

15From the Levites: Shemaiah, Hasshub's son—the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; 16Shabbethai and Jozabad, the Levite leaders who were responsible for the work being done on the outside of God's temple; 17Mattaniah, Mica's son—the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph. Mattaniah was the *worship* leader who would lead us in thanksgiving prayers. His assistant was Bakbukiah; also Abda, Shammua's son—the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. 18There were 284 Levites in the holy city *of Jerusalem.*

19From the gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon, and the rest of their relatives who watched over the gates were 172 men. 20All of the rest of the Israelites, priests, and Levites lived on their family's land in Judah. 21The temple servants lived on *the hill of* Ophel. Ziha and Gishpa were their leaders.

22The leader of the Levites living in Jerusalem was Uzzi, Bani's son—the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. Uzzi was a descendant of Asaph, who led the singers in worship in the temple. 23The singers answered directly to *Judah's* king *before the conquest,* and he gave them their responsibilities day to day. 24*Now,* Pethahaiah, Meshezabel's son—a descendant of Zerah, Judah's son—advised the king *in Persia* about the concerns the people had *in Jerusalem.*

25*The returning Israelites lived in Jerusalem's* surrounding cities, near their farms. Some of the descendants of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages. 26They also lived in Jeshua, Moladah, Bethpelet, 27Hazar-shual, Beersheba and its villages, 28Ziklag, Meconah and its villages, 29En-rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, 30Zanoah, Adullam and its towns, Lachish and its farms, Azekah and its villages. Their settlement stretched from Beersheba all the way to the valley of Hinnom, *covering the area God had given to Judah and his descendants.*

31The Benjaminites lived in Geba, Michmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages, 32Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, 33Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, 34Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, 35Lod, Ono, and in the valley of the craftsmen. 36Some of the Levites from Judah were sent to live in Benjamin's *settlements.*

12 These are the priests and the Levites who returned with Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son) and Jeshua *the high priest. The priests were* Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, 5Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their relatives during the time of Jeshua. 8In addition the Levites *who returned* were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, and Judah; Mattaniah and his brothers were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. 9Their brothers Bakbukiah and Unni stood across from them in worship and led *half of the responsive singing.* 10Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim was the father of Eliashib, Eliashib was the father of Joiada, 11Joiada was the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

12During the time of Joiakim's *high priesthood,* these were the leaders of the priestly families: from Seraiah's family—Meraiah; from Jeremiah's family—Hananiah; 13from Ezra's family—Meshullam; from Amariah's family—Jehohanan; 14from Malluchi's family—Jonathan; from Shebaniah's family—Joseph; 15from Harim's family—Adna; from Meraioth's family—Helkai; 16from Iddo's family—Zechariah; from Ginnethon's family—Meshullam; 17from Abijah's family—Zichri; from Miniamin and Moadiah's families—Piltai; 18from Bilgah's family—Shammua; from Shemaiah's family—Jehonathan; 19from Joiarib's family—Mattenai; from Jedaiah's family—Uzzi; 20from Sallai's family—Kallai; from Amok's family—Eber; 21from Hilkiah's family—Hashabiah; from Jedaiah's family—Nethanel.

22During the time of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, the Levites were listed by the heads of their families when Darius of Persia reigned; the practice was the same for the priests. 23-24In the book of the chronicles, the Levites who were listed as the heads of families, until the time of Johanan (Eliashib's son), were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua (Kadmiel's son). Their brothers stood across from them in worship and led the other half of the responsive singing following the instructions of David, the man of God. 25The gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms inside the gate were Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub. 26These men fulfilled their responsibilities during the time of Joiakim (Jeshua's son and Jozadak's grandson), and

Two very important characteristics of Jewish belief and behavior that set them apart from other peoples are endogamy and Sabbath: The Jewish people can only marry within and among their various tribes. After the exile the choices are limited to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but there is still opportunity for marriage and family. However, the Jews are forbidden to practice exogamy, which is marriage outside their ethnic group. The Eternal does not want the ideas and activities of other nations to influence His special people. Second, as with many of God's instructions to Israel, the Sabbath observance reflects God's activities in "creation week" in Genesis 1–2. The Sabbath or seventh-day rest is unique in the ancient world; and it signifies that Israel's Eternal One is over all aspects of creation, work, play, and rest. Nehemiah understands this, and he is direct in his instructions to this new Judean community.

in the time of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

27Finally, the time came to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem. Levites were tracked down from all over to perform the dedication ceremonies in Jerusalem. They celebrated joyously *and led the people* in songs of thanksgiving, *worshiping with abandon.* They played cymbals and harps and other stringed instruments *they could carry.* 28Singers from all around Jerusalem also came—from the villages of the Netophathites, 29from Beth-gilgal and the farms at Geba and Azmaveth. The singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem *where they lived.* 30The priests and the Levites *ended the ceremonies by* purifying themselves and then the people, the wall, and the gates.

31Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall. I had organized two large choirs *to lead us in thanksgiving.* One of the choirs walked *south* along the wall to the right, toward the potsherd gate. 32Behind that choir marched Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah. 33This group included Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah. 35-36Some of the young priests played trumpets. Others played the same instruments David, the man of God, played. They came next: Zechariah, Jonathan's son—the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph—and his brothers Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. This group was led by Ezra the scribe. 37At the fountain gate, they went up the steps of the city of David, climbing the city wall, passing the house of David on their way to the water gate to the east.*

38The other choir went to the left. Along with the remaining people up on the wall, I followed them *north* from the oven tower to the broad wall. 39We went over the Ephraim gate, the old gate, the fish gate, the tower of Hananel, and all the way to the tower of the hundred. We went through the sheep gate and stopped when we arrived at the guard's gate. 40As they arrived at the temple of God, both choirs took their places, *all the while giving thanks.* Those of us leaders in the second group joined them. 41We followed the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah played their trumpets 42while Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer sang. *The musicians were playing loudly* and the singers were singing. Jezrahiah led them, 43*and together the sounds filled the city*. Everyone was rejoicing and making sacrifices to God in their great joy—even the women and children got involved. Far outside Jerusalem the noise from our celebration could be heard.

44That same day, we appointed men to be in charge of the storerooms that held *everyone's offerings*—all their contributions, best offerings, and *monetary* tithes. These administrators were in charge of collecting from all of the villages the offerings set aside by the law for the priests and the Levites. Everyone was grateful to the priests and the Levites *and were happy to contribute* for all that they did. 45Just as David and his son Solomon instructed them to do, they served God and purified the people with the help of the singers and gatekeepers. 46It was *during the united monarchy* long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, that it became customary

* 12:37 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

to have choir directors lead the singers in songs of worship and thanksgiving to God. 47In these times of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, the people of Israel also contributed a daily supply of food so that the singers and the gatekeepers had enough to eat. They also designated consecrated portions for the Levites' share, who set aside food for *the priests—who are* Aaron's descendants.

13 Later that day, when the book of Moses was being read to the people, we discovered a passage that said no Ammonite or Moabite should be allowed to enter the *sacred* gatherings of God's *people.**

2This prohibition went back to the time *when our ancestors wandered in the desert*—when the Ammonites and the Moabites refused to welcome the Israelites with food and drink. In fact, they hired Balaam to curse them. But *it didn't work.* God turned the curse into a blessing. 3As soon as people heard what *God's* law said, they excluded anyone with any non-Israelite descent from Israel.

4-5Before that happened, the priest named Eliashib took a large storeroom in the temple of God and gave it to Tobiah *the Ammonite* for his use. Eliashib was in charge of the storerooms, and Tobiah was a relative of his. Before *he gave it to Tobiah,* it had been used to store *many different things for use in the temple:* the grain offerings, the incense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, new wine, and *olive* oil for the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers—also the offerings for the priests. 6I was not in Jerusalem when Eliashib did this. It was the 32nd year of *the reign of* Artaxerxes, king of Persia,* and I had returned *to make a report* to him. Later on I asked his permission to return 7to Jerusalem. When I arrived, I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done by giving Tobiah a room in the courts of the temple of the True God, *a place he wasn't even allowed to enter because of his heritage.* 8I was livid. *In my anger,* I threw all of Tobiah's property out of the room. 9Then I had them purify the rooms and restore what was supposed to be there—the sacred vessels, the grain offerings, and the incense.

10I also learned that the portion *of the offering* that belonged to the Levites had not been given to them. As a result, the Levites and singers who were responsible for leading God's people in worship returned to work on their farms instead. 11I went straight to the leaders *responsible for this* and confronted them, asking, "Why are you neglecting God's temple?" I reassembled the leaders who had returned home and placed them back at their posts. 12*This allowed* the people of Judah to bring their tithes of grain, wine, and *olive* oil into the storehouses again. 13I placed trustworthy men in charge of the storerooms: Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah. I brought Hanan (Zaccur's son and Mattaniah's grandson) on as their assistant. It was their responsibility to make sure the daily rations were distributed to their relatives.

Nehemiah: 14O God—my God—remember this good thing I have done. Do not forget the way I have served Your temple and its servants.

15At that same time, I looked around Judah and saw men working the winepresses on the Sabbath. Others I found bringing *large* loads of grain to be loaded on donkeys. Wine, grapes, figs—they brought every kind of load into Jerusalem on the Sabbath *no matter the season.* I warned them about selling food on the Sabbath, *just as they were doing it.* 16There were men from Tyre living in Jerusalem. They also brought fish and all kinds of merchandise *into Jerusalem* and sold it to the people of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem. 17I confronted the leaders of Judah, *whom I held responsible for the public's actions.*

Nehemiah: Why are you doing what *you know* is wicked? You are desecrating the Sabbath! 18Tell me how this is different from what we just confessed about our ancestors *and their sin.* This is the thing that provoked God's judgment and the destruction of this very city. You are fueling the fire of judgment for Israel by desecrating the Sabbath!

19*As the sun was setting* before the Sabbath and darkness fell over Jerusalem's gates, I ordered the doors to be closed. I required them to remain closed until the Sabbath ended. I placed some of my own guards by the gates to ensure no load *of merchandise* could be brought into the city during the Sabbath, *but Jerusalem's citizens could still*

* 13:1 Deuteronomy 23:3-6 * 13:6 Hebrew manuscripts read, "king of Babylon."

come and go. 20On a couple of different occasions, some traders and merchants of a great variety of goods slept *by the gates* outside the wall. 21They also received a warning from me.

Nehemiah: What are you up to, sleeping here outside the wall? If I find you here again, you will be removed by force!

They never came back on the Sabbath again. 22I ordered the Levites to go through the purifying rituals and then to come back and guard the gates so that the Sabbath would be kept holy.

Nehemiah: O God—my God—remember my actions. Because of Your great love, show me mercy.

23During that same time, I witnessed men from Judah marrying women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah *or understand our laws* but only the languages of their peoples. 25I rebuked and cursed them. Some of them I beat, and I tore out their hair. I made them take an oath in the name of God.

Nehemiah: You will not let your daughters marry their sons, nor will you accept their daughters as wives for yourselves or your sons! 26This is the very thing that caused King Solomon's downfall. In all the world, there was no king like him. God loved him *dearly* and made him king over all Israel. Yet these foreign wives led Solomon into sin. 27Now we discover that you have embraced the same wicked ways, betraying our God by marrying these foreign women.

28Even the family of High Priest Eliashib was guilty. One of his grandsons, a son of Joiada, married one of the daughters of Sanballat the Horonite. I drove him away from me.

Nehemiah: 29O God—my God—remember how these men polluted the priesthood and the sacred vows of the priests and Levites.

30Once more we went through the rituals of purification, removing every foreign object. I reassigned the priests and the Levites to their tasks; *everyone had a specific job to do*. 31I made sure the altar was supplied with the offering of wood and the *offerings of* firstfruits, too—each at the right time.

Nehemiah: O God—my God—remember me with favor.

ESTHER

The Jews are rescued from certain annihilation by a brave young queen

By an unknown Jew living in Persia

Pretty Hadassah, evil Haman, and wise Mordecai meet and match wits in a royal drama amid feasting in the winter palace of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) in Susa. (Persia occupied the region of modern Iran.)

Haman, likely descended from the Jews' early enemies the Amalekites, becomes obsessed with ridding the Persian Empire of Jews, especially his rival Mordecai, Hadassah's older cousin and guardian. When Queen Vashti is deposed, Hadassah becomes Queen Esther after an empire-wide search. Meanwhile, Mordecai overhears an assassination plot, thus saving the king's life. Following a series of plot reversals, Esther and Mordecai succeed in gaining the Persian king's favor, and the king himself vanquishes their enemy Haman.

The Jews, ever the outsiders as they seek to establish and maintain a permanent earthly home, provide a study of contrasts with the antagonists. They counter the often-drunken feasting with fasts before they take action. Against abusive power, they show courage and apply cleverness. The Persian men fear the independence of women and thus depose Vashti, but it is the boldness of her successor, Esther, that changes the course of history.

Esther's story evokes the recurring biblical theme of a promised remnant. Earlier, Joseph's service to the Egyptian pharaoh allowed him to secure his family's well-being and lineage during a deadly famine. He told his brothers how God had put him in his position to preserve their family (Genesis 45:7). In a similar reversal, the Jews in Persia are able to defeat their tormentors because Esther also attains a high position in a foreign palace. Although a remnant of Jews has already returned to Jerusalem, the remnant in Persia is still struggling to preserve their heritage.

This event is the origin of the Feast of Purim (named after the *pur,* which is a "lot" or object used to make decisions). Jews still observe Purim annually to remember God's deliverance on the day decided by lot to be their day of destruction. During Purim, children especially enjoy wearing masks and costumes to enact an important aspect of Esther's story: because the Jews were highly assimilated into Persian society, mistaken identity played a role in their survival.

God is not explicitly mentioned in the Book of Esther, but it is His work through Esther and Mordecai that saves the Jews. The reader senses the hand of God, as evil is thwarted, goodness is rewarded, and the Jews are once again saved from their enemies. The human role in the salvation drama is highlighted in Mordecai's famous challenge to Esther to risk her life for her people: "And who knows? Perhaps you have been made queen for such a time as this" (4:14).

1 The following events occurred *in Persia* during the reign of King Ahasuerus, the same man who ruled 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. 2In those days King Ahasuerus' throne was in the citadel of Susa. 3During the 3rd year of his reign, Ahasuerus gathered together all of *Persia's ruling authorities*—nobles and officials, leaders of Persia and Media, and nobles of his provinces*—for a *grand, state* banquet. 4For 180 days, King Ahasuerus continuously paraded his glorious kingdom's riches and the splendor of his own notoriety *in front of his nobles. Day after day the party continued with Persia's grandeur on display.*

► Kings in general, and Persian kings in particular, enjoy throwing lavish feasts and banquets for honored guests. It is their best opportunity to show off their wealth and power. Occasions like this are useful for impressing and intimidating foreign agents, making treaties and deals, maintaining the illusion of greatness, making the powerless feel especially helpless, and even bullying would-be troublemakers. It is during these occasions that much of the business of ruling is accomplished. But only men are allowed at this party.

5After these days *of feasting* were over, the king held another banquet for all who lived in the citadel of Susa. For seven days, wealthy and poor men alike *danced, drank, and made merry* together in the *lush* enclosed gardens of King Ahasuerus' palace. 6His gardens were lavishly dressed with white and blue linen draperies, which hung from large marble pillars and were tied to silver rings with cord made out of fine purple linen. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a grand patio—a mosaic *beautifully* crafted of *crystalline burgundy* porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl stone, and other beautiful* stones. 7King Ahasuerus generously served his guests wine from the royal cellar in goblets made out of gold, each uniquely designed. 8But no one was required to drink. The king merely ordered his servants to let his guests do as they wished. 9Meanwhile, *as the men enjoyed the goodwill of King Ahasuerus,* Queen Vashti gathered all of the women together for a celebration in one of the banquet halls of the royal palace.

10On the seventh *and last* day *of the celebration,* when the king was in a very good mood from the wine, he gave *special* orders to his eunuchs, who served as his personal assistants. (These seven men were Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas.)

King Ahasuerus: 11Bring Queen Vashti to my party! Tell her to put on her royal crown *and to wear her finest clothes.* I want to show off her beauty in front of my distinguished guests.

He did this because Queen Vashti was very beautiful. 12But when she heard the king's order from his eunuchs, she refused to join him *and his guests.* King Ahasuerus was infuriated when he heard *the news from his assistants. In fact, the more he thought of it, the more* King Ahasuerus burned with anger.

13*Immediately,* King Ahasuerus called a meeting with his wise counsel, men who understood the laws and customs *that had made the Persian Empire great.* 14These seven nobles—the king's most elite confidants—came from Persia and Media and were named Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan.

King Ahasuerus: 15Queen Vashti has *blatantly defied me and* refused the order I gave her through my assistants! *Tell me, good men,* what do the laws *of this land* suggest should be done to a queen *who has disobeyed her king*?

Memucan *(before the king and nobles)*:
16Your queen has wronged you, my king. She has also offended every noble *of the land* and all the people who reside in your provinces. *Something must be done!* 17*If we don't act quickly,* every woman in this kingdom will hear about Queen Vashti's disrespect *for you* and they will follow *her example* in dishonoring their husbands. *I can hear the women now, talking among each other:* "*Why should we listen to our husbands* when Queen Vashti doesn't come when King Ahasuerus calls for her?" 18This day the noble women of Persia and Media who hear

* 1:3 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 1:6 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

what the queen has done will respond in kind to your nobles, and there will be chaos *all across the land.*

19But my king, *don't worry; I have an idea!* With your permission, *of course,* I recommend that a decree be issued among the Persians and the Medes, a law which cannot be repealed, that forbids Vashti from ever being allowed in your presence again. *In fact, I would further suggest* that you give her position to another woman, someone who is more honorable than she is. 20As your subjects hear about your decree in the far reaches of your kingdom, all the women will *stop and* give their husbands the honor *they deserve,* those of royal blood as well as the commoners. Oh, this is a great *idea*!

21Memucan's advice was well received by the king and his advisors.

King Ahasuerus: *That is a brilliant idea!* I say we make Memucan's counsel into law!

22The king drafted letters and sent them to all of his provinces. *His emissaries spread the news quickly at the king's directive that* each province receive the decree in their own script and language: "*In Persia* every man will be master of his own home and speak in the language of his own people—*regardless of the language his wife speaks.*"

2 A little while later, when King Ahasuerus was no longer angry, he began thinking about Vashti, her actions *that night at the party,* and his decision to dismiss her *from his presence.* 2*Seeing the king's mood,* his servants had a suggestion.

Servants: *King Ahasuerus,* someone should find beautiful young women *who are old enough to be married* for you. 3We suggest you appoint officers in every province of Persia to round up every eligible woman and add her to your harem in the citadel of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch who is in charge of the harem, will see to it that all of the women are properly prepared and receive all the needed cosmetics. 4Then whichever young woman delights you the most will reign as queen in Vashti's place.

King Ahasuerus liked the advice *of his servants* and *gave them permission to* execute the plan.

5Meanwhile in the citadel of Susa, there was a Jewish man from the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai. He was the son of Jair who was a descendent of Shimei and Kish. 6It was at the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that Jeconiah (king of Judah) and Mordecai's ancestors had been forced out of *the city of* Jerusalem to live as exiles in Babylon. 7Mordecai had a cousin who was a young and beautiful girl named Hadassah, and she was also called Esther. After her mother and father died, Mordecai adopted her *into his family* as his daughter.

8As the result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the royal palace in the citadel of Susa, and she was put in the care of Hegai (who was in charge of the harem). 9Esther soon impressed Hegai and was favored. He arranged that she be given the *most lustrous* beauty treatments and fed *the finest fruits and vegetables from the king's garden.* He assigned to her seven servants and moved her and her servants to the harem's finest rooms. 10Mordecai had instructed Esther to keep her *Jewish* heritage a secret, and so she told no one. *Still her cousin worried about her.* 11Every day Mordecai paced back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to see if he could find out some news, *any news,* about Esther.

12Before going in to the king, each young woman went through 12 months of beauty treatments, as the harem's rules prescribed. For the first 6 months the women were treated with *the palace's finest* myrrh oil, and that was followed by 6 months in perfume and other women's cosmetics. 13This is how a young woman would go in to the king: each woman was allowed to take whatever she wanted *or needed* from the harem into the king's rooms. 14In the evening the woman would go in *to King Ahasuerus' chambers* and then, the next morning, she would return to the harem again, but now she would be watched over by Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of his concubines. No woman returned to the king's rooms unless he was pleased by her and called for her by name.

15Esther was the daughter of Abihail who *in turn* was the uncle of Mordecai. When it was time for Esther, whom Mordecai had adopted, to go in to the king, she didn't ask for anything special. She took only what Hegai suggested. Since he was the king's eunuch in charge of the women,

he would know what was best. Now Esther *had some special qualities, and* all who met her favored her. 16In the 10th month (the month of Tebeth) during the 7th year of his reign, *four years after King Ahasuerus dethroned Queen Vashti,* Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in the king's rooms. 17The king found her to be more desirable than all of the other women. Unlike the other young women *brought before him,* she alone won his heart and his favor. So he made her his queen instead of Vashti and placed the royal crown on her head. 18King Ahasuerus invited all of the nobles and officials to a *state* banquet in honor of Esther, *his new queen*. He declared that day as a holiday throughout his entire kingdom and distributed extravagant gifts.

19When the young women were gathered together for a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the palace gate *where the men gathered for business and legal decisions*. 20Since Mordecai had required Esther to keep her Jewish heritage a secret, she had told no one. She continued to obey him as she did when he took care of her. 21One day while Mordecai was at the gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the door, were plotting to kill King Ahasuerus. They were angry *over some matter*. 22But Mordecai learned of their plan and reported it to Queen Esther who told the king about the plot, giving credit to her cousin. 23After a thorough investigation, the report was proven true. So the two officers were killed and displayed on a pole. All of this information was chronicled in the presence of the king, in the public record.

The Persians execute their criminals by impaling them on a sharpened pole.

3 A little while later, according to King Ahasuerus' wishes, Haman (son of Hammedatha, an Agagite) was promoted to a rank above all his fellow nobles in the kingdom. 2The officials at the king's gate all bowed down before Haman and paid him homage because the king commanded this. But Mordecai, *the Jew,* refused to kneel and refused to honor him.

► The bad blood between the families of Benjamin and Agag goes back a long way to the time when Saul, a Benjaminite, destroyed the Amalekites and took their king, Agag, as his captive (1 Samuel 15:7-9). Now the tables are turned, and Agag's descendant exercises nearly supreme power over Mordecai and the other subjects of Persian power. But, true to his Jewish teaching, Mordecai bows to no man nor pays him homage. That honor is reserved for God and Him alone.

3Mordecai's actions came to the attention of the king's officials standing at the gate.

Officials *(looking at Mordecai)*: Why are you disobeying the king's command?

4The officers questioned him daily *about his disobedience to the king,* but Mordecai refused to listen *and bow down*. The officers reported this to Haman to learn whether or not Mordecai's excuse would be tolerated, for Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. 5Haman was furious when he saw that Mordecai refused to bow and pay him the respect *he was due*. 6But Haman wasn't to be satisfied with killing only Mordecai, so he began to think of ways to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

7During the 1st month (the month of Nisan) of Ahasuerus' 12th year as king, they cast lots (also known as "purim") in the presence of Haman in order to select a day and month. [The lot fell on *the 13th day of*]* the 12th month (the month of Adar), *a day nearly one year in the future*.

Haman *(to the king)*: 8All the provinces in your kingdom are overrun with one *insignificant* group of foreigners, *people who haven't adopted our customs*. Their laws differ from all other peoples', and they do not keep your laws. Therefore it's not a good idea for you to tolerate them *or their actions* any longer. 9If it is your wish, sign an order that these people be destroyed, *and I will bear all the costs.* I'll pay 375 tons of silver directly to those who carry out the king's business in order to relieve the royal treasury *of the expense*.

10*Not knowing which group of foreigners was being targeted,* the king took his signet

* 3:7 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

ring, *the symbol of his power and authority,* from his finger and passed it to Haman (son of Hammedatha, the Agagite), who hated the Jews.

King Ahasuerus *(to Haman)*: [11]The money is yours and the people *are yours* also to do with as you wish.

[12]On the 13th day of the 1st month, the royal secretaries were summoned. The king's order was written down exactly the way Haman dictated it to all of the king's rulers of the regions, governors of the provinces, and nobles of the ethnic groups. *The orders were written* in every script and every language spoken in the provinces in the name of the king, and they were sealed *into law* with his ring. [13]Messengers were sent out to all the royal provinces with the official law *giving the order* to destroy, kill, and annihilate all of the Jews. *They were to kill everyone,* including women and children, young and old, on the 13th day of the 12th month (the month of Adar), and they were free to take everything the Jews owned. [14]An official copy of the king's order was to be issued to every province and read publicly, so that the people could get ready for that day. [15]The messengers were quickly dispatched by order of the king. Then the decree was *publicly* proclaimed in the citadel of Susa. As the king and Haman relaxed and drank *wine,* the city of Susa was thrown into chaos.

4 *Mordecai mourned* when he found out what had happened. He ripped his clothes, put on sackcloth, and wiped ash onto his body. Then he went through the city, weeping loudly in anguish. [2]When he came to the king's gate, *not far from the palace,* he stopped since those wearing sackcloth were not permitted to enter it *and disrupt the mood of the court.*

[3]*In the meantime,* as word of the king's decree began to spread throughout all of the provinces, terrible distress grew among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and screamed out *in misery. Like Mordecai,* many put on sackcloth and ashes.

[4]*Back in Susa,* Esther's maids and eunuchs *witnessed Mordecai mourning outside of the king's gate.* They went and reported to the queen *all that they saw.*

Esther: What is wrong? Why is he doing this? It breaks my heart to think of him like this. Take these clothes to Mordecai so he can put them on instead of wearing sackcloth.

But *when the servants arrived,* Mordecai refused to wear the clothes *Queen Esther had sent.* [5]So Esther sent for Hathach, who was one of the king's eunuchs assigned to serve her.

Esther: Hathach, go to Mordecai *at once.* Find out why he is mourning, *and report back to me all that he says.*

[6]Hathach went to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. [7]Mordecai told the queen's servant everything that had happened and how much money Haman had pledged to place into the royal treasury in exchange for the destruction of the Jews. [8]Then he gave Hathach a copy of the order for mass murder of the Jews, the same order issued in the city of Susa.

Mordecai: Show it to Esther. Tell her *everything I have told you.* Convince her to go before her king and plead for his favor, *not only for her life, but also* for the lives of her people.

[9]Hathach returned to Esther and told her everything Mordecai had said. [10]Esther ordered Hathach to *return to the city gate and* reply to Mordecai.

Esther: [11]*How am I supposed to see the king?* It's known *throughout the land,* from *the greatest of* the king's officials to the common folk who live in the provinces, that any person who approaches the king in the inner chamber without being invited is sentenced to death. That's the law! There's only one exception, and that's if the king were to hold out the gold scepter to that person and spare his or her life. It's been 30 days since the king last summoned me!

[12]Hathach *and the other servants* took Esther's response to Mordecai.

Mordecai: [13]Tell Esther, "Don't be fooled. Just because you are living inside the king's palace doesn't mean that you out of all of the Jews will escape *the carnage. You must go before your king.* [14]If you stay silent during this time, deliverance for the Jews will come from somewhere, but you, *my child,* and all of your father's family will die. And who knows? Perhaps

you have been made queen for such a time as this."

► Of all the books in the Bible, Esther is unique because God is never once mentioned explicitly. Still, for those who know God and who know history, God is in the story, behind it, above it, beneath it. He is the main actor in history, even if He is not acknowledged. Here, Mordecai shows great wisdom. The Jews, God's chosen people, will be delivered whether Esther involves herself or not. Divine Providence has ways and means that go beyond human understanding. Still Providence has made Esther queen for a purpose, a purpose she cannot easily escape.

15 *Once again, Hathach returned to Queen Esther with Mordecai's message.* In turn she sent a reply back to Mordecai.

Esther: Tell Mordecai, 16 "*In preparation for my audience with the king,* do this: gather together all the Jews in Susa, and fast *and pray* for me. *Intercede for me.* For three days and nights, abstain from all food and drink. My maids and I will join you in this time. And after *the three days,* I will go in to the king *and plead my people's case,* even though it means breaking the law. And if I die, then I die!"

17 Mordecai left *the king's gate* and put all of Esther's instructions into action.

5 When the third day arrived, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace across from the king's rooms. The king was sitting on his throne facing the palace entrance. 2 He was pleased when he noticed Queen Esther waiting in the court. He extended his gold scepter with his hand, inviting her in. Esther walked toward him, *and when she was close enough,* she *reached out and* touched the king's scepter.

King Ahasuerus: 3 What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? I'll give you anything—even half of my kingdom—*all you need to do is ask.*

Queen Esther: 4 If it would please you, my king, I'd like for you and Haman to come today to a banquet I have made in your honor.

King Ahasuerus *(looking at his servants)*: 5 Go and find Haman this instant, so we can do as Esther desires.

So the king and Haman came to Esther's banquet. 6 As Haman, the king, and Esther were enjoying the wine at *the end of* her banquet, the king pressed the question.

King Ahasuerus: Now, *my queen,* what is your request? *I promise that* half of my kingdom is not too much to ask! *Don't be afraid to* ask for whatever you want.

Queen Esther: 7 I do want something. My request is: 8 If I have found favor before you, and if you truly desire to grant my request, would you and Haman join me again tomorrow for another banquet I will prepare? Then I will answer your question.

9 Haman left dinner in high spirits, almost gleeful, *but his joy was short lived.* As he walked through the king's gate, he passed by Mordecai. It angered Haman to see the Jew unwilling to stand and, *worse still,* seemingly unafraid. 10 But he resisted showing his anger *right then and there.* Instead, he went home and spent time with friends and Zeresh, his wife. 11 Haman *spent the evening* bragging to them about being rich and having lots of sons *in his family. He even boasted about* his relationship with the king, *talking to his guests about* his promotion above all of his fellow nobles and the officials of the king.

Haman: 12 And that's not all! Queen Esther invited me *today* to dine with her and the king. Just the three of us! And guess what? She's invited me again tomorrow. *What do you think about that?* 13 But *I must be honest;* seeing that Jew, Mordecai, as I pass through the gate makes it difficult to celebrate *any of my good fortune.*

14 Then his wife Zeresh and all of his friends came up with an idea.

Zeresh and His Friends: You should make a wood pole 75 feet high! Tomorrow morning, have the king sentence Mordecai to be executed on it. Then

you'll be able to have a good time at the banquet with the king.

Haman thought the idea was brilliant. So he had the pole made.

► The Persians have a particularly grisly way of humiliating and killing those they hate. A tree is cut down and sharpened to a point at one end. In some cases, the condemned are killed, and their lifeless bodies are impaled on it. Others are hung on the pole as a mode of torture and execution. It is erected in some public place as an example for others, and the 75-foot pole described here is high enough to be seen over most buildings and small trees. Soon birds and insects begin eating away at the dead or dying. Political enemies, criminals, and dissidents often end their lives this way. The threat of public death and humiliation has kept many from disobeying the law, but not Mordecai.

6 That same night the king was unable to sleep, so he ordered the official records of his reign to be brought and read before him. 2As the record was read, the king was reminded of the time when Mordecai *saved his life. Mordecai had been the one who* reported that Bigthana and Teresh, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the doors, were plotting to assassinate the king.*

King Ahasuerus *(to his servants)***:** 3Did Mordecai receive any recognition for this action? Was he honored in any way?

Servants: He received no recognition for this.

King Ahasuerus: 4Is anyone out in the court now?

Haman had just arrived at the outer court of King Ahasuerus' palace. He hoped to speak with the king about *executing* Mordecai and hanging him on the pole he had prepared.

Servants: 5Haman is here waiting in the court *to see you.*

King Ahasuerus: Allow him to come in.

6So Haman entered the king's chambers. *He waited for the king to speak first.*

King Ahasuerus: *Haman, I want to ask you something.* What do you believe is the proper manner in which to honor a man who has pleased me?

Then Haman thought to himself, "There is no one the king wishes to honor more than me."

Haman: 7If you desire to honor a man, *I believe you should do this:* 8*First,* have your servants bring one of the robes you have worn and one of the horses you have ridden that has worn the royal crown on its head. 9Then, you should give the robe and horse to one of your most noble officials. Have him robe the man whom you want to honor and then lead the man on horseback throughout the center of the city. It should be announced that this is what happens for the man whom the king wants to honor.

King Ahasuerus: 10*Your idea is perfect,* Haman. *I want you to go and* do this immediately. Take one of my robes and one of my horses and do exactly what you have suggested to Mordecai, the Jewish man who sits at my gate. Do everything you have said, and don't leave out one single detail. *Not one!*

The situation is now reversed, and Haman is forced to honor the man he has sought to kill.

11Haman *was mortified.* He took the robe and horse; he dressed Mordecai in the king's robe and led him throughout the square of the city.

Haman *(shouting)***:** This is what happens for the man whom the king desires to honor!

12When it was done, Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman fled to his home, mourning and covering his head *in humiliation.* 13He told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends everything that had

* 6:2 Esther 2:21-22

happened to him. They offered him a bit of wise advice.

Zeresh and His Friends: *You must be very careful with how you handle Mordecai!* If he really is a Jew, *a descendant of the nation that defeated your ancestors,* then you won't be able to succeed. In fact, you will most certainly be destroyed! *Look,* you've already begun to bow to him.

14 In the middle of their conversation, the king's eunuchs arrived *at Haman's house* and rushed him off to have dinner with Esther and the king.

7 King Ahasuerus and Haman came to dine with Queen Esther; 2 and while they were drinking wine, the king posed his question once again.

King Ahasuerus: What is your request, Queen Esther? I'm willing to give you anything you want. Just make your request. Even if it's half the kingdom you desire, I will make it happen!

Queen Esther: 3 If you favor me, my king, and if it pleases you, *spare my life.* That's all I'm asking for—that my people and I be spared. That is my wish. 4 *There are some, my king, who wish to rid your kingdom of us.* For my people and I have been sold, marked for destruction and massacre. Now if the plan were simply to sell our men and women into slavery, I would have kept my mouth closed because that would not have been important enough to disturb you, my king.

Esther's plea to Ahasuerus echoes the words of Moses to Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

King Ahasuerus: 5 Who *has targeted your people*? Where is this man who dares to do this?

Queen Esther *(pointing to Haman)***:** 6 *The man responsible for these actions is* wicked Haman. He is vile, and an enemy to my people.

In that moment, Haman's *joy turned to* terror before the king and queen. 7 Angered, the king *shoved away from the table,* left his wine, and walked into the palace garden. But Haman, aware that King Ahasuerus had already sealed his fate, *didn't follow behind.* Instead, he pleaded with Queen Esther to spare his life. 8 *In desperation,* he threw himself onto the couch where Queen Esther was sitting, just as King Ahasuerus walked back from the garden to the place where the wine *and the banquet* had been set.

King Ahasuerus: *Haman,* will you even violate my queen right here in the palace, where I can see you?

As soon as the king gave the order, the royal eunuchs covered Haman's face. *His fate had been sealed.* 9 One of those eunuchs was Harbonah.

Harbonah: Look! Haman has prepared a 75-foot pole for execution in his own courtyard. He was hoping to use it to hang Mordecai, the man who spoke up and saved the king.

King Ahasuerus: *Well,* hang him on it!

10 So they took Haman and killed him and displayed him on the pole he had made ready for Mordecai. And King Ahasuerus' anger subsided.

8 On the same day, King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther all the household of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Then Mordecai was brought before King Ahasuerus, for Queen Esther had told the king how they were related. 2 The king took off his signet ring (the one he had taken back from Haman) and gave it to Mordecai. Then Esther put Mordecai in charge of all of Haman's household.

3 Esther came before the king once more. This time she fell at his feet, wept, and begged the king to do something to stop the evil plan that Haman (the Agagite) had brought upon the Jews. 4 The king, *as before,* extended his golden scepter to Queen Esther; and she stood to her feet before him.

Queen Esther: 5 If it pleases the king, and if I am in his favor, and if the king believes it is the right *and just* thing to do, let there be an official decree written that will cancel out the order that Haman (son of Hammedatha, the Agagite) had written to rid all the king's provinces of the Jews. 6 For I can't bear to see this catastrophe brought against my people; how can I live *another day* if I witness the destruction of my kindred?

King Ahasuerus *(to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew)***:** 7Look, I have given you, Queen Esther, Haman's household because of his vengeful actions against your people. That is also why he hangs on the pole *he had made for Mordecai. I have done all I can do; the rest is your responsibility* 8because no order that has been written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring can be overturned. So you must write a new order to the Jews *to remedy the situation*; it, too, must be written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring.

► Although Haman is dead, the order to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire is very much alive. Once the king has signed an order, it cannot be reversed. Such kings never reverse themselves; it is too risky. So a new order must be written and sent to the far reaches of the empire; and Mordecai, the Jew, is just the person to do it. Now that he has been elevated to the supreme position where he has use of the king's signet ring, he can exercise royal power.

9So the royal secretaries were summoned together on the 23rd day of the 3rd month (the month of Sivan). The *king's new* orders were written down exactly the way Mordecai dictated them, and they were written to the Jews, the rulers, the governors, and the nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. The orders were written down in every script and every language spoken in the provinces, including the Jewish script and the Jewish language. 10Mordecai wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with his signet ring. Then, these orders were dispatched *to the provinces* by couriers who rode on the finely bred horses sired by the royal stud. 11The king's new orders gave the Jews in every city the right to gather together, to protect themselves, and to kill or destroy any army of any nation or province (including their women and children) who might attack them. The orders also gave *the Jews* the right to take over the assets of their enemies. 12*These new orders were set to go into effect* on the 13th day of the 12th month (the month of Adar). *This was the same day Haman had determined by casting lots to kill the Jews.* 13An official copy of the *king's* order was to be issued to every province and read publicly to all nationalities, so that the Jews would be ready to protect themselves against their enemies. 14The couriers were quickly dispatched by order of the king, and they left *the capital* riding on royal steeds. Then the decree was publicly proclaimed in the citadel of Susa.

15Mordecai went out from the king's presence donning blue and white royal robes, a large gold crown, and a fine linen and purple cape. *When the people of* the city of Susa *saw this, they* exploded into joy. 16For the Jews, it was a time of celebration. *Darkness had turned to* light. *Sadness to* joy. *Shame to* honor. 17In every city and province, wherever the king's law and orders were received, there was happiness and joy among the Jews. They feasted, *they danced,* they celebrated—and people from other nations *living among the Jews* professed to be Jews because they were afraid of the Jews' *sudden political power in Persia.*

9 The new law and orders of King Ahasuerus took effect on the 13th day of the 12th month (the month of Adar). It was on this day that those who were enemies of the Jews had planned to overtake them, but that was not the way it happened. Instead, the Jews got the upper hand over those who conspired against them. 2*On that day,* the Jews gathered together in their respective cities in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to fight those who sought their destruction. No army or nation could stand against them, because they were all frightened of the Jews. 3The nobles and governors of the provinces and also the king's officials did what they could to help the Jews, but that was because they feared what Mordecai might do to them. 4In King Ahasuerus' palace, Mordecai grew more powerful. Word spread quickly throughout the provinces about Mordecai's authority and influence. 5The Jews took this opportunity to attack their enemies with swords, killing them. And then they did whatever they deemed reasonable with those who despised them. 6Just in *the city of* Susa, the capital *of the empire,* the Jews killed 500 men. 7-10That didn't include the 10 sons of Haman (son of Hammedatha, enemy of the Jews):

Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. *They were also put to death.* All of them were considered enemies of the Jews. But they did not touch the assets of their victims. 11When the day was over, the number of those killed in his capital, Susa, was reported to King Ahasuerus. 12Then the king spoke to Queen Esther.

King Ahasuerus: The Jews have killed 500 men in the capital of Susa alone, and also the 10 sons of Haman. How many must they have killed in the other provinces? Now, do you want anything more? Whatever you ask will be given to you. So, tell me; what further do you need? I will grant whatever that is.

Queen Esther: 13If it pleases the king, allow the Jews in Susa one more day *to exact justice on their enemies* according to your decree. And let Haman's 10 sons be displayed on the pole.

14The king honored Queen Esther's wishes. An order was issued in the city of Susa, and *the dead bodies of* the 10 sons of Haman were displayed. 15So on the 14th day of the month of Adar, the Jews killed 300 men in Susa. But they didn't touch any of their assets.

16In the meantime, the Jews who lived *outside Susa* in the king's provinces also gathered together to defend themselves and find freedom from their enemies. *In total,* the *rural* Jews killed 75,000 of their enemies, but they didn't touch any of their assets. 17All of this took place *in the provinces* on the 13th day of the month of Adar, and on the 14th day the Jews rested and celebrated with food and drink.

► According to custom and Persian law, the Jews have every right to seize the assets of those they kill in this battle. But it is important to note that they do not. The reason for this odd behavior may well lie in history: Hundreds of years earlier, Saul and the Israelites defeated King Agag (the ancestor of Haman) and helped themselves to the plunder, violating God's clear directive. That violation brought them irreparable harm. So now, when they have the opportunity, the Jews leave the Agagites' assets alone. Obedience deferred is still obedience.

18Since the Jews in Susa had gathered together *to defend themselves* on the 13th and 14th days of the month of Adar, they rested on the 15th and celebrated with food and drink. 19(This explains why the Jews who live in rural areas and villages continue to celebrate on the 14th day of Adar with food and drinks and send gifts to one another.)

20Mordecai kept a *detailed* journal of all these events, and he corresponded *often* with all of the Jews from every corner of King Ahasuerus' kingdom, regardless of its distance from Susa. 21He reminded them to *remember and* celebrate the 14th and 15th days of Adar every year *(based on the day of each group)* 22*and to celebrate as faithfully* as they did on the days in which the Jews were granted relief from their enemies. He wanted them to savor the month *of Adar* as a time when their sadness turned into gladness and their mourning into celebration. He encouraged them to celebrate with food and drink, to send gifts, and to offer help to the poor. 23The Jews *in every part of the kingdom* took Mordecai's advice and celebrated on the 14th and 15th days of the month of Adar, *making it an annual custom.*

24*In short,* Haman (son of Hammedatha, the Agagite), the enemy of all Jews *everywhere,* had schemed against the Jews to destroy them. He did so by casting the lot (also known as the "pur").* *That was the beginning of the plan* to annihilate them and bring about their ruin. 25But King Ahasuerus learned about his evil plot and wrote an order that Haman should receive the very punishment that he himself wanted the Jewish people to suffer. So the king directed that Haman and *all ten of* his sons be killed and displayed on the pole. 26So this is why they call these days *of feasting* "Purim," from the word "pur," *which means "lot."* It is also because Mordecai's correspondence had instructed Jews across the empire to remember what they had seen and what had happened to them. 27So, the Jews made it their custom that every family, and every descendant, and every future convert would observe

* 9:24 Esther 3:7

these two days each year in the way *that Mordecai* asked. 28(*This explains why* these days were remembered and celebrated by all Jews in all places, and at all times; the days of Purim would never be forgotten and their celebration would never stop.)

29Queen Esther (daughter of Abihail) utilized her full authority *as queen* to affirm a second letter by Mordecai the Jew regarding Purim. 30So Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of King Ahasuerus' kingdom. His letter included *encouraging* words of peace and truth; 31*and it was his hope* to establish these days of Purim permanently on the calendar as days of mourning and fasting for future generations as it was for themselves. 32Esther's authority affirmed the tradition of Purim and it was written down in the official records.

► In all of Jewish history, Esther's story is unique. Her meteoric rise from common Jewish girl to queen of the vast Persian Empire is evidence that God can use some unlikely characters. In this case, He uses Esther to halt a terrible injustice and to settle an ancient score. To be used by God in any capacity, however, requires courage; it requires taking a risk. In Esther's case, she risks her own life in order to save her people, and in a greater sense to ensure that the story of redemption continues.

The world has always endured times of great injustice, times of great need. Yet God is at work, transforming sorrow to joy, shame to honor, and injustice to justice. Each person is called to impact the age in which he or she lives.

10 *Across his empire,* on the land and along the coasts, King Ahasuerus imposed taxation *upon the people.* 2All of King Ahasuerus' accomplishments, as well as the great work of Mordecai, whom the king promoted, are written down in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. 3For Mordecai the Jew became second-in-command to King Ahasuerus, and he was highly revered among the Jews because he worked for the prosperity of his people and was an advocate for their well-being.

JOB

Job's devotion to God is tested

By an unknown author

The Book of Job is considered one of the greatest literary works in history. It reflects a familiar theme in ancient literature, namely, the problem of suffering, particularly unjust suffering. If obedience to God leads to prosperity and if disobedience leads to adversity—the message of books such as Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges—then why does Job suffer? After all, Job is considered one of the best and most righteous people of his day. Shouldn't Job enjoy a blessed life? As a result of such profound questions, the Book of Job is categorized as a book of wisdom. Based on the language and understanding of retribution in Job, many date the book in its current form to the sixth century B.C.

In spite of its placement in the Bible at the end of the historical books, the story of Job is set much earlier, perhaps as early as the Patriarchal period. Set in the land of Uz, the book describes Job as a man whose righteousness and good deeds appear perfect yet who is tormented by God's messenger, known as the Adversary (or "the Satan"). This angelic accuser questions God before His celestial throne in an attempt to find the reason behind humanity's devotion to God. Unaware of the heavenly debate behind his suffering, Job and his friends heatedly discuss the reasons for Job's pain. Even after many appeals to ideas of divine retribution and the advice of the pious man Elihu, Job's friends do not have a satisfactory answer to the troubling questions Job is persistently asking. Finally God Himself addresses Job, but only after Job challenges Him to step forward and account for Himself.

But God's answer is not unambiguous. Some reckon that God is chiding Job for questioning Him in the first place. Others figure that God's response has more to do with the limits of human understanding. In the end, God's speech to Job appears to provide not so much an answer to the question of evil and suffering, but perhaps a context for reflection. This, too, is the way of wisdom; for it results in a deeper understanding of God, the individual, and the world. The lesson learned from this book is that God's people must have unwavering faith in Him and never stray from respecting and honoring Him. In the epilogue (Job 42:7-17), God rebukes Job's friends for their unwise counsel and restores Job's fortunes.

1 Once there was a man *from* Uz by the name of Job. He was a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so *believed in God that he sought to* honor Him *in all things*. He deliberately avoided evil *in all of his affairs*. 2He had 7 sons and 3 daughters; 3he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a large number of servants. Among Easterners, he was the most powerful and influential man. 4His sons, *who were all wealthy landowners, too,* all used to gather together *on each others' birthdays and special occasions*. The brothers would take turns hosting the others in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5When these days of feasting were through, Job would call all of his family *to his own house* and purify them, rising up early in the morning to offer burnt sacrifices for each one.

Job: *God, forgive my children* for any *secret* sins or grudges they have against You deep in their hearts.

No worshiper of God could ever curse Him, so the Hebrew says "bless God" when the reality is, as Job says, they have "grudges . . . deep in their hearts."

Job did this again and again.

6Now one day, it came time for the sons of God, *God's heavenly messengers,* to present themselves to the Eternal One *to give reports and receive instructions.* The Accuser* was with them there.

► The dialogue between the Accuser and God is similar to what might be heard during a court case. Job is a person of the utmost integrity; he is someone God highly respects as His servant. Attacked by the Accuser in God's heavenly court, Job's actions are both supported and evaluated by God, who fills the roles of both Job's Advocate and the Promoter of Justice.

Eternal One *(to the Accuser)***:** 7Where have you been?

The Accuser: Oh, roaming here and there, running about the earth *and observing its inhabitants.*

Eternal One: 8Well, have you looked into *the man,* Job, My servant? He is unlike any other person on the whole earth—a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so *believes in Me that he seeks, in all things, to* honor Me and deliberately avoids evil *in all of his affairs.*

The Accuser: 9*I won't argue with You that he is pious,* but is all of this *believing in You and* honoring You for no reason? 10Haven't You encircled him with Your very own protection, and *not only him but* his entire household and all that he has? *Not only this, but* Your blessing accompanies whatever his hand touches, and see how his possessions have grown. *It is easy to be so pious in the face of such prosperity.* 11So now extend Your hand! Destroy all of these possessions of his, and he will certainly curse You, right to Your face.

Eternal One: 12*I delegate this task to you.* His possessions are now in your hand. One thing, though: you are not to lay a finger on the man himself. *Job must not be touched.*

With that, the Accuser left *the court and* the Eternal's presence.

13Now one day, all of Job's children were gathered together under the roof of Job's firstborn *for their usual celebration*—feasting and drinking wine—14when a messenger came to Job.

Messenger: *We were in the field.* The oxen were plowing, the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15and *out of nowhere,* the Sabeans attacked. They stole your animals, all *1,000 oxen and donkeys,* and as for your servants, they put their swords to us, and everyone is dead—*every last one, except me.* I am the only one who got away *from the fields* to tell you.

16And while the words were still leaving the messenger's mouth, another messenger arrived.

Second Messenger: *Lightning has struck!* The fire of God fell from the sky and

* 1:6 Literally, the Satan

burned the *7,000* sheep alive . . . *alive!* Shepherds, too—all of them burned; everyone is dead—*every last one, except me.* I am the only one who got away *from the pastures* to tell you.

17And while the words were still leaving that messenger's mouth, a *third* messenger arrived.

Third Messenger: Chaldeans! Three groups of them attacked us. They converged on the camels and stole your *3,000* animals, and as for your servants, they put their swords to us, and everyone is dead—*every last one, except me.* I am the only one who got away to tell you.

18And while the words were still leaving that messenger's mouth, *yet* a *fourth* messenger arrived.

Fourth Messenger: All of your children *were gathered together today* under the roof of your firstborn *to celebrate*—eating a feast and drinking wine—19and then a powerful wind rose up from *the other side of* the desert, and it struck all four corners of the house. It collapsed! Everyone is dead—all of those young people—*every last one, except me.* I am the only one who got away *from your son's house* to tell you.

20Then Job stood up, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground. *Face down,* Job *sprawled in the dirt to* worship.

Job: 21I was naked, *with nothing,* when I
came from my mother's womb;
and naked, *with nothing,* I will
return *to the earth.*
The Eternal has given, and He has
taken away.
May the name of the Eternal One
be blessed.

22In all of this Job neither sinned nor did he make *foolish* charges against God.

2 Now one day, it was time for the sons of God, *God's heavenly messengers,* to present themselves to the Eternal One *to give reports and receive instructions.* The Accuser* was with them there *again,* also ready to present himself to Him.

Eternal One *(to the Accuser):* 2Where have you been?

The Accuser: Oh, roaming here and there, running about the earth *and observing its inhabitants.*

Eternal One: 3Well, have you looked into *the man,* Job, My servant? He is unlike any other person on the whole earth—a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so *believes in Me that he seeks, in all things, to* honor Me and deliberately avoids evil *in all of his affairs.* And *I have found* him to be unswervingly committed, despite the fact that you provoked Me to wreck him for no *particular* reason, *to take away My protection and his prosperity.*

The Accuser: 4*Well, as they say,* "Skin for skin!" *It is easy to be so pious in the face of such health. Surely* a man will give what he has for the sake of his own life, 5so now extend Your hand! Afflict him, both bone and body, and he will curse You, right to Your face.

Eternal One: 6*Well then, this is how it will be:* he is now in your hand. One thing, though: you will not take his life. *Job must not be killed.*

7With that, the Accuser left *the court and* the Eternal's presence, and he infected Job with a painful skin disease. From the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, *his body was covered with boils.* 8Job took a broken piece of pottery to scrape his wounds, and while he sat in the ashes *just outside of town,* 9his wife *found him.*

Job's Wife: Will you still not swerve in your commitments? Curse God and die!

Job: 10You're speaking nonsense like some *depraved* woman. Are we to accept the good that comes from God, but not accept the bad?

Throughout all of this, Job did not sin with his mouth; *he would not curse God as the Accuser predicted.*

11Now Job had three friends: Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuah, and Zophar from Naamath. When these three received word of the horror that had befallen Job, they left their homes, and

* 2:1 Literally, the Satan

agreed to meet together to mourn with and comfort their friend.

These friends are from different regions: Eliphaz comes from Edomite lands to the southeast, while Bildad and Zophar come from more eastern lands.

12 *They approached the town ash-heap, but* they were still far off when they caught sight of Job. *His sores were so severe and his appearance so changed by his condition that* they almost didn't recognize him. *Upon seeing him and apprehending the extent of his suffering,* they cried out, burst into tears, tore their robes, *reached down into the dust and* ashes *at their feet, and* threw ash into the air and onto their heads. 13 Then, they sat with him on the ground and stayed there with him for seven days and seven nights, *mourning as if he were already dead.* All the while no one spoke a *single* word because they saw his profound agony *and grief.*

3 1-2 After all of this, Job opened his mouth *and broke the silence.* He spoke a curse, *not upon God but* upon his day of birth.

Job: 3 May the day die on which I was born,
along with the night that spoke the words, "a boy is conceived."
4 May that day *of birth* become darkness,
and *when it has disappeared,*
may God above neither seek it out
nor light *find a way to* shine on it.
5 *Rather,* let darkness and the shadow of death claim the day *and its life-giving light.*
Let *storm* clouds roll over it
and threatening blackness terrorize it.
6 As to that night *of my conception*—
may it be snatched by the thick darkness *of death's realm,*
Never to be released again for any year or any month—
so my conception and life could never have happened.
7 May that night prove infertile,
and may no moan of pleasure be heard there.
8 Bring out *the enchanters, the diviners* who cast their spells on the day—
who can awaken *that beast,* Leviathan—
9 And may the early-morning stars be extinguished.
Let the day wait for a light that won't *ever* come,
And may it never see the eyelids of dawn *crack open.*
10 Because it neither closed the door of my mother's womb
nor covered my eyes to *these* sorrows.

► Reflecting on his conception, Job wishes darkness and death could have prevailed over light and life on that day. The one place that represents such darkness and death is called *sheol*. Job and his contemporaries believe all people go to *sheol* when they die. The Bible describes it as the very opposite of the heavens, a land of no return that is dark, dusty, and silent. Certainly this is not the heaven or hell of the New Testament; it is neither a place of communion with God nor a place of torment. One's comfort after death is not determined by where he goes, but by whom he is with. The people of the Old Testament hope to "leave this world to sleep with their ancestors." Such a fate is the reward of following God's path in life.

Job: 11 Why did I not die at my birth,
simply pass from the womb into death?
12 Why did my mother's lap welcome me,
and why did her breasts nourish me?
13 *If I had died,* then I would now be reposed in quiet;
I would be sleeping in peace,
14 *Resting* with kings and their earthly ministers
who rebuilt ruined cities to *glorify* themselves,
15 With princes who possessed gold,
whose houses swelled with silver.
16 Why was I not buried in secret as a baby born still,
as a newborn who never saw light?
17 In *the sleep of* death, the wicked can do no more damage;
the weary ones *at last* find rest.

18 *In death* the captives are *freed,* together at ease,
and the shouts of their oppressors die along with them.
19 In the grave, together are the small and great,
and slaves from masters are emancipated.

20 Why is light awarded to those distressed,
and life given to embittered souls
21 Who long for a death that can't be found,
though they mine *the earth* to find it
More than hidden veins of riches—
22 Who would be overjoyed and glad when they find the grave?
23 Why is light *wasted* on *the earthbound,*
who cannot find their way and whom God has surrounded?
24 For I groan before every meal;
my moaning flows like water.
25 What I feared *most* descends on me;
my nightmare—now reality.
26 I have no peace; I have no quiet;
my resting, gone, has turned to riot.

4 *Standing with Job and his other two friends in the trash heap,* Eliphaz the Temanite tried *to convince Job his suffering was temporary.*

Eliphaz: 2 Could you bear it if someone were to speak?
Ah, but who can hold his tongue *in such a situation*?
3 *Look back, and* think on the many you have taught;
you have strengthened the weak hands *of the suffering.*
4 Your words propped up the tottering;
you have strengthened *mourners'* wobbly knees.
5 *May my words help you in that way,* now that trouble arrives and you despair.
It *extends its hand,* crushes you, and you are overwhelmed.
6 Isn't your fear of God true confidence
and your unswerving commitment *genuine* hope?

7 *Take pause;* scan your memory:
Who ever died among the innocent?
And when have the righteous ever met with destruction?
8 The way I see it, those who pull the pernicious plow,
Who sow sorrow's seeds, reap the same *at harvest.*
9 By God's breath, they meet destruction;
when His anger explodes, they meet their end.
10 *O the bluster of humanity!*
The lion roars! The king of beasts thunders!
Still the young lions' teeth are shattered.
11 The *old* lion dies for lack of prey,
and the whole pride is scattered.

12 *Now, listen:* a secret word was delivered to me;
my ears caught *hold of* a whisper.
13 In the anxiety of a nightmare—
while deep sleep falls on humans—
14 Fear took me *by my right arm, terror by my left,*
and they shook me, *they did!*—
made my bones rattle.
15 Then a wind blew through, a *divine* breath skimming my face.
Every hair on my body stood on end.
16 It came to a stop, but I couldn't make it out—
some form there before me, then a *hushed* voice breaking the silence:
17 "Can a mortal stand innocent before God?
Can a man *or even a hero* be pure before his Creator?"
18 If God is unsure of His *own* servants,
and in His holy attendants He finds fault,
19 How much more those whose bodies come from clay,
whose skeletons are dust, are crushed like a moth.
20 From morning to evening, their bodies are broken to pieces,
ground back into dirt, unseen, gone forever.
21 When the cords of their tents are pulled up,
don't they die, none the wiser?

5 **Eliphaz:** *As for you, Job,* feel free to call, but will anyone reply?
Among His holy attendants, to whom will you turn?
2 *Remember,* anger kills off the foolish,
and *jealous* indignation closes in on the simple for the kill.

3I have seen a fool putting down roots,
apparently succeeding,
and immediately I cursed his
house, *knowing this brings*
destruction.
4His children are far from safe,
crushed in *full view of* the city's gate
with no defender *nearby*.
5Hungry *raiders* consume his crops,
harvesting even where the thorns
stand guard*
while drifters and con-men target
his wealth.
6You see, sorrow is not a *natural*
product of the soil,
nor *is* trouble *known to* sprout up
from the earth itself.
7Still humankind is born into trouble,
just as embers *break loose and* fly
from the fire.

8This is why, if I were you, I would
appeal to God;
I would lay my cause at *the feet of*
the Lord.
9He does wonderful things that
confound,
infinite numbers of miracles.
10He gives rain to the earth,
sends down water to the fields;
11He lifts up the downtrodden, bolsters
the bereaved,
raising them to safety.
12He thwarts the plots of the devious
and ties their hands to failure.
13He catches the clever in their deceitful
plotting*
so the plans of the crafty are swept
away.
14Their day turns to darkness;
they grope at noon as they do in
blackest night.
15He saves the needy from the cutting
sword,
and from the *perilous* grip of the
powerful.
16So there is *still* hope for the helpless;
and the mouth of injustice is
muzzled.

17Remember, a happy man accepts God's
correction,
so don't despise the discipline of
the Highest God.*
18For the Lord may cut, but He
stitches up;
He may wound, but His hands also
heal.
19In six *different* perils, He will rescue
you;
even in seven, evil will not touch
you;
20In famine, He will save you from
starvation;
and in war, you won't be run
through with the sword;
21In slanderous situations, you will go
unharmed;
in the face of *chaotic* destruction,
you won't tremble;
22In violence and famine, you will
laugh;
in the presence of wild animals, you
won't quiver.
23The stones of the field will sign a treaty
with you,
and you'll enjoy a truce with the
ravenous beasts.
24You *can rest* knowing your tent is
invincible;
for when you visit your pastures,
nothing will be missing.
25Your children *and their children* will be
abundant,
as the *blades of* grass in the fields.
26You will arrive hearty *and undiminished*
at the grave after a long life,
like a pile of grain harvested at its
peak ripeness.
27We've *all* thought this through. It's true,
and you should hear it.
So hear it *well,* and know it
completely.

► The first of Job's three wise friends, Eliphaz, is a man guided by strong convictions and a belief in the accumulated knowledge of his ancestors. Because he thinks Job is suffering due to his own unintended sins, Eliphaz dwells on God's responses to the wicked and the righteous, believing he will encourage Job to accept God's correction of his sins. Although his intentions are good, Eliphaz does not realize that Job will have a different perspective on his words. Eliphaz's intended encouragement instead upsets Job more. These powerful convictions are expressed in the wrong place and time.

* 5:5 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 5:13 1 Corinthians 3:19 * 5:17 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

6 Job answered *Eliphaz.*

Job: [2]Would that my anguish were
weighed,
laid on a scale together with the
disaster I've suffered!
[3]For there is not enough sand in the
seas to outweigh it!
It's no wonder my untamed words
are but *incoherent* stammering.
[4]The arrows of the Highest One* have
sunk *deeply* into me;
my spirit drinks their poison.
The terrors of God assemble *like
soldiers marching* against me.
[5]Does a wild donkey bray *in hunger* in *a
field of* fresh grass?
Does an ox low *with pangs* over
plenty of feed?
[6]If I were served a tasteless mush,
how could I eat it without *at least*
adding salt?
Or is there *even* any *sense of* taste in
the slime of a plant?*
[7]I refuse to eat, and I gag at the thought
of it.
This vile food sickens me.

[8]If only my *one* request were answered,
if only God would grant me *the
fulfillment of* my *only* hope:
[9]That God would be willing to crush
me, *to kill me,*
that God would release His hand
and cut me off.
[10]*At least* then I would have *a crumb of*
consolation,
one source of joy in the midst of
this relentless agony:
I never denied the words of the Holy
One *in my pain.*

► It is possible to imagine God's creation as fabric on a loom and God as a weaver. The threads of the world are stretched out vertically on a large loom, creating the warp of the fabric; and God weaves the threads of our lives horizontally, pushing them back and forth quickly around the vertical threads with His shuttle, creating the weft of the fabric. Job pictures his life ending when the thread runs out (7:6), but here he asks God to release His guidance on Job's life and cut him away from this world prematurely. To do so, God would cut across the warp, thus affecting all of creation and not just Job himself. Even though God does not grant Job's wish, Job has no thought of suicide; he knows only God has the right to begin and end life.

Job: [11]What strength do I have, that I
should persist *in this life*?
And what is my *life's* end, that I
should forestall it?
[12]Is my strength like that of stones?
Is my flesh like bronze?
[13]Can I *even hope to* help myself,
or has any chance of help been
driven away?

[14]A despondent person deserves
kindness from his friend,
even though he strays from the fear
of the Highest One.
[15]But *you,* my brothers, are unpredictable
like an *unexpected flood of the* wadi
that quickly rises and then
falls,
[16]That contain dark, *muddy swirls of
thawing* ice
that swell in the melting snow,
[17]But whose flow is stopped in the
summer heat
and that vanish *in their gullies*
under the heat *of the sun.*
[18]The path of their course winds along,
goes out into the desert and
disappears.
[19]*You travelers have heard*
how the *experienced* caravans from
Tema searched *for water,*
how the travelers of Sheba expected
to find it;
[20]But their confidence turned to
frustration and shame;
for when they arrived, they found
no water, only disappointment.
[21]Now you, *too,* have come to nothing.
You see *my* terror and are afraid *for
yourselves.*
[22]Have I ever asked you to give me
anything,
or from your means to offer a bribe
on my behalf?
[23]*Have I ever asked you* to rescue me
from my enemies' hands,
or to deliver me from the clutches
of powerful adversaries?

* 6:4 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 6:6 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

24 *In all seriousness,* teach me, and I will
be silent.
Where I have erred? Help me
understand.
25 *True,* honest words are painful,
but what does your chiding
confirm?
26 Was it your intent to correct me?
Did you imagine that, desperate as
I was, my words were nothing
but wind?
27 Yes, *it seems* you'd have no qualms about
sending an orphan *into slavery*
or selling out a friend.
28 Now do me the favor of looking at me;
look me in my face; I will not lie to
your face.
29 Turn back; don't let any more harm be
done.
Turn back *to me now*; my *reputation
and* integrity are at stake.
30 Is there any wickedness, *any poisonous
word* on my tongue?
Don't you think I can tell when I've
tasted a ruinous lie?

7 **Job:** Don't we humans struggle *long
and* hard *in our time* on earth?
Don't we live our lives as common
laborers?
2 As slaves longing for shade,
as workers pining for wages,
3 So I am *destined* to receive only months
of meaninglessness,
and nights of *nothing but* misery.
4 When I lie down *at the end of day,* I
wonder,
"How soon till *morning so* I can
arise?"
But the night stretches on,
and I toss and turn until sunrise.
5 My *putrid* skin is covered with maggots
and a dirty crust.
It hardens *and cracks* and oozes
again.
6 My days whisk by swifter than the
shuttle in a weaver's loom—
back and forth, and back and forth—
and then they come to their
hopeless end.
7 My life, remember, is just a breath;
in death no more good will reach
my eye.
8 Whoever sees me now, will not for
long;
you'll look for me, but I'll be gone.
9 As clouds thin and finally vanish,
so it is when people enter the land
of the dead.
Never will they come back up.
10 Never will they return to their homes
or will the place they lived
recognize them anymore.

11 *Like Eliphaz,* I will not keep silent.
In the agony of my spirit, I will
speak;
In the bitterness of my soul, I will
complain.
12 Am I the *raging* sea, or the monster of
the deep,
so threatening you must appoint a
guard over me?
13 When I think my couch will
comfort me
or my bed will soften my complaint,
14 You, *Lord,* intimidate me with dreams
and terrorize me with visions.
15 I'd rather be suffocated, even dead,
than live in these aching bones of
mine.

► Job compares his treatment to God's defeat of two mythic enemies of creation: Yam and Tannin. Ancient Near Eastern legends say that before God created the world, the "formless void" that existed was called "the deep." When God separated the heavens from the earth, He divided the formless void with the horizon, leaving the waters of the earth below (the oceans) and the waters of the heavens above (the blue skies and clouds). Yam the sea god and Tannin the sea monster tried to interfere in this separation. God of course defeated them, imprisoning them in the sea with sandbars. Job's reference to this myth shows he believes God is treating him unfairly, punishing him as brutally as He did these subhuman, rebellious creatures. Job, on the other hand, has not been rebellious to God.

Job: 16 I hate my life. I have no desire to
keep on living.
Leave me alone, *God,* for I have only
a short time left.
17 What are these human beings, that You
make so much of them—
that You shower them with
attention?

18You examine them morning by
morning;
You test them moment by moment.
19How long will You stare at me?
I can't even clear my throat of spit
without an audience.
20I have sinned. What have I done to You,
You who watch after humanity?
Why have You targeted me, *a man*
whose life is just a breath?
Am I really such a heavy load for
You?
21*So I've sinned inadvertently: can't You*
pardon me?
Are my crimes such You can't
forgive my sins?
After all, I will lie in the dust, *and it*
won't be long
until You will look for me, but I'll
be gone.

8 Then *the second of Job's three friends,* Bildad the Shuhite, addressed Job.

Bildad: 2How long will you say these
things,
your words whipping through air
like a powerful wind?
3Does God corrupt justice,
or does the Highest One* corrupt
the good?
4If your children sinned against Him,
He *merely* administered the
punishment due them for those
sins.
5But if you search for God
and make your appeal to the
Highest One,
6If you are pure and righteous,
I have no doubt He will arise for
you and restore you to your
righteous place.
7From your modest beginnings,
the future will be bright *before you.*

8Ask those who have come and gone!
Explore what their fathers learned
and taught them.
9For *we are not of ages past, nor even of*
years gone by.
We are ignorant creatures of
yesterday,
and our time on earth is only a
shadow.
10*But the ancients are not similarly bound,*
are they?
Won't they speak to and instruct
you?
Won't they draw up words from
deep within?

11Can papyrus grow tall without a
marsh?
Can reeds flourish without water?
12Even if they are hardy and unbroken,
without water they will dry up
before any other plant.
13So it goes with any who forget God.
The hope of the godless *soon*
withers and dies.
14His confidence breaks,
for he trusts in *the tenuous threads*
of a spider's web.*
15When he leans into his house *of silken*
threads for support,
it won't hold;
Though his arms grab to steady him,
it will break—*he will fall and never*
get back up.
16*Still* the godless *appears to be a hardy*
plant,
thriving in full sun, sending his
shoots across the garden.
17The roots twine *and grip* the stone
heap
and search for a home among the
rocks.
18If he is pulled up, the place will disown
him saying,
"I have never seen you."
19See, his *sole* joy consists of this:*
knowing that others will spring
from the earth *to take his place.*
20Do you see it? God will not reject the
innocent;
He will not reject you or support
agents of evil.
21He will fill your mouth with laughter;
your lips will spill over into cries of
delight.
22Those who hate you will don the
garment of shame,
and the home of the wicked will
disappear.

► Much like Eliphaz, Bildad believes people suffer as a result of their own sins. But his justification of that suffering is different. Bildad reasons that God is just; as God, He is justice personified. Because He is so perfectly just, God will not punish someone who is also just. Bildad's logical but flawed

* 8:3 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 8:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 8:19 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

conclusion is that Job must have sinned to deserve his current pain. Surprisingly, he manages to be even less effective than Eliphaz had been, alienating Job by reasoning that Job's children must have sinned to deserve their deaths and implying that Job's regular sacrifices on their behalf were not enough to save them.

9 Then Job spoke to them.

Job: 2Sure, I know *all of* this is correct,
but *tell me this:* how can a person set things straight with God?
3If one wanted to argue with Him,
even in a thousand questions he would not be able to answer Him once.
4His wise heart is vast; His strength immeasurable.
Who has *ever* challenged Him and remained safe *and at peace*?
5He uproots mountains,
and they are unaware when He overturns them in His rage.
6He shakes the earth out of its place
so that its *foundation* pillars shudder.
7He commands the sun to *go down and* not rise,
and He sequesters the stars *so they do not shine*.
8He single-handedly stretched out the heavens *overhead*
and walks on the back of the *raging* sea.
9He fashioned the *stars into constellations we know by name*—
Bear, Orion, the Pleiades—
and the lights of the southern sky.
10He does wonderful things, even confounding *things,*
and performs an infinite number of miracles.
11*Still,* if He passes right by me, I don't see Him;
if He brushes past, I don't notice Him.
12*Ah,* but if He were to steal *like a thief in the market,*
who could stop Him? *No one has authority over Him.*
Who could *dare* say to Him, "What are You doing?"
13God does not restrain *Himself in* His anger.
Even the minions of Rahab—*that monster of the sea and purveyor of chaos*—
cower at His feet *in subservience.*
14So then how do I argue with Him?
How can I find the right words *to state my case* to Him?
15*After all,* I am the innocent one *here,*
and I still can't *find an* answer.
So I must *continually* appeal to the mercy of my judge.
16*But even* if I were to call Him and He were to answer,
I *still* could not believe that He would listen *to my complaint.*
17For He flattens me with a tornado
and multiplies my wounds for no reason.
18He won't even give me time to catch my breath;
instead He force-feeds me *more* bitterness.
19If it is an issue of power, there is no question
He is the mighty one;
and if it is an issue of justice, who would ever appoint me?
20Even though I am right *in all of this,* my own mouth sentences me.
Though I am blameless, my own lips cheat me.
21I am blameless, but I don't know myself.
I hate my life.
22Well, then this is what I say: it's all the same.
In the end, He kills off both the innocent and the depraved.
23If *a flood of* disaster rushes in and kills,
He ridicules the anguish of its innocent *victims.*
24The earth has been given over
and is under the dominion of some wicked hand.
God *conceals these things from* its judges, covering their faces,
blinding their eyes.
If not He, then who is it?

25*As for me,* my days are sprinting by like a runner.
Seeing nothing good, they *seek* escape.
26They glide past *in swift silence* like reed boats *on the river.*
Now a blur, they dive like an eagle toward its prey.

27 If I tell myself, "I will forget *all about* my
grievance *against God*,
I will *simply* abandon my long face
and cheer up,"
28 Then I fear the suffering *to come*
because I know there's no chance
that You, *Lord,* will find me
innocent.
29 So *if the verdict is already in,* if I have
already been found guilty,
why should I *bother to clear my*
name?
Why struggle in vain?
30 Though I wash my body in the *pure*
melted snow
and scrub my hands *thoroughly*
with the strongest soap,
31 You would toss me into a *putrid* pit,
and *when I emerged, even* my own
clothes would hate me.
32 *The Lord . . .* He is no man, like me,
whom I could answer,
no human being whom I could face
in court.
33 There is no judge *to stand* between us
who can lay his hands on us both,
34 *Who can* remove God's rod from my
back
and stave off the terror of Him that
haunts me.
35 I long to speak *and defend myself*
without fear of Him *and His*
reprisals;
but as things stand now *and* as
I am within myself, that's not
possible.

10 **Job:** I hate my life, so I will
unload the full weight of my
grievance *against God.*
Let me speak and reveal the
bitterness I am harboring.
2 I will say to God: Don't find me guilty;
just explain the charges You have
against me.
3 Does it please You to oppress,
and is this why You spurn *me,* the
work of Your hands,
and yet *Your smile* shines down
upon the plots of the wicked?
4 Do You have human eyes *so that Your*
outlook is short?
Do You see as through human
frailties?
5 Are Your days like mortals' limited
days?
Are Your years like mortals' limited
years?
6 Is this why You seek out my faults
or You go in search of all my error?
7 You know well that I am not guilty,
yet nothing can free me from Your
overwhelming power.

8 Your hands formed and made me
whole,
yet now You turn to crush.
9 Recall how You molded me like clay.
Will You now render me back to
dust?
10 Didn't You pour me out like milk and
curdle me like cheese?
11 *Didn't You* clothe me in skin and
flesh, weave my bone and sinew
together?
12 Your care has saved my spirit,
and You have given me life and
loyalty;
13 Yet I know what is in You,
what Your heart has always hidden.
14 If I sin, You see it, *watching ever so*
closely,
and You do not acquit me of my
guilt.
15 If I am wicked, woe is me;
even if I am innocent, I cannot take
a chance and lift my head
Because I'm gorged with disgrace.
Gaze on my misery!
16 If I do raise my head,
then like a lion, You hunt me;
Like a night sky turned threatening,
You unfold Your power against me
so that others marvel;
17 *Like a prosecutor,* You drag in witnesses
against me;
You escalate Your fury against
me, coming in waves to pound
on me.

18 So then, why did You *bother to* drag me
out of the womb *at all*?
I should have just died before any
eye could see me.
19 It should have been as though I had
never been:
plucked from the womb, carried to
the tomb.
20 Aren't my days almost finished
anyway?
Stand back, leave me alone, and let
me have a scrap of comfort
21 Before I go to the place from which I
won't return,
to the land of *utter* darkness and
still shadows,
22 The land of deep, *unending* night,
of blackness and shadowy chaos
where the only illumination is *more*
darkness.

11 Finally, *Job's third friend,* Zophar the Naamathite, spoke to Job.

Zophar: [2]Shall such a great volume of
words remain unanswered
and a long-winded man be *so easily*
acquitted?
[3]Shall your empty prattle silence people,
and when you mock, shall no one
shame *you*?
[4]You've told *us,* "I have a clear
understanding *of things,*
and I am innocent in Your eyes,
O Lord."
[5]Ah, but I wish God would speak,
that He would address you openly,
so I will argue for Him.
[6]I wish He would show you the secrets
of *great* wisdom—
for the two sides of sound wisdom
are both found *in His mercy and*
justice.
Know this: God forgets some of your
guilt.

[7]Can you see to the unseen side of God,
or explore the limits of the Highest
One's* *knowledge*?
[8]Higher than the heavens—what can
you do *to reach it*?
Deeper than the realm of the
dead—what can you know *of it*?
[9]Its farthest reaches exceed the ends of
the earth;
its breadth spans far beyond the
sea.
[10]If He passes by, *as is His routine,* and
throws *you* into prison,
and calls *you* to testify *about what*
you've done, who can challenge
Him?
[11]He recognizes worthless people
without integrity,
so do you really think when He sees
wrongdoing He doesn't examine
it?
[12]*As they say,* "The empty-headed will
become clever
in the day the colt of a wild donkey
is born human!"

[13]If you will focus your intentions *in His*
direction
and open your hands and reach for
Him,
[14]Where you have guilt on your hands,
if you will send it far away and not
tolerate sin in your tents,
[15]Then you will lift up a face clean of all
stains;
you will hold *your head high,* secure,
and free of fear.
[16]You will forget all of these troubles of
yours;
they will pass *beneath* your memory
like *a drop of* water that has just
flowed away.
[17]Life will become brighter than high
noon;
darkness will give way to morning.
[18]Once again, you'll trust in the presence
of hope;
you'll scan *the horizon* and sleep
safely.
[19]You will lie down, and no one will
terrorize you,
and many will long to be in your
good graces.
[20]But the eyes of the wicked will grow
dark *as they lose hope;*
they'll find no escape, and *in despair,*
they'll long only to breathe their
last *dying breath.*

* 11:7 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

► Throughout the book, Job has very little to cling to besides a hope for the end of his current suffering. Each of his three friends expounds on hope, drawing three similar but increasingly brutal conclusions. Eliphaz realizes Job is basically a righteous man, so he encourages Job to take hope in the person he already is; somehow his own righteousness will manage to save him. Bildad adds to Eliphaz's conclusion, claiming that wicked men cannot hope; they are left with only despair. Zophar, the most unabashedly honest of the three men, believes hope exists only for the righteous; and since Job is obviously a sinful man, he is hopeless until he changes. Fortunately, all three "wise" men are ultimately wrong. Hope is a product of trusting God and is not based on anyone's actions, wicked or otherwise.

12 *In responding to his friends' collective accusation of his guilt,* Job finally spoke.

Job *(sarcastically to his friends)*: 2Surely,
surely, my discerning friends, you
are the ones!
And when you pass away, *the sum*
total of all wisdom will perish
from the earth.

3I have a mind as good as yours.
Don't think I am so far beneath you!
After all, who doesn't know all about
these things?
Who isn't acquainted with the
pedestrian platitudes you've
trotted out?
4*As for me*—the one who called upon
God and whom God answered—
now, I am *pitiful, laughable,* a just
and upright joke.
5Those who have it easy may *easily*
scorn the unfortunate;
they have *their contempt* already
prepared for those whose feet
slip.
6*Ironically,* there is peace inside the
tents of the raiders,
and those who upset God *seem to*
live safe and secure;
They carry their gods around in their
hands.

7However, call on the animals to teach
you;
the birds that sail through the air
are not afraid to tell you *the*
truth.
8Engage the earth in conversation; it's
happy to share what it knows.
Even the fish of the sea *are wise*
enough to explain it to you.
9In fact, which part *of creation* isn't aware,
which doesn't know the Eternal's
hand has done this?
10His hand cradles the life of every
creature *on the face of the earth*;
His breath fills *the nostrils of*
humans everywhere.

11*Listen!* Aren't *we made to be*
discriminating:
our ears testing wisdom, our
mouths tasting food?

Shouldn't wisdom come with old age? Not necessarily. Only God has wisdom; we merely fool ourselves into thinking we are wise.

12*But you tell me,* "With age comes
wisdom,
and a long life grants understanding."
13With God is *the sum total of all* wisdom
and *of all* power;
His is *the greatest of* plans and *the*
deepest of comprehensions.
14*So, then,* what God tears down cannot
be built back up;
the man He shuts up cannot be
released.
15If God withholds the rains *and stops the*
streams from flowing, the earth
suffers drought;
if He unleashes too much, the lands
are ravaged by flood.
16He is strong, and sound wisdom
belongs to Him:
whether one deceives or is
deceived, he is under God's
control.
17He leads the counselors off *as captives,*
barefoot *and stripped*;
He makes a mockery of judges.
18He strips off the *royal* sashes of
kings
and ties them at the waist, *making*
them slaves as well.
19He leads the priests away barefoot
and defeats the *long-incumbent*
men of power.
20He robs trusted advisors of speech;
He steals discretion from elders.
21He heaps contempt on rulers,
and loosens the bind of *alliances*
among world powers.
22Aspects *of His* deep *wisdom* that were
hidden away,
He shows in plain sight;
darkness is brought into the
light.
23He builds the strength of nations, only
to crush them—
increases their population *across*
the earth, only to scatter them
again.
24He divests *each* nation's leaders of
understanding,
and causes them to wander
aimlessly with nowhere
to go,
25*Until finally* they grope in the dark, the
light having departed,
and He lets them *stumble and*
stagger like drunks.

13 **Job:** Look. I've seen it all with
my eyes,
heard and understood it
with my ears.
2What you know, I know, too;
don't think I am so far beneath
you!

3*Let our differences be clear;* I am ready
to speak to the Highest One,*
eagerly wanting to argue my case
with God.
4But *you!* You smear me with lies *as if*
to help,
but as healers you are worthless.
5Would that you were totally silent.
At least that would make you *seem*
wise.
6Please, just listen while I reason this out;
lean in to hear how my lips *will*
plead.
7Will you try to defend God's cause by
telling lies?
Be deceitful on His behalf?
8Will you show partiality for Him?
Argue on His behalf?
9How would you fare
if He searched your *soul*?
Do you think you might deceive Him
as you would any other person?
10*No.* He would bring charges against you
even if you secretly show partiality.
11Aren't you horrified at *the weight of* His
majesty?
Isn't the dread of Him enough to
drop you *where you stand*?
12All your quoted proverbs turn to ash;
your clever comebacks *crumble like*
brittle towers of clay.

Job will take his chances before God. He still trusts Him, even if God chooses to take his life.

13So keep your mouths shut around me,
and let me speak *to God.*
And whatever may come, let it
come.
14Why should I lay my body at *the mercy*
of the words of my own mouth
or risk my life with only my own
hands *to defend me*?
15Look, He may well kill me,
but I will hope in Him.
Still I will be ready to argue my case
before His very face.
16In fact, this will become my salvation,
for the godless wouldn't even dare
to approach Him.
17So then here is my account. Listen
carefully!
Give me a chance to share my side
of the story with you.
18My case is prepared, and I am
confident
I will be found righteous.
19*And yet* who will meet me *in court* to
argue the other side?
If I am out-argued, then I will stay
mute until I die.

20*Lord,* I ask only two concessions *in this*
case;
if You grant them, I will not hide
from Your face.
21*First,* remove Your *damaging* hand
from me;
second don't intimidate me
anymore with your terrifying
presence.
22Then send me Your summons, and I
will reply,
or *better yet,* I will speak *first* and
then You answer me.
23How many counts *do You have* against
me?
How many sins must I account for?
Spell out the nature of *Your*
indictment against my rebellious
ways.
24Why do You hide Your face *from me;*
why is my name now "nemesis"*
to You?
25Would You *waste Your energy to* terrify
a windblown leaf,
or chase down the dry chaff *as it*
tumbles in the breeze?
26For *I see* bitter accusations against me
written in Your own hand;
You call me to account for the guilt
of my youth.
27You fasten shackles at my ankles but
still keep close watch on where
I walk,
marking the places where my feet
may plant themselves.
28This is how a person wastes away *to*
nothing,
like something rotten, like moth-
eaten clothing.

14 **Job:** Humankind, born of
woman,
has a few brief years with
much suffering.
2Like a *short-lived* bloom,
he springs up only to wither;
like the brief shade *gained by a fast-*
moving cloud,
he passes swiftly.
3*Lord,* is this why You turn Your gaze on
such a creature:
to bring me,* *a mere human being,*
alongside You for judgment?

* 13:3 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 13:24 A wordplay in Hebrew between "Job" and "enemy," so "name" and "nemesis" in English.
* 14:3 Other manuscripts read, "him."

4Who can take what is impure *and defiled*
to fashion something pure *and pristine*?
No one! *We are, after all, so different in nature.*
5Since a person's life is fixed,
and You *are the One who* determines the number of his months,
And You set a limit on the length of her life,
and since they are incapable of exceeding Your decree,
6*The least You can do is* turn Your gaze away from him until they pass,
so that he can enjoy his day like a hired worker.

7*You know,* at least there is *a kind of* hope for a tree:
if it gets cut down, it may yet sprout again *out of the roots.*
And very likely then, its *tender* shoots will not die.
8Its roots may age *deep* under the ground,
and the stump appear dead in the dry earth,
9But even then it needs only the merest whiff of water
to bud *again* and put forth shoots like a *newly planted* sapling.
10But *not so with humankind.*
The noblest of human beings dies and lies flat.
Humans die, and where do they go?
11Just as water evaporates from the sea,
And riverbeds go parched and dry,
12so humankind lies down and does not rise again.
Until *the day when* the skies are done away with,
humankind will neither awaken nor rouse from slumber.

13O that You would *merely* hide me in the land of the dead
and keep me in secret till Your wrath is gone,
until a time You decide when You might think upon me.
14If one dies, can he live again?
Through these days of toil and struggle,
I will *patiently* wait until my situation changes.
15You will call out, and I will answer You then;
and You will long for *me,*
the work of Your hands, *again.*
16For then You would still count *each of* my steps
but not focus on my faults.
17My sins would be sealed up as in a bag,
and my crimes You would carefully cover up.

18And yet *while every crack in me is closely watched,*
the mountain will slide and erode as the avalanche steals its cliffs away.
19The water grinds at the surface of stones,
and the floodwater* steals the soil away.
This is how You wreck the hope of humankind.
20You continually overwhelm him, and he dies;
You alter his appearance and send him away.
21If his children rise to honor, he does not know of it;
if they sink to humiliation, he is unaware of it.
22He knows only this:
His body feels agony and his soul grieves.

15 Eliphaz reiterated *his points.*

Eliphaz: 2Does a wise man reply with windy knowledge
and fill up his belly with the hot east wind?
3Does a *wise* man reason with impotent chatter,
with bankrupt words of no account?
4Indeed, *Job,* you have ignored your responsibility to revere *God*
and depreciated your *own* thoughts toward God;
5For your faults inform your speech,
and your language is tricky.
6Your own mouth condemns you, not I;
your own lips *volunteer as* witnesses against you.

7Were you the firstborn among men?
Were you introduced *to the earth* before the hills *were conceived*?
8Were you *allowed to* listen in on the deliberations in God's assembly?

* 14:19 Hebrew manuscripts read, "her aftergrowth."

Do you imagine all knowledge to be confined to you *and you only*?
9What do you know that we don't know?
Do you have an understanding that has *somehow* eluded us?
10We have gray hairs and elders among us
weighed down with years,
heavier than your father.
11Do you find God's *many* comforts too meager
and His gentle speech to you *too mild*?
12What has *stripped you of your reason,* carried away your heart?
Why do your eyes flash *with anger*—
13*So much so* that you unleash your spirit
and spray out such speeches against God?

14What is humankind, that people would be *considered* pure?
And among those born of women, who could *possibly* be innocent?
15Look, if God refuses to trust *even* His holy attendants,
if even the heavens above are impure in His eyes,
16Then how much less *regard must He show for* humankind, who is base and corrupt,
or for Adam's children who drink sin like water.

► Genesis 6:1-4 tells the strange story of God's own heavenly messengers procreating with beautiful human women. Such a union was obviously forbidden, possibly because it endowed the children with eternal life, based on God's response to the situation—limiting the lifespan of humans to 120 years. As Job has revealed, these heavenly messengers are with God all the time. They do His bidding. No one could possibly know His rules better than they do or have more motivation to follow them, yet they still chose to disobey God. Eliphaz's point is clear: no human could possibly claim to be above the temptation to sin when God's heavenly envoys are not.

Eliphaz: 17I will tell it like it is, so listen.
I'll recount what I have seen:
18The very things that knowledgeable men have declared
and which they do not hide that they heard from their fathers
19To whom the land was granted *long ago* when no foreigners were among them.
20The wicked man endures misery his whole life long;
and many years of sorrow are stored up for the ruthless.
21His ears are assailed by the sounds of terror;
but when he is *finally* at peace, the destroyer seizes him.
22Unsure that he will ever escape darkness,
he lives ever-conscious of the sword.
23He wanders *aimlessly* in search of food.
"Where is it?" he asks.*
He knows *all the while* that the *great* day of darkness is imminent.
24He is addled by strain and anxiety, terrified;
he will be overwhelmed as if by a king about to descend upon his enemy in war.
25For he raises his fist to God
and acts arrogantly *like a hero* against the Highest One.*
26He runs at Him, headlong, *headstrong, and leads his charge* behind *the thick protection of* a massive shield.
27*Strong and healthy, he has nourished himself well and prospered*
until his face and his thighs are *pleasantly* fat.
28He lodges in evacuated towns in empty houses unfit for habitation,
in buildings condemned to rubble and ruin.
29He will never be rich; his wealth will not last,
nor will he have possessions *enough for any* to put down roots.
30He will not *manage to* escape from darkness,
as it scorches like tender branches that wilt in the flame;

* 15:23 Greek manuscripts read, "He is thrown out like food for vultures." * 15:25 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

He will blow away like the breath of his mouth.
31 Don't let him fool himself;
if he trusts in the emptiness *of his vanity,*
emptiness will be his reward.
32 Before his time is up, it will all be finished
and the branches of his trees will never leaf out.
33 He will be like the vine that drops its immature grapes,
the olive tree that sheds its own blossoms.
34 O the gathering of the godless is unfruitful,
and fire consumes the tents of those *who pervert justice by* giving bribes.
35 *Their intercourse yields only* the conception of misconduct,
the birth of sinfulness,
and their wombs carry only lies *to term.*

16 Then Job reiterated *his innocence.*

Job: 2 All the things from you sound the same.
You are all terrible *as* comforters!
3 Have we reached the end of your windy words,
or are you sick *with something* that compels you to argue *with me*?
4 If we were to trade places,
I could rattle on as you do.
I could compose *eloquent* speeches as you do
and shake my head *smugly* at you *and your problems.*
5 *But I believe* I would use my words to encourage you;
my lips would move only to offer you relief.

6 And yet, *I am not you, you are not me, and my words are of no real use:*
When I speak, my pain is not relieved;
if I remain *silent,* it does not go away.
7 God has drained me *utterly;*
He has made those near to me desolate—*killed my family and my servants.*
8 You have shriveled me up;
my withered form stands as a witness *against me*;
my *body,* haggard and thin, testifies to my face.
9 In anger He hunts me down and tears at me;
in rancor His teeth grind on my *flesh*;
His eyes are locked on me as a foe,
eager to destroy *still more of me.*
10 My foes *taunt me,* their mouths gape *in derision,*
they slap my cheek in disgust, and they conspire against me.
11 God has forsaken me to *young* thugs
and flung me into the hands of evildoers *who lie in wait for me.*
12 I was living *a good life*—a quiet, peaceful life—
when He began to beat on me;
He throttled my neck, tore me apart,
and then propped me up *at the far end of the field,* making me a target.
13 His archers have *now* gathered around me.
In cold blood He splits my belly open and spills my bile on the earth.
14 He charged like a soldier *storming a stronghold*
until my walls were breached, broken down, one after another.

► Job in his despair and frustration responds as he and his friends have been taught by previous generations to display grief: by donning sackcloth and covering the head with dust to show devastation, as if everything has been lost even to the point of death.

Job: 15 *Well,* I have sewed the sackcloth to my very skin
and buried my *mighty* forehead in the dirt.
16 My face, red and hot, *boils over* in tears;
the *shadow of* darkness lies *heavy* on my eyelids,
17 No matter that my hands are free of violence,
and my prayer is pure.

18 O earth, do not conceal my blood!
And *when they seek to silence* my cry, refuse a place for its burial.
19 Look! Even at this very moment, my witness is *there,* in heaven;
my advocate is *seated* on high.

20My *only* friends *scoff at me; they persist*
in mocking me;
even now my eyes well up *in tears*
to God,
21Appealing to God as a mere man,
as a human being might for the
sake of his friend.
22Only a few years left now,
and I will go down the path from
which I cannot return.

17 **Job:** My spirit has collapsed;
my days have been blotted
out;
the grave is prepared for me.
2There are mockers all around me;
my eyes are fixed on their
unwarranted opposition *of me.*
3Show me a sign! Vouch for me, *God!*
Who is there to give me his hand,
guaranteeing his pledge?
4*I think no one is there because* You have
closed up their minds,
made them unable to see or
understand;
so You will honor none of them.
5*You have heard,* "Whoever denounces
his friends for land
will watch his children go blind."

6But God has turned me into a swear
word for everyone;
*I have become a symbol of human
darkness;*
I am the face on whom one spits.
7*All* my afflictions cloud my vision;
the members of my body are
wasting away;
I am a mere shadow *of what it once
was.*
8Those of moral fiber are appalled at
this;
innocent men grow indignant at
the wicked.
9Even still, the righteous embrace their
way *of life*;
those with clean hands go from
strong to stronger.
10*By contrast, I look to you, my friends,
and I say,*
"Come ahead, all of you; try *your
words* once more."
I still won't expect to find a wise man
among you.
11*Even now* my days have passed me by;
My plans lie broken *at my feet*;
the *secret* wishes of my heart *grow
cold.*
12*And yet* my friends say, this *loss of hope
is for* good,
turning *my dark* night into *what
appears to them as* day.
In the pitch darkness, *these broken
plans and secret wishes speak
to me.*
They say, "There is light nearby."
13If I hope only to live in the land of the
dead,
if I prepare for myself a bed in the
darkness,
14If I speak to my *burial* pit, calling it
"Father,"
and to the worms *in the earth,*
calling them "Mother" and
"Sister,"
15Then where will I find my hope?
And who will see it?
16Will hope go with me to the place of
death?
Will hope accompany me into the
ground?

18 Bildad the Shuhite encouraged *Job to righteousness.*

Bildad: 2How long will you keep up the
hunt for words?
Show some sense, and then we can
actually converse.
3Why is it we are like cattle *to you,*
dumb *animals* in your eyes?
4*You speak of how God "tears at you,"* you!
You tear at yourself in your rage.
Oh, how self-centered you are!
Ought the earth be emptied *of its
inhabitants* for your sake?
Ought the rocks roll away *for your
convenience*?

5*Remember,* the flame of the wicked is
extinguished.
His fire no longer lends light *to
anything.*
6His tent-lamp goes dark;
his *bedside* lamp *flickers and* dies.
7His long strides falter, as his own plans
take him down.
8His *then-weakened* feet lead him
to a net,
And wander into its waiting mesh.
9A snare clamps around his heel;
he feels it dig into him.
10*This trap was set for him beforehand:*
a snare is hidden on the ground;
a net is *overhead* along the path.
11Terrors press in on every side
and badger his every step.
12His deepest fears *stalk him as he
staggers,* craving him,
and awaiting his *imminent* collapse.

13 *Bit by bit,* disease eats at his skin;
bit by bit, the firstborn of death
gnashes at his limbs.
14 He is torn *violently* from the safety of his tent
and forced to march before the king of terrors.

► Bildad sees the realm of death not just as a place of rest and waiting, but as a growing society ruled by a king. *Sheol* always has room for more citizens and always wants more. Like an infant, this place—this firstborn of death—has a voracious appetite for the wicked. And the infant's father, the king of terrors, has many ways to provide for his child. His terrors are not nightmares or phobias or any other psychological device. Instead, he rules over disaster, disease, and famine—anything that brings death. Through his vibrant imagery, Bildad explains that death is the ultimate fate of the wicked; he implies that Job cannot be evil because the terrors he has faced have not yet killed him.

Bildad: 15 Nothing of his remains in his tent,
and burning sulfur has been scattered on it *so no one will dwell there again.*
16 *Death comes from both directions:*
from below, his roots dry out;
from above, his branches wither.
17 On the earth, he disappears from memory;
on the outside, no one recalls his name.
18 He is pushed out of the light into darkness
and chased from the inhabited world *altogether.*
19 He has no children, no descendants among his people;
no one survives him *or escapes* from his homeland.
20 His fate is *unanimously* viewed:
with dismay in the West,
with horror in the East.
21 Surely this is the way it goes with *all* evil people;
surely this is the lot in life for those who do not know God.

19

Job answered *his friends in frustration.*

Job: 2 O how long! *How long* will you torture me and pound me with *your* chatter?
3 *What is it now? Eight times? Nine times?*
No, surely it's ten times you have insulted me.
Ten times you've shamelessly acted to harm me.
4 Even if I have erred, my faults lie with me alone.
5 *However,* if you must exalt yourselves at my expense,
if you must proffer my own disgrace as evidence against me,
6 Then you ought *at least* to know that I have been wronged by God.
Yes, His net is closed about me.

7 Look! I cry out, "Violence!" but no response comes.
I shout for help, but justice eludes me.
8 He is a roadblock. He will not let me pass;
He has covered my roads in darkness.
9 He has stripped me of my honor,
torn the crown off my head.
10 He comes at me from all sides, but I *attempt to* leave;
He rips out my hope as if it were a tree *in dry ground.*
11 His anger burns *white-hot* against me,
and He considers me His enemy.
12 His militia arrives to raise a siege ramp against me
and to surround my dwelling.

13 He has driven my relatives far from me;
I am cut off from my friends.
14 My *entire* family has failed *me;*
my best friends have forgotten me.
15 Everyone in my house, including my maidservants,
treats me like an outsider;
I am a stranger to them *now.*
16 When I send for my servant, he does not come.
I even plead with him with my own voice.
17 My breath is strange; even my wife avoids me;
I'm loathsome to my relatives; *they can't stand to be around me.*
18 Even young children taunt me,
and when I *seek to* rise, they mock me.

19My closest friends can no longer
bear me,
and anyone I have ever loved has
turned against me.
20I am reduced to skin and bones;
I have barely escaped by the skin of
my teeth.
21Show me your pity, my friends, show
me your pity!
For *truly,* I have been struck by the
hand of God.
22Why do you pursue me as God has
done?
Is my emaciated body not satisfying
enough for you?

23What I would give to have my words
taken down,
to have them inscribed for posterity
on a scroll.
24*No! More than that!*
To have them chiseled with iron *filled
with* lead—
carved in stone for all eternity.
25Besides, I know my Redeemer lives,
and in the end He will rise and take
His stand on the earth.
26And though my skin has been stripped
off,
still, in my flesh, I will see God.
27I, myself, will see Him:
not some stranger, but *actually* me,
with these eyes.
Toward this end, my deepest
longings pine away within my
chest.

► Literally, a redeemer "buys back" something that was taken away. In the Old Testament, kinsmen-redeemers are men who buy their relatives out of slavery, buy family property back from creditors, or marry their brothers' widows to save the women from destitution. What is it that Job needs returned to him? Acknowledgment of his innocence and a renewed life. Because all of his family and friends have abandoned him, Job is trusting in his plea to God. As he did in chapter 16, Job is personifying his words and hoping in the redemptive power of his own argument.

Many millennia later, Christians do not have to trust in their own actions or persuasive reasoning to save their lives. Jesus redeemed all when He died on the cross—trading Himself to buy back our lives. He is the ultimate Redeemer.

Job: 28If you ask, "How will we pursue him
since the root cause *of his suffering*
lies in him?"
29You ought to fear the sword yourselves;
for the sword bears fury's
punishment
in order that you might realize
there is, *in fact,* a judgment.

20 Zophar the Naamathite reiterated *his concern for Job.*

Zophar: 2My anguished thoughts force me
to respond
because I feel an urgency within
myself.
3I caught wind of your words that
dishonor me,
but I am prompted to answer
based on my own spirit and
understanding.
4Don't you know how it has always been?
Since humankind was first put here
on the earth,
5The celebrations of the wicked have
been brief,
and the joy of the profane lasts only
a moment.
6Even if he were tall enough to reach
into the heavens
and his head were to reach to the
clouds,
7He would *still* perish forever, like his
own excrement;
those who once looked upon him
would wonder,
"Where has he gone?"
8Like a dream, he flies off where no one
can find him;
he is chased away *only to vanish
into the air* like a vision of the
night.
9The eyes that saw him before see him
no more;
his home doesn't ever welcome him
again.
10His children beg *at the door of* the poor;
his hands render his wealth back
to them.
11The vigor of youth *had a home,* a
residence in his bones,
but it lies down in the dust with him.

12Though *his* wrongdoing is sweet in his
mouth,
though he hides it under his tongue,
13Though he holds it close and will not
let it go
(but *must* keep it in his mouth),
14His food will be transformed within
him
into the bitter venom of the asp.
15The wealth he has swallowed *will be*
poison.
He will vomit it up—God will cast
it out.
16*It is as they say,* "He sucks the venom
of asps
and is slain by the tongue of the
viper."
17Never again will he gaze at the brook's
edge
or see streams that flow with milk
and honey—
18*The food* for which he worked he
vomits up or cannot swallow,
and the gains of his trading, he can
never enjoy.
19After all, *he's an oppressor;*
he's crushed and forsaken the poor;
he made his home in a house he
stole *from another,*
a house he did not build himself.

20Because he's never known inner peace,
he has seized everything he's ever
craved.
21Because he consumed all he could see,
nothing is left;
his prosperity cannot last.
22When he is fat with satisfaction,
the belt of distress will tighten
around him
and the hands of the downtrodden
will rise up against him.
23When he has filled up his belly,
God will visit him with His
ferocious anger;
it will rain down on him while he
is eating.
24Let him attempt to escape the iron
weapon.
Instead, a bow of bronze will *send*
death to tear into him.
25When the arrow is drawn it comes out
of his back,
and the shining arrowhead comes
out of his organ,
bringing terror upon him.
26A great darkness waits for *and stalks*
everything he values.
A *mysterious* fire—unstoked *yet*
burning hot—will consume him
and devour everything *and everyone*
left *behind* in his tent.
27The skies will *tell on him,* exposing his
wrongdoing;
the earth will rebel against him.
28All that he labored to build will be
carried off,
washed away in the day of God's
furious anger.
29This is how it will be for the wicked of
humanity before God;
this is the inheritance God
bequeaths them.

21 Then Job answered *Zophar.*

Job: 2Listen carefully to what
I'm about to say,
and let your listening be the
consolation you give me.
3Suffer me to speak *to you,*
and after I've said what I need to
say,
you may commence mocking.
4Is my complaint addressed to
humanity, *or has it ever been*?
Why shouldn't I, *by this point,* be
impatient *with all of this*?
5Stay with me, and be stunned *at what*
has happened to such a righteous
person;
cover your *gaping* mouth with your
hand.
6When I think back *upon everything that*
has gone before, I'm terrified;
my body is overtaken with
trembling.
7Why do the wicked live
on an ever-upward path to long life
and riches?
8Their children become well-established
in front of them;
their offspring *are guaranteed to*
grow up before their very eyes.
9Their houses are immune to
approaching terrors;
the rod of God is not on their backs
punishing them.
10Their bulls are consistent breeders;
their cows deliver *healthy* calves
without miscarrying.
11They produce flocks of children and
send them all out *into the*
world;
their young ones dance around *free*
of care.
12They *still participate in celebration,*
raising their voices to the song of
the tambourine and the harp;
delighting in the sound of the flute.

Throughout the Bible, God is called by many names. One of the most frequent in the Old Testament, *Shaddai,* was a favorite name of God for patriarchs such as Abraham and Moses. Based on the etymology of the name, many suggest Abraham brought that epithet with him from Mesopotamia, so it is logical that Job (another patriarch from outside of Israel) could often refer to Him the same way.

El Shaddai, which translates to "God of my mountain" or possibly "God of might," aptly describes many characteristics of God. He is strong and high above everything, just like the heights of a mountain. He is a protector, just like the rocky crags in the side of a cliff. And certainly God associates Himself with mountain ranges—having Abraham bind Isaac on Mount Moriah, giving the Israelites the law from Mount Sinai, and placing His sacred temple on Mount Zion. Whether speaking to humanity from the top of a mountain or the heights of heaven, the Lord is certainly the Highest One; no one is above Him.

13 They pass their time in *the lap of*
abundance,
and *they are even permitted* to pass
quickly to the land of the dead,
instead of lingering with chronic
pain.
14 They tell God, "Leave us be.
We have no interest in *You or* Your
ways.
15 Who is the Highest One* *anyway,*
and why should we serve Him?
What can we *possibly* gain by asking
favors of Him?
Isn't He generous enough already?"
16 Look, *don't you see?*
The wicked do not control their
own wealth, *God does*;
I am a long way from understanding
the plan for the wicked.

17 *Bildad claims the flame of the wicked is*
blown out.
But how often *is* their lamp
extinguished?
How often does disaster strike them or
does God give them pain
because of His anger *at what they've*
done?
18 *How often* are they as straw in the
wind
or the chaff separated *from the*
grain by fierce winds?
19 It is said, "God stores away a man's
misdeeds
and delivers them to his children."*
Let Him repay the man Himself, so
the man can know it.
20 Let the wicked see his ruin with his
own eyes
as he drinks down the wrath of the
Highest One.
21 After all, once he's *dead and* gone and
his time is up,
what will he care for his household
and family?
22 Now who dares impart knowledge to
God
since He stands as judge over the
most powerful?
23 One *person* dies when he is fit and
strong,
completely secure and *totally* at
peace;
24 His body* is *vigorous and* well fed;
his bones are *strong and* moist.
25 Another *person* dies with a bitter soul,
having never even tasted
goodness.
26 But they lie down together in *the same*
dust,
covered by the *same blanket of*
worms.

27 I know how your minds work, *my*
friends,
and how you plan to wrong me—
your thoughts of retribution.
28 You will counter, "*Show me!*
Where is the palatial estate?
Where are the *vaulted* tents of the
wicked?"
29 *But I say,* have you never consulted
with those who travel this
world?
They can tell you the complexions of
many lands.
But you've never permitted their
witness
in your courts of opinion, have you?
30 *Well, if you had, you'd have heard*
that when disaster strikes, the
wicked are spared;

* 21:15 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 21:19 Exodus 20:5 * 21:24 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

On the day of fury,
they are escorted safely through.
31 Who challenges them *openly* regarding
their actions,
and who repays them on account of
all they've done?
32 When *death finally comes and* they are
laid in their graves,
guards stand watch over their
tombs, *fending off grave robbers.*
33 *Laid to rest beside the stream,* clods of
earth cover them kindly;
while countless souls have gone
before, all of humanity follows
after.
34 *So, my friends,* how can you *continue*
trying to comfort me *with these*
empty consolations?
So far, your answers have been only
thinly veiled lies!

22 Eliphaz the Temanite made suggestions *to Job.*

Eliphaz: 2 Can a strong person be of any
use to God?
How about one who is wise? Can
he help himself?
3 Is the Highest One* made happy if you
are righteous?
Does He profit from your perfect
ways?
4 *Do you really think* He takes you to task
because you revere Him *too*
much?
Is this why He brings allegations
against you?
5 Is it not *possible* that you are, *in fact,*
great with wickedness
and endless in your wrongdoing?

6 When your relatives *came to you*
needing money,
for no good reason you took their
clothes for collateral
and left them naked.
7 You have never given *so much as a cup*
of water to the thirsty
or a crumb to the hungry.
8 *You must think* only the powerful and
privileged possess the land
and can live in it *any way they wish.*
9 You have sent away widows who were
wanting,
and you have obliterated the *only*
support of orphans.
10 This is why you are surrounded by
snares,
why you are overcome with
dreadful fears,
11 Why you're in the dark, without *a*
glimmer to help you see,
sunk beneath *the rush of* flooding
water.

12 Is not God *up there* at the *crown of the*
highest *arc* of heaven?
And the highest stars!
See how lofty they are!
13 *But you*—you say, "What does God
know?
Can He send His judgments
through such thick darkness?
14 *Those* clouds are *just* a veil for Him
so He does not *have to* look
upon us
while He saunters, *oblivious,*
through the chambers of the
sky."
15 *Job,* are you now guardian of the
ancient road
where the wicked have traveled?
16 *The wicked,* who are *captured*
and taken off before their time,
their foundations washed out by a
flooded river,
17 They *are the ones who* tell God, "Leave
us be."
They say, "What can the Highest
One do to us?"
18 *How are they repaid for their insolence?*
You say, "He stuffs their homes with
goodness,"
Then you shake your head and mutter,
"Far be it from me to understand
the thoughts and plans of the
wicked."
19 The righteous *would* look *upon their*
ruin and laugh for delight;
the innocent *would* taunt
20 By saying, "Sure enough, our enemies
have gone to their annihilation,
and what they've left behind feeds a
hungry fire."

21 Now be of use to God;
be at peace with Him,
and goodness will return to your
life.
22 Receive instruction *directly* from His
lips,
and make His words a part of you.
23 If you return to the Highest One,
you will be restored;
if you banish the evil from your
tents,

* 22:3 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

24And consider your gold *as common as earth's* dust
and Ophir's *refined gold as plentiful* as stones *in rock-lined* streams,
25Then your true treasure will be the Highest One—
worth more than gold and silver beyond measure.
26For then, *at last,* you will find pleasure in the Highest One,
and you will *finally be able to* show Him your face.
27When you approach Him, He will listen;
you will make good on your promises *to Him.*
28You will pronounce something to be,
and He will make it so;
light will *break out* across *all of* your paths.
29*God* will humble, but you say, "Raise them up."
He will save the downcast.
30He will even *consent to* deliver those who are not innocent
through the purity of your *then-washed-clean* hands.

23 Job confided *to his friends.*

Job: 2So once again *you are telling me* my complaint amounts to rebellion,
that the heavy hand *I feel upon me* is smothering my groans?
3Would that I knew where to find Him.
I would appear before Him.
4I would lay my case out before Him;
I would fill up my mouth with arguments.
5*And then* I would *finally* learn how He would answer me,
and *I would* understand what He tells me.
6Would He oppose me *merely* with His great power? Surely not!
Surely He would *show me the respect of* listening to my *argument.*
7There, *in that courtroom,* a moral man might *hope to* reason with Him,
and I would escape my Judge forever.

8*Alas,* wherever I go, ahead or behind,
He is not there;
I am unable to find Him.
9When He works on either side of me, I *still* cannot see Him.
I catch no glimpse of Him.
10But He knows the course I have traveled.
And I believe that were He to prove me,
I would come out *purer than* gold *from the fire.*
11My foot has been securely set in His tracks;
I have kept to His course *of life* without swerving;
12I have not departed from the commands of His lips;
I have valued everything He says more than all else.
13He alone is one *True God*; who can alter Him?
Whatever He desires within Himself, He does.
14For He will carry out exactly what He has planned for me,
and *in the future* there are more plans to come.
15Therefore, I am deeply troubled before Him;
when I ponder it *at any length,* I am terrified of Him.
16Yes, God has melted my courage,
and the Highest One has overwhelmed me with *His* terror.
17*He could have turned me aside when* the darkness *came,*
but He did not cut me off.
Nor does He hide my face from the gloom *that has now overtaken me.*

24 **Job:** Why are there not judgment times *for the wicked* before the Highest One?*
Why do those who know Him not see His *judgment* days?
2*After all* it's the wicked who seize land *that belongs to others,*
capture flocks and let them graze *for themselves,*
3Drive off orphans' donkeys,
take as collateral widows' oxen,
4Drive the needy off the road,
and force the poor into hiding together.
5*Look at how the poor are forced to live!*
Like wild donkeys in the desert,
They spend all their energy scrounging for food,
hoping the desert provides enough to feed their children!
6They forage for scraps out in the open
and glean *what they can* from the *already-harvested* vineyards of the wicked.

* 24:1 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

7 They settle down night *after night,*
naked *since pawning their cloaks,*
and have nothing to protect them
from the cold.
8 The *hard* mountain rains soak them
as they press *themselves* against
rocks in the absence of *real*
shelter;
9 The fatherless child is torn away from
the breast;
the suckling babe is seized as
collateral from the poor.
10 They force the poor to wander naked,
no clothing to be had,
carrying the *very* bundles of grain
they long to eat.
11 They are *stationed* among the
terraces*
pressing oil *from the olive* that calls
to their hunger;
they trample in winepresses,
extracting the juice for which
they thirst.
12 At *the outskirts of* the city, the *oppressed*
groan,
wounded souls crying for help,
but God fails to charge the guilty
who have brought them such
pain.

13 They were among those who rebel
against the light.
They don't want to know what
makes it shine,
nor do they live their lives in its
paths.
14 *It is not the poor and the victim who*
rebel.
It is the murderer who rises before
first light
And kills the poor and the needy.
And in the *dark of* night, he
becomes the thief.
15 And the eye of the adulterer waits for
the onset of dusk;
he thinks, "No one will see me,"
because he disguises his face.
16 And others break into homes in the
dark.
However, by day they shut
themselves up inside
because they do not know the light.
17 For *all of these criminals,*
the morning *arrives arm in arm*
with the threat of being found
out.
It is as the shadow of death to them,
for they are at ease with the terrors
of the night.

* 24:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

► This passage is challenging to translate because it appears to have Job arguing against his previous convictions by claiming the wicked do suffer, which fits better with Zophar's philosophy. But that textual difficulty offers two possible explanations of Job's apparent dual arguments. First, it is possible to read these verses as if Job is quoting his friends; he is not adopting this theology, but mocking his friends who do. Second, Job may be cursing the wicked, wishing these evil things would happen to them. The Greek version of the text, called the Septuagint, provides the second translation of this passage. Regardless of who said it and how, this passage describes the possible pitfalls of evil actions.

Job: 18 The wicked may sit lightly on the
surface of the waters,
but their bit of land, *the parcel on*
which they live, is accursed;
In fact, they don't even turn *down the*
road to their vineyards
because they don't produce.
19 Just as *summer's* heat and drought melt
and carry off the winter snow,
the land of the dead *digests and*
carries away sinners.
20 The very wombs *whence they came*
forget them;
the worms will feast on them until
no one remembers they existed;
the skeletons of wickedness *dry up*
and snap like twigs.

21 They *deliberately* prey on women with
no children *to protect them*
and don't care to lend a hand to
widows!
22 By His power, God drags off the high
and mighty *with the ropes of a*
hunter,
and though they may rise to the
top, they have no assurance of
true life.
23 God may provide for them, and they
may feel secure,
but His eyes are *always* on their
ways.

Thanks to commonly known Greek and Roman mythologies, it is not difficult to imagine what "the land of the dead" or *sheol* may be. But what is this place of "destruction," known in Hebrew as *abaddon*? The Hebrew word comes from a verb that means "to become lost," and *abaddon* is usually mentioned in the Old Testament in conjunction with the land of the dead, the grave, or death itself—places lost to the living world. In the New Testament Book of Revelation, *abaddon* is personified as the "messenger of the abyss" (9:11) who rules the locusts—horrible creatures that torture any living thing. Based on these clues, *abaddon* may be thought of as a place for the dead (like here in Job) or as death personified (like in Revelation) that decimates everything around it or commands the destruction of everything it sees, a primitive creature living in its own chaos where no one would ever want to visit and wreaking havoc wherever it goes outside its home.

24 They may make their mark—to be sure—in a brief moment of glory,
but then *just as quickly* the wicked are gone, like the rest of humanity,
like heads of grain cut off *and dried up*.
25 Now, if this is not the truth, then call me a liar
and count all this talk for nothing.

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite responded.

Bildad: 2 God rules *over all things*;
dread is His domain,
God—who makes peace *and order* on His own heights.
3 As for His armies, can they even be counted?
As for His light, is anyone not illuminated?
4 Then *tell me* how can a person be right with God?
How can someone born of a woman *in blood* be pure?
5 If even the moon is not bright *enough*
and *the light of* the stars is not pure in His estimation,
6 How much less so a human,
who is a mere worm—
The offspring of humanity,
who is a maggot!

26 Job explained.

Job *(sarcastically)*: 2 What a *great* help you are to the powerless!
How you have held up the arm that is *feeble and* weak!
3 What *sage* counsel you have given to *me,* the unwise!
And what immeasurable insight you have put on display *for us*!
4 Whom did you say these words to?
Where did you get such *profound* inspiration?

5 The departed quiver below,
down deep beneath the seas
and all that is within them,
6 The land of the dead is exposed before God,
and the place where destruction lies is uncovered *in His presence.*
7 He stretches out the northern sky over *vast reaches of* emptiness;
He hangs the earth itself on nothing.
8 He binds up the waters into His clouds,
but the cloud does not burst from the strain.
9 He conceals the sight of His throne
and spreads His clouds over it *to hide it from view.*
10 He has encircled the waters *with a horizon*-boundary:
the line between *day and night,* light and darkness.
11 The very pillars *that hold up the* sky quake
and are astounded by His reprisals.
12 By His power, He stilled the sea,
quelling the chaos;
by His wisdom, He pierced Rahab,
evil of the sea;
13 By His breath, the heavens are made *beautifully* clear;
by His hand that *ancient* serpent—even as it attempted escape—is pierced through.
14 And all of this, *all of these* are the mere edges of His capabilities.
We are privy to only a whisper of His power.

Who then *dares to* claim
understanding of His thunderous
might?

27 Job continued.

Job: [2]By God—who lives and
has deprived me of justice,
the Highest One* who has *also*
embittered my soul—
[3]*I make this proclamation:*
that, while there is life in me,
While the breath of *that selfsame* God
is in my nostrils,
[4]My lips will not let lies escape them,
and my tongue will not form deceit.
[5]So I will never concede that you *three*
are right.
Until the day I die, I will not
abandon my integrity *just to*
appease you.
[6]*On the contrary,* I'll assert my
innocence and never let it go;
my heart will not mock my past or
my future.

[7]May my enemy be counted as the
wicked
and my adversary as the unjust.
[8]For what hope does he who is sullied
and impure have
once God lops him off from life and
requires his soul?
[9]Will God listen to his cry
when he is overtaken by distress?
[10]Will he have made the Highest One his
pleasure *after the fact*?
Will he have marked the seasons
with his calls to God *once it is*
too late?
[11]Let me show you *what I have learned* of
God's power.
I assure you I will not cover over the
true nature of the Highest One's
ways.
[12]Look, you have all seen it—*seen the*
same things I have seen here.
Why then all this vain nonsense?

[13]*Indeed, Zophar, listen closely,* for what
the wicked of humanity will
inherit from God.
This is the heritage the Highest
One bequeaths to those who
oppress:
[14]If the children of the wicked multiply,
they meet their end at *the blade of*
the sword.
And even if they are fat with surplus,
the descendants of the wicked will
be starved for bread.
[15]Those who survive will fall to disease
and be buried;
many of their widows will not
mourn their deaths.
[16]Though he pile up money as if it were
common dirt
and clothing *in heaps* like *mounds*
of clay,
[17]What he may prepare, the righteous
will wear;
the silver *he sets aside,* the innocent
will divide.
[18]He builds his house *doomed to*
impermanence—
like the moth's cocoon,
like the *field* watchman's lean-to
that is dismantled after the
harvest.
[19]He lies down *to sleep* a wealthy man,
but never again,
For when he opens his eyes *to*
morning,
all is gone.
[20]Terrors overtake him as if they were
floodwaters;
the tempest snatches him away in
the *dead of* night.
[21]*Indeed,* the *sultry* east wind lifts him *up*
and away.
He is gone, swept off the place *he*
knew as his own.
[22]It will have blown against him pitilessly,
and he tries to flee from its *fast-*
closing hand.
[23]*As a final humiliation,* it claps its hands
against him as a man would—
sneering, hissing at him as he
leaves.

28 **Job:** There is a place where
silver is mined,
a place where gold is
refined.
[2]*There* iron is dug from the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.
[3]Humans put an end to darkness,
and search in every last corner
For the ore that is in gloom and
darkness.
[4]*In the earth* they cut a shaft
in a place forgotten, far from the
beaten path;
They descend *on ropes,*
swinging *dangerously* back and
forth.

* 27:2 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

5The ground above yields food;
the earth below is turned as if fire
has destroyed it
6Where earth gives up sapphires from
her rocks
and *bits of* gold from her dirt.
7No bird of prey knows this *way, this*
secret path *down below*;
no falcon's eye has ever peered
into it.
8No proud beast has ever reached this
place;
no *lordly* lion has marched over it.

9The miner breaks apart flinty stone,
uprooting the *ancient* mountains.
10He carves tunnels through the rock,
revealing precious treasures.
11He dams up* the *underground* streams
until they cease seeping,
and he brings out into the light what
was hidden *there in the darkness.*

12But where is wisdom found,
and where does understanding
dwell?

► Proverbs 1:20-33 and 8:3-36 give the best articulated picture of wisdom in the Bible. Personified there as Lady Wisdom, this character was created by God long before His creation of the world—which she then aided in. After creation, she wanted nothing more than to be with humanity and help them to have full, truthful lives; but here Job explains that wisdom is now hidden. Certainly God knows where she is, although He isn't telling; but humans have a better chance of finding immeasurable wealth than of attaining wisdom. This is because she is only found on one road, and that's the God-fearing road of piety. In order to find wisdom, one must allow God to direct him there; and ironically, the knowledge that God must direct lives is wisdom itself!

Job: 13No human perceives wisdom's *true*
value,
nor has she been found in the land
of the living.

14The deep says, "She is not *to be seen*
within me."
"Nor within me," says *the voice of*
the *raging* sea.
15No gold can be given in trade for
wisdom,
nor *a sum of* silver weighed out as
her price.
16She cannot be bought with *all* the gold
of Ophir,
neither with onyx nor sapphire.
17The *shimmer of* gold and *brightness of*
glass cannot compare,
and no refined gold jewelry is
worth her in trade.
18Perish the mention of coral and
crystal;
even more than pearls is the value
of wisdom.
19Ethiopian topaz—unequal as well;
even gold, unalloyed, is too paltry
indeed.
20Then from where does wisdom come?
Where does understanding dwell?
21She is hidden away from every eye,
even from birds *looking down* from
the sky.
22Destruction and Death have both
confessed,
"Rumors are all we know about her."

23God understands wisdom's path *and*
way;
her place is known to Him alone.
24For He gazes out to the edge of the
earth,
sees all *that falls* beneath the sky
overhead.
25He lent the wind its weight *and force*
and measured out the waters'
spread.
26When He set a limit on the rain *that*
falls
and made the thunderbolt a road
to race,
27Then He saw wisdom and made her
known,
He settled her and searched out for
her a place.
28And to humankind, He said, "Now, the
fear of the Lord is wisdom,
and to depart from evil is
understanding."

The great wisdom of the ages begins with fearing God. It is the evil of the world that clouds our understanding and leads us into foolishness.

* 28:11 Hebrew manuscripts read, "He searches."

29 Job continued.

Job: [2]Ah, that I were as I once
was, months ago
during the time when God
oversaw me,
[3]When His lamp shone above my head,
and by His light, I walked through
the darkness.
[4]Ah, to be in the ripest time of life *once
more*—
when the *intimacies of* friendship
with God enfolded my tent,
[5]When the Highest One* was with me
and my children encircled me,
[6]When my steps were bathed in milk
and the rock poured out rivers of
olive oil, *showering my body,*
[7]When I went *up* to the gate of the city,
when I took my seat in the *town*
square *where the elders meet.*
[8]There the young saw me and *made
room for me, in deference to
elders.*
The old rose and stood *out of respect.*
[9]The leaders stopped talking
with their hands over their mouths.
[10]The voices of nobles fell to a hush;
their tongues stuck to the roofs of
their mouths.
[11]Every ear that heard me blessed me,
and every eye that saw me testified
to my *greatness.*
[12]After all, I rescued the poor when they
cried out for help
and assisted the orphans when they
had no one else.

Great virtue has always begun with the treatment of the poor. Can Job be accused of having a hard heart?

[13]The dying spoke their blessings over me,
and the widows sang their joyful
songs honoring what I did.
[14]I adorned myself in righteousness,
and it covered me;
my justice *fit me* like a cloak and
turban—
*conveying both my dignity and my
authority.*
[15]I was the eyes for the blind,
the feet for the lame,
[16]A father for the needy,
and I sought for the cause of whom
I did not know.
[17]I broke *out* the fangs of the wicked
and wrested prey from their jaws.
[18]Then I said, "I will pass from this earth
in *the comfort of* my nest.
My days will be more numerous
than *a beach's grains of* sand.
[19]My roots will *grow deep,* spreading out
to the water's *edge,*
and in the night, the dew will *come
to* rest on my branches.
[20]Respect will be accorded me every day,
my skill with the bow always new in
my hand."

[21]People used to listen to me,
the sense of expectation *visible on
their faces;*
they waited in silence for my advice.
[22]And when I finished, they did not *hurry
to* speak again.
They waited while my words
dropped *like dew* upon them.
[23]Indeed, they waited for me as *one waits
for a good* rain,
and they opened their mouths as if
to catch spring showers *on their
tongues.*
[24]I smiled upon them when their
confidence flagged,
and they took comfort in my
beaming face.*
[25]I led them in their way.
I sat as their leader.
I lived like a king among his troops.
I was as a *happy* man spreading
comfort among the mourners.

30 **Job:** But now they mock me,
these young men whose
fathers I *hold in such*
contempt.
I wouldn't trust them *with my herds*
as I do my dogs.
[2]What good does their strength do me?
Their potency has wilted.
[3]Gaunt from starvation, *haggard* from
hunger *that drives them* to gnaw
the ground in the night,
a ground *all* wasted and hollowed-
out,
[4]They *are left with the desperate foods of
the famished—*
plucking mallow from the bushes
by the salt marshes,
and making the *ashy* broom tree
root their staple.
[5]*The people from the town* chase each
one out of his neighborhood;
they howl at *all of* them as if they
were *common* thieves,

* 29:5 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 29:24 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

6 *And push them out* to live in the deep
valleys of the wadis—
those desert streams that come and go—
So these outcasts seek shelter in the
overhangs and crumbling caves
that line the banks of no-man's-land.
7 Braying *like donkeys* from the bushes,
huddled together in the prickly
undergrowth are
8 Fools and sons of no-names,
driven by lashes out from *the bosom of* the land.

Even the fools and outcasts use Job's name as an insult. His character has been brought low by those who should be beneath him.

9 And now they sing of me in taunt *and parody,*
and make my name a byword
among them.
10 They abhor me, keep their distance,
and feel free to spit in my face.
11 Because God has unstrung His
bowstring and stricken me *with suffering,*
they are no longer restrained
toward me.
12 To my right, the horde* arises.
They *seek to* knock me off my feet,
piling their disastrous ways
against me.
13 They lay waste to my path
and benefit from my destruction,
and no one is there to stop them.
14 As through a wall breached, they
advance *easily.*
Their *thunderstorm of wheels* rolled
across *my* ruins.
15 *Alas! A storm of* terrors has turned
toward me and is upon me;
my dignity is blown away as by the
wind;
my prosperity vanishes like a wispy
cloud.

16 And now my *own* soul is *drawn out,*
poured over me.
The days of misery have taken hold
of me;
I am firmly in their grasp.
17 By night, my pain is *at work,* boring
holes in my bones;
it gnaws at me and never lies down
to rest.
18 With great force, God wraps around
me like my clothing.
He binds tightly about my neck as
if He were the collar of my
tunic.*
19 He has pushed me off into the mud,
and I am reduced *from man* to dust
and ashes.
20 I call out to You, *God,* but You refuse to
answer me.
When I arise, You merely
examine me.
21 *You have changed.*
Now You are cruel to me;
You employ Your strength to
attack me.
22 You pull me up into the wind and make
me ride *upon it*
until I am *fractured and* dissipated
in the storm.
23 I know *where this ends.*
You will send me off to death
and usher me to that meetinghouse
where all the living *one day* go.

24 And yet does not a person *trapped* in
ruins stretch out his hand,
and in this disaster does he not cry
out for help?*
25 Did I not grieve for the hard days of
another
or weep for *the pains of* the poor?
26 And yet when I longed for the good,
evil came;
when I awaited the light, *thick*
darkness arrived instead.
27 I am boiling on the inside,
and it will not quit;
yet the days of misery *still* come
for me.
28 I drift in darkness, the sun absent;
I arise in the assembly
and call out for help.
29 *But who will come now that I am roaming the wilderness?*
I am a brother to jackals, a friend of
ostriches.
30 *Despite my earnest cries,* my skin burns
until it is black and flakes off,
and my bones burn with fever.
31 And so my harp is tuned to *the key of*
mourning,
and my flute *is pitched* to the sound
of weeping.

31 **Job:** I have made a sacred
pledge with my eyes.
How then could I stare at
a young woman *with desire*?

* 30:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 30:18 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 30:24 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

2And what share has God set aside for
us from above?
What is the heritage *we can expect*
from the lofty *God, the* Highest
One?*
3*Has it not been made clear these many
years?*
Is there not *supposed to be*
punishment *poured out* on the
wicked
and disaster on those wrongdoers?
4Does God not see the paths of my
choosing;
does He not count every single step
I take?

► In this speech, Job is actually recording his deposition; he is calling God to come answer the charges he is laying out. Using a rigid format, Job explains away eight areas of potential sin in his life. So certain is Job that he is innocent of wickedness, he actually pronounces curses upon himself if the all-knowing God finds him guilty of any of the sins. This ethereal courtroom procedure would be like any human going to a court to explain how he did not violate the law of the land and prefacing his testimony with a proposed sentence of the death penalty if the judgment goes against him. Job will soon learn that it is never appropriate to assume he knows more about justice than God, the very author of justice.

Job: 5If I have walked alongside lies
or if my feet have rushed toward
deception,
6Then let God weigh me on a truly
balanced set of scales.
He will know *and see* my integrity.
7If my steps have veered off *God's
prescribed* path
or if my heart has followed *any of
the evil* my eyes have seen
or if my hands are soiled,
8Then let me sow, but then let another
one eat *the produce*!
Let my sprouts be pulled up by
their roots!

9If my heart has been seduced by
another woman
or if I have waited by a friend's door
for a liaison with his wife,
10Then let my wife be taken by another,
to grind his grain *or do whatever he
pleases,*
And let other men kneel down over her
11because *adultery* is such a lewd,
scandalous act,
an offense punishable by the
court,
12For it is a fire that burns until the
destruction *is complete.*
Had I done it, it would have undone
all that I had gained.

13If I have refused justice to my
servants—either male or
female—
when they have *had cause for*
dispute with me,
14Then what ought I do when God
stands to judge *me*?
How will I answer when He calls
me to account *for my actions*?
15Did not God, who made me in my
mother's womb, make my
servants *as well*?
Is He not the same One who made
us *each* in *our own mother's*
womb?

16If I have stood between the poor and
the object of their desire,
if I have caused a widow to lose her
love of life,
17If I have eaten my food alone
and not shared it with the *hungry*
orphan
18(*Indeed, from as far back as I can
remember,* I have cared for them
all—
from my youth, been a father to the
orphan;
from my own birth, cared for the
widow),
19If I have *idly* watched anyone die from
exposure simply due to a lack of
clothing
or seen the poor without *any kind
of* covering,
20If *ever* people *in such conditions* did not
physically bless and thank me
for warming them up with the
fleeces of my own sheep,
21If I ever used my *civic* strength to
condemn the fatherless

* 31:2 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

simply because I knew I had allies
in the courts;
22Then let my arm be pulled from its
socket!
Let my forearm be snapped off at
the elbow *for raising it against*
the orphan!
23See, I have *always* dreaded the *kind of*
disaster wrought by God;
I was never able to withstand His
majesty.

24If I have put my confidence in *my stash*
of gold,
if I have trusted in a metal so well-
refined,
25If I have exulted in my immense
wealth
(for I had accumulated so much),
26If I saw the sun in its radiant glory
or the moon sliding *across the sky* in
its splendor,
27If *such sights* secretly seduced my
heart
and made my hand throw kisses
to the false gods of sun and moon,
28Then these things, too, would have
been punishable offenses
because they would have shown me
untrue to the God above.

29Have I gloated at my enemy's downfall
or been excited when he
encountered evil?
30No. I have not permitted my mouth
to sin
by uttering a curse against his very
life.
31Have my guests ever left my dwelling
saying,
"*Anyone still hungry?* Who didn't get
enough to eat?"
32Have I ever left the foreigner to sleep
outside?
No. My door was always open to
the traveler.
33If I have covered my sin as people do
or attempted to hide my
wrongdoing in *the recesses of*
my heart
34(Because of my fear of *the opinions of*
the crowd
or my fright at the disdain of my
family)
And kept silent hiding indoors *away*
from all possible discovery of
flaws;
35(if only someone were listening!)
Now, here *to these oaths, these curses,*
I make my signature!
Let the Highest One answer me!
Let my adversary put his case in
writing!
36If He does, I would place it on my
shoulder *for all to see*;
I would *put it on my head and* wear
it like a crown.
37I would offer Him an account of the
steps I've taken *along my life's*
path
and approach Him *directly* like a
prince.

38If my land cries out against me,
if my furrows gather together to
weep *over my mistreatment of*
them,
39If I have eaten the fruit of the land
without payment *to those who*
tend it
or exasperated the lives of its
tenants, *the farmers, in pursuit*
of greater harvest, or in poor
management of them;
40Then let thistles grow instead of wheat
and stinkweed instead of barley.

This concludes the words of Job.

32 At that point, Job's three friends stopped responding to him because Job was quite certain of his own righteousness. 2But *someone else was there. His name was* Elihu (Barachel's son from Buz, of the family of Ram), *and he* was burning with anger toward Job because Job defended his righteousness rather than God's. 3And Elihu was also angry with Job's three friends because they found no *decent* rebuttal to Job yet condemned him nonetheless. 4Elihu had withheld his words from Job because he was younger than *all four of* them *and knew it was improper to speak until each of them was heard,* 5-6but when Elihu (Barachel's son from Buz) realized the three men's words were spent, his anger inflamed him.

Elihu: I am a young man,
and you are my *wise* elders,
So I have been here shyly *creeping*
about in the background,
timid about sharing my opinion
with you.
7I thought *to myself,* "Age should speak
first;
those advanced in years will teach
wisdom."
8But *alas, it turns out* it is the spirit in a
man, *not age,*

Due to the abundance of grapes and the absence of refrigeration, wine was a staple drink in the ancient Near East. The process of making wine was basically the same one used today, although the equipment was different. Grapes were grown, gathered, pressed, fermented, and stored. For the fermentation process, wineskins (usually made of goat hide) were used instead of today's barrels. Wineskins were the perfect choice because they could expand as the grape juice released its gases during the fermentation process, much as the human stomach expands as it digests food, as Elihu points out. It was imperative that new wineskins were used for each batch of wine because each skin could only expand so far; a second round of fermentation in an old skin would rupture the skin and spill the wine—a truth Jesus makes famous in Luke 5:37. After fermentation, the wine was stored in amphora jars with vented tops, so any gases could be released and the wine still be contained or even transported.

and the breath of the Highest
One* *within him* that lends
understanding.
9*In fact,* sometimes it is neither the great
who are wise
nor the elderly who have an
understanding of justice.
10And so I say, "Listen to me, *Job,*
and I, even I, will explain what I
know."

(turning to the three friends) 11After all, I
waited while *each of* you *three*
spoke;
I lent my ear to your insights
while you searched for what to say,
looking for the right words.
12I paid you my utmost attention, but
hear this!
Not one of you countered Job *with a*
decent argument;
not one rebutted his statements *of*
the case.
13And don't you *dare fall back on the easy*
reply:
"We have found wisdom;
let God rebuke him, not just *any old*
human!"
14*I will answer him differently,*
for he has not assembled his words
against me.
I will not answer him with
your *overly personalized and*
insufficient arguments.

15They are all undone, *unhinged,*
embarrassed!
They have no response!
Their *faculty of* speech has
apparently failed them!
16Should I wait *a bit longer* to make sure
they are *all* done speaking,
for when they stand *silent* and
appear to have nothing to say?
17*So now* it is my turn.
I will tell *you* what I think.
I will impart what I know.
18After all, I am filled *to the brim* with
words,
and my gut reaction is to speak.
19My insides are like *fresh* wine sealed up
and needing to breathe.
Like a new wineskin, I am on
the brink of bursting *from the*
pressure.
20Let me speak. Then I will find relief.
Yes, I will open my mouth and
answer.
21*You will have to pardon me*
if I do not impede my words with
deference to any *of you*
or flatter you *with honorable titles.*
22After all, I am not very skilled with
flattery *anyway*;
I have reason to believe that, if I
were to engage in such senseless
rhetoric,
My Maker would whisk me away from
here
because this matter is so serious.

33 **Elihu:** So now, Job, listen *closely*
to my words;
lend an ear to my
speeches.
2*Wait for it!* I am about ready to part my
lips;
even now, my tongue *begins to stir*
within my mouth.
3My words emerge from a heart of
integrity;
my lips express their knowledge
with sincerity.

* 32:8 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

4 God's Spirit has fashioned me
and the breath of the Highest One* imparts life to me.
5 *So* refute me if you can;
go ahead and make your preparations and assume your position.
6 But remember I am just like you; we are both God's *vessels,*
both pinched from the clay and formed *by Him.*
7 Look, there is no reason for you to be afraid of me;
my hand will not feel all that heavy on you.

8 *Job,* now you have said—and I heard it—
I heard the words sounded out:
9 "I am pure, without sin;
innocent *indeed,* and there is no wrongdoing within me!
10 But oh! God has come up with reasons to accuse me;
now He considers me His enemy.
11 He locks my feet in the shackles;
He watches all my paths, *dogs my every step.*"
12 But listen! You are wrong in all this because God is greater than *a mere* man.

13 Why do you argue with Him,
complaining that He refuses to account for all of His actions?
14 For God does speak in one way and even another way—
yet no one may be able to perceive *what He says.*
15 *One kind of answer God gives comes in the form of* a dream—in a night-vision—
When deep slumber comes to people who have lain down to sleep in their beds.
16 *Yes, this is often* when He opens the ears of humanity,
and seals their life-corrections in the terrors *of the night*
17 So that He can turn one away from his *evil* deeds
and put down the arrogance of the proud.
18 *He does all of this so* that He might hold back one soul from the pit
and protect one life from passing over to the land of death.*

19 Or *another kind of answer God gives comes thus:*
one may be corrected through a bed of pain;
his bones may hold him in an unceasing trial,
20 In which his food becomes repulsive,
and he doesn't hunger for even his favorite meals.
21 His body wastes away *almost* to nothing,
and bones, once hidden, stick out *gruesomely.*
22 *Thus he is sobered as* his soul approaches the *rim of the* pit,
as his life *hears the whispers of* the coming messengers of death.

23 If there is a *heavenly* messenger at one's side, a mediator,
even just one out of the thousand *in his regime of God's messengers,*
to proclaim what is right for that person *according to God,*
24 And to be gracious to him and to say,
"Spare this one from descending into the pit;
I have found a ransom *that will save his life!*
25 Then his skin will be renewed, as *smooth and* fresh as a child's,
and he will be restored to the *vim and* vigor of his youth."
26 He will make his appeal to God, and God will grant acceptance;
he will see God's face *and shout* with joy,
knowing God has restored his right standing.
27 Then he comes to his fellow humans and sings *out,*
"I sinned and perverted *what I knew to be* right,
but God has not repaid me what I deserved.
28 He has *instead paid that ransom and* spared me from descending into the pit
and my life *now* sees the light."

29 Look! God does all of these things two, even three times with a person,
30 *In order* to guide his soul back from the *rim of the* pit
so the light of life might shine on him.
31 Lend your ear, Job, and listen *well* to me;
remain silent, and I will do the talking.

* 33:4 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 33:18 Hebrew manuscripts read, "from passing over the canal."

32 If you have anything to say *to me, say it.*
Make your answer to me;
go ahead and speak, because I *do*
desire to see you justified *to*
God.
33 But if not, then listen *well* to me;
stay quiet, and I will teach you
wisdom.

34 *Job remained silent, so* Elihu continued.

Elihu: 2 Hear my words, you men of
wisdom;
listen to me, learned ones:
3 Our ears are capable of testing wisdom
of words
the way the roofs of our mouths are
capable of tasting food.*
4 Let us *form a council here then, and*
decide among us what is right;
let us come together to know what
is good *in all of this.*
5 After all, Job has told *us,* "I am
innocent,
but God has denied my right *to a*
fair hearing.
6 Though I am right, should I lie *and*
claim to be wrong? No.
Let me put it to you simply:
I am gravely wounded *as* by an arrow,
but I am innocent."
7 What *other* man is comparable to Job?
He drinks disdain like water.
8 *He is not like* the one who runs with the
workers of wickedness
and associates himself with evil
people.
9 In fact he *even* suggests, "A person
receives no benefit
from pleasing God."

► In his first speech to Job, Elihu has been a cowboy, brazenly calling Job out for his blasphemous words about God. He has not exactly condemned Job as a wicked man; he has condemned Job for his reaction to his suffering and to God. This is unprecedented behavior, since a younger man would never contradict an elder, especially in the presence of other elders. Possibly realizing how disrespectfully he has been acting, and certainly noticing that Job isn't responding well to his arguments, Elihu begins this second speech with a new approach. He tries to gain the support of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Maybe if other elders are on his side, Elihu can make Job understand that it is wrong to question God, the very Creator of justice.

Elihu: 10 So, you men whose hearts have
embraced wisdom, listen
to me:
far be it from God to commit evil
acts;
and from the Highest One* to
engage in wrongdoing!
11 For He *is like an employer*
who pays *workers* according to what
they have done;
He makes sure the rewards they
receive match their conduct.
12 Oh, unimaginable thought—that God
would cause evil!
The Highest One does not pervert
justice!
13 Who designated Him as earth's
overseer?
Who placed Him in charge of the
entire world?
14 If He made it His aim to do so,
if He recalled to Himself His spirit
and His breath,
15 All living creatures would expire as
one
and humankind would return to
the dust *from which He formed*
them.

16 If you are one of understanding, hear
this!
Listen to what I am saying!
17 Can one who despises justice also
govern?
And are you willing to render
condemnation on the Righteous
and Mighty One?
18 Is He not the One who says to the king,
"You are worthless,"
and to the *exalted* nobility, "You are
depraved."
19 *Is He not the One* who refuses
favoritism to royalty
and who will not put rich above
poor?
After all, they are all the creations
of His very own hands.

* 34:3 Job 12:11 * 34:10 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

20All of a sudden, in the middle of the night, people perish;
they are shaken, and then they pass away;
the *strong and* mighty, apart from any human hand, are taken.

21For God's eyes are on the paths people choose;
He surveys each of their steps.
22There is no darkness, no gloomy shadow
in which wrongdoers may hide themselves *from Him.*
23God does not need to scrutinize people further
or bring *them* before Him for judgment.
24Without *need of a lengthy* investigation,
He breaks *even* the mighty into pieces,
and installs others to replace them.
25And this is because He is *already* acquainted with their actions.
When the *seemingly sudden* midnight *hour* rolls over, they are crushed *beneath it.*
26He strikes down people as if they were wicked—
front and center—a display for all to see
27Simply because they turned from following Him,
because they no longer considered His ways.
28As a result of their injustice,
the poor cried out to Him
And *as you ought to know well,*
He *always* hears the cries of the needy, *of the oppressed peoples.*
29If God remains silent, who is fit to raise his voice against *Him*?
If He *chooses to* hide His face, who is able to see Him?
This goes for a nation or an individual; all are the same.
30A person estranged from God must be prevented from ruling *over any nation*
and from laying snares for *the downfall of* a people.

31Has anyone *then* said to God,
"I have carried punishment,
but I will not offend again.
32Teach me and fill in my blind spots,
and if I have done wrong, I will stop *and do what is right.*"
33Is God obliged to reward you on your terms
for your personal revolt *against Him*?
You must decide that, not I.
Tell me, *if* you know *what you believe,*
34People who comprehend *such things,*
wise folk who hear me say,
35"Job speaks without knowledge;
his harangues are devoid of insight."
36May God try Job to the *bitter* end,
for he responds as the wicked do
37And he keeps adding to his sins;
he claps his hands in rebellion in our very midst,
and he multiplies his *offensive* words against God.

35

Elihu continued advising.

Elihu: 2*Job,* is this your idea of justice,
that you would say, "My righteousness exceeds God's"?
3For you say *something like,* "What good does it do You *if I do right*?
What is in it for me if I don't sin?"
4I will return your words with my own,
and I *will answer* your friends with you.
5Look at the skies above and take notice.
See how high the clouds are—they are so far above you!
6*Surely, if the clouds maintain such a distance,*
one must wonder: how high up and far away is God?
If you sin, how much have you really accomplished against Him?
If you pile up your sins, *if you stack them high,* what does it do to Him?
7*Likewise,* if you are righteous, what does that confer to Him,
or what *gift* does He receive from your *outstretched* hand *of righteous generosity*?
8*Listen!* Your wickedness affects your own kind,
and your righteousness only helps other human beings.

9People call out *to God* when they feel *the crush of* oppression.
They implore *Him* for deliverance from the strong hand *of tyranny.*
10But none of them pleads *in this way:*
"Where is God, my Creator,
who gives songs *of comfort* in the *silence and suffering of* night,

11 Who enlightens us more than the animals of the field,
who instructs us in wisdom more than the birds of the air?"
12 *And so, in the absence of such prayers,*
God does not answer the cries of the people
because *they cry with* the arrogance of the wicked.
13 Indeed, God does not hear the *vain and* empty cry,
nor does the Highest One* pay it any mind.
14 How much less *must He hear you*—
you who say you cannot see Him,*
You who say you have *already* pled your case before Him
but that you are *still* waiting for Him.
15 And now, *here we are.*
Because God has not *been swift to* punish in His anger,
because He does not concern Himself with great arrogance,*
16 Job opens his mouth and out comes empty talk.
Yes, he heaps up words with ignorance.

36 Elihu continued.

Elihu: 2 Wait for me to finish, and I will explain.
There is still more to be said on God's behalf.
3 I will acquire my knowledge from *ancient,* far away *sources*
and illustrate the righteous ways of my Maker.
4 Truly, there is no untruth *hidden* in my words;
in fact, perfect knowledge has graced your presence.
5 Look! God has great strength, but He does not detest *human beings;*
He is mighty *indeed,* and His heart *swells with* understanding.
6 He does not preserve the life of the wicked,
but He grants justice to those who are weak *and humble.*
7 He does not divert His gaze from the righteous;
He enthrones them with monarchs,
lifts them up to positions of power forever.
8 And if the people are restrained in chains,
caught in the cords of their misery,
9 Then He explains to them their exploits,
their errors, and how they have lived in arrogance.
10 He uncovers their ears so as to hear His teaching
and commands them to abandon their sinful path.
11 If they hear and *choose to* serve Him,
then they end their days in prosperity and their years in felicity.
12 But if they refuse to listen,
then they will pass over *to the land of death* by the sword
and will arrive, lacking any wisdom, at their death.
13 The sullied and impure stash away *their* anger.
Even when He puts them in chains *for their own good,*
they refuse to cry for His help.
14 They die young,
debased among the male prostitutes of the shrines.
15 *As for the righteous*—when they are afflicted—
God delivers them through the affliction *itself,*
and uses the trial to open their ears *to His voice.*
16 *Job, even now,* God is enticing you away from the jaws of distress;
He is luring you to a wide, *wonderful* place free of boundaries
where your table will be covered in the finest foods.

17 You are weighed down, *instead,* with judgment *usually reserved* for the wicked.
And yet, ironically, as you seek to lay hold of justice and judgment,
justice and judgment have laid hold of you.
18 Beware that your anger *at how you are being judged* does not seduce you into scorning.
Do not let the high ransom *you are paying through your suffering* steer you off *God's path.*
19 Will your cry for help lessen your misery?
How about your strength and forcefulness?

* 35:13 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 35:14 Job 9:11; 23:8-9 * 35:15 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

For the patriarchs, there is really no greater mystery in the natural world than the weather. What keeps the rain up in the sky, or what makes it fall to the earth? Why does water sometimes freeze and sometimes dry up? What is lightning and thunder? Weather impacts every part of their lives, determining whether or not they can farm and pasture animals, where they can live, and if they can live. Since none of these questions can be answered with scientific explanations yet, societies invent gods whom they think control it all. Ancient people hope that by doing or saying the right thing, they can convince the god to send rain when it is needed or stop the damaging hail before their roofs cave in. These pagan worshipers aren't too far off in their thinking; they just have the wrong god.

The Lord's followers have the answer right in believing He controls it all. When they look at the weather, they see God's power. As God will expound upon Himself shortly, the One who controls the weather is the One who created it. He put order in the cosmos, although humans may not always understand its order, just as He organized everything else. God, who has perfect understanding and unimaginable power, cannot be comprehended with the human mind and should not be questioned by the likes of Job.

Are they yielding you any better result?
20 Do not pine, *Job,* for the night
when people pass from their *earthly* homes *into oblivion.**
21 *In short, be* careful! Do not turn *your life* toward evil ways—
which you have preferred to *hearing God's correcting voice in* the *midst of your* suffering.
22 See, God is supreme in His power.
Is there any teacher like Him?
23 Is anyone *capable of* overseeing His path?
Who has *ever* said to Him, "You have done wrong"?

24 Remember to praise His works,
which generations have celebrated in song.
25 All of humankind has seen them
and has gazed upon them from far away.
26 Look, God is exalted, beyond all knowing.
The number of His years is *vast,* beyond all discovery.
27 For He draws up drops of water,
distills the rain from the mist
28 Which pours down from the clouds,
dripping a sky full of water over *the whole of* humanity.
29 It is beyond comprehension: the fanning out of the clouds,
the *crashing* thunder from His *cloudy* pavilion.
30 Ah, *and then* He extends His lightning over the earth,
striking even the sea *to illumine its* depths.
31 For with these, He judges the peoples—
lightning punishing His enemies and rain blessing His people—
but *now with those same waters,* He gives them food in abundance.
32 In the palms of His hands He holds lightning
and issues orders for it to strike its target.
33 Thunder announces His presence;
His jealous anger* is against what is coming.

► The discussion has included many references to nature and weather. Maybe it has been spoken in the midst of a storm and as a clap of thunder sounds overhead, startling all five of the men. Elihu picks up the conversation again with renewed vigor, possibly gesturing toward the sky as he speaks about the storm of life in which Job is caught.

37 **Elihu:** At this, my heart quivers,
and it *nearly* leaps out of my chest.
2 Listen! Listen to the raging *anger* in His voice,
the rumbling that's coming from His mouth!

* 36:18-20 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 36:33 Hebrew manuscripts read, "cattle."

3He sets the roar loose across the whole length of the sky,
and His lightning *flashes* to the ends of the earth.
4After *the flash* comes the *deafening* roar of His voice,
the voice that thunders His majesty—
The voice that resounds with no evidence of restraint,
5the voice of God that is thundering wondrously.
He does magnificent things, beyond our comprehension.
6To the snow, He issues the order: "*Go!* Fall on the earth!"
And to the rain shower, He says, "Show your power; *beat down heavy on the earth!*"
7*Then, as the weather drives laborers indoors,*
He closes in around every human hand,
sealing them *off from their labors,*
and *in forced rest,* all *are drawn to* see the *ongoing* work of God.
8The beast *of the field* scampers *for cover,* hiding in its cave for the duration.
9*Meanwhile,* the whirlwind comes forth from its southern chamber,
and the arctic winds bring the cold.
10From the breath of God ice forms,
and the wide waters *of the rivers and seas expand in the* freeze.
11He weighs down the thick clouds with moisture,
and they scatter His clusters of light.
12The storm changes course under His guidance;
it moves as He directs over the contours of the entire earth.
13*And what is His aim?* Whether for the discipline *of His people*
or for *the sake of* the earth itself,
Or as an expression of His *deep,* loyal love,
He causes *all of* this to happen.

14Hear this, Job.
Pause *where you are,* and ponder the wonders of God.
15Do you know how God orchestrates these marvels?
How He makes the clouds flash with lightning?
16Do you know how *those same* clouds are hung up in the sky *or how they move*?
Do you know the wonders of God, who is perfect in His knowledge *of such things*?
17You, *who feel the wind of His voice even now,*
are the same one whose clothes are hot *to the touch*
when *God makes* the land go still beneath the south wind.
18Can you assist God in hammering out the *silver* sky
until it *appears* as hard as cast metal mirror?*
19*Job,* tell us what to say to Him.
We cannot draw up our argument before such *impenetrable* darkness.
20Shall He be told that I wish to speak *to Him directly*?
Will it help if I admit I would be consumed *if I did*?

21But now no one can see the brightness of the light through the *thick* clouds;
as the wind *changes and* blows through the sky, it clears the air.
22From the north, *the weather changes;*
golden *skies* encircle God, now clothed in awesome majesty.
23We cannot find the Highest One:*
He is exalted in power,
Great in righteousness,
and does not depreciate *humanity*.
24This is why mortals fear Him;
He doesn't see the wise of heart.*

38 Out of the raging storm, the Eternal One answered Job.

Eternal One: 2Who is this that darkens counsel,
who covers over sound instruction with *empty* words void of knowledge?
3Now, prepare yourself *and gather your courage* like a warrior.
Prepare yourself for the task at hand.
I'll be asking the questions, now—
you will supply the answers.
4Where were you when I *dug and* laid the foundation of the earth?
Explain it to me, if you are acquainted with understanding.
5Who decided on the measurements?
Surely you know that!
Who stretched out a line to measure the dimensions?

* 37:18 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 37:23 Hebrew, *Shaddai* * 37:24 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

6 Upon what base was the foundation
set?
Or who laid the cornerstone
7 *On the day when* the stars of the
morning broke out in song
and God's heavenly throng, elated,
shouted along?

8 Who held back the sea behind doors
and brought the earth bursting
forth from the womb *of the*
deep,
9 When for clothes I gave it a cloud
and for swaddling I wrapped it in
darkness,
10 When I placed shores around its limits
and put up the doors and the bars;
11 And I said *to the sea,* "Here you may
come, but no farther.
And here is the shore where your
grand waves will crash."

12 In your *short run of* days, have you ever
commanded the morning *to*
begin
or taught the sun to rise in its
place?
13 *Under your watch* has the early light
ever taken hold of the earth by
the edges
and shaken the wicked loose?
14 *Under dawn's early light* the earth takes
shape
as does clay when a seal is *firmly*
pressed in it;
Its *colors and features* stand out
as a *well-made* garment *does from*
the body.
15 Yet the light is withheld from the
wicked,
and the arm is snapped off of the
oppressors.

16 Have you entered into the sea's
tidewaters
or trod the bottom *of the ocean*
looking for the deepest *cavern*?
17 Have *you found it, only for* death's
infamous gates to be unveiled
to you,
or did you catch a glimpse of the
gates of the deep darkness
beneath the waters?
18 Have you roamed the earth *in her*
entirety, comprehended her vast
regions?
If you know all of this, declare it!
Make your statement!

19 *Tell me,* which way is it to where the
light resides?
And darkness? Where does the
darkness live?
20 When you escort it through its regions
every day,
will you know the way to its home?
21 *Ah, but of course* you know!
After all, you were born *way back*
then *when all this was created,*
and your days have been many
indeed.

22 *Have you visited* the *vast, cold* treasury
where the snow is stored,
or have you gazed on the
shimmering, frozen armories
where the hail is held,
23 *The hail* which I keep on reserve for the
time of *great* trouble,
for the day of battle, *the day* of
war?
24 Where is the way *to the realm* where
light is scattered *across creation,*
and where is *the field* where the
east wind *is divided up*
and sent across the face of the
earth?

25 Who cut the channel for the flooding
rivers
or *paved* a path for the thunderbolt
26 So that rain might fall on an
uninhabited land,
even on a wilderness where no
human sets foot
27 So that the desolate desert *and the*
withering wasteland are satisfied,
so that the grass is made to sprout
in that seemingly forsaken place?
28 And does the rain have a father?
Who sires the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb comes the ice?
And who gives birth to the sky's
pale, thick frost?
30 When water *seems to* turn to stone,
the face of the deep *freezes to*
imprison *its inhabitants.*

31 Can you bind together a cluster of
twinkling stars—
the seven sisters of Pleiades *who keep*
company in the night sky?
Can you loosen the cords of Orion's
bow?
32 Can you lead the stars* *of the Zodiac*
out in their proper seasons
and guide the Bear with her cubs?

* 38:32 Hebrew, *Mazzaroth*

33 Do you know the rules of the heavens,
or apportion their influence on the
seasons of the earth?

34 Can you bellow out orders at the
clouds
and pull down a flood of rain
around you?
35 Can you dispatch bolts of lightning on
their way,
who *instantly obey and* say to you,
"Here we are"?
36 Who put wisdom within the center of
the created
or granted understanding to the
mind?*
37 Who has the wisdom to count the
clouds *and send them on their
way*
or tip over the water skins of
heaven *to refresh the ground
below*
38 When the *dry* dust is as hard as metal
and clods *of clay* clump together?

39 Can you hunt prey for the lioness
or sate the appetites of her cubs
40 While they crouch in their dens
and wait in the brush?
41 Who nourishes the *hungry* raven
when its young chirp to God and
wander for want of food?

39 **Eternal One:** Do you know the
time when the mountain
goats give birth?
Do you attend at the doe's delivery?
2 Can you keep track of the months until
each carries to term?
Do you *even* know their calving
season?
3 They drop to their knees to birth their
young,
and their labor pains cease to grip.
4 Their offspring grow to their *full*
strength in the open field;
then they leave and do not return.

5 Who set the wild donkey free?
Who cut it loose from its bonds?
6 I gave it the wastelands for a home
and the salt flats for a dwelling.
7 It avoids the commotion of the city;
it is *far from* the shouts of the *mule*
driver and never has to obey
one.
8 *Instead,* it trundles through hills in
search of pasture,
its eyes ever watchful for a patch
of green.
9 Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will it *be content to* stay the night
beside your feeding trough?
10 Can you confine the wild ox with a
rope to *plow a straight* furrow?
Will it cultivate the valleys as you
pull him along?
11 Can you trust it *simply* because of its
enormous strength?
Can you *really* leave your work to it
without guiding it?
12 Can you depend on it to return the
remaining seed to you,
to carry the grain to your threshing
floor?

God now speaks to Job of the ostrich. Is Job as foolish as this stupid bird who leaves her eggs on the ground?

13 The ostrich flaps her wings,
and the ringing joy *is heard.*
But her wings and pinions are not
like a stork's. *She cannot fly.*
14 *She is different from other birds,*
for she lays her eggs *straight* on the
ground,
and she incubates them in the *bare*
dust.
15 She forgets that a foot might crush
them
or a wild animal trample them.
16 She is harsh to her young, as if they
were not even hers.
She is unconcerned at the futility of
her labor,
17 For God denied her *a share of* wisdom,
and in doling out understanding,
He passed her by.
18 *Oh and* yet, *look at her* when the time
comes to run—
she *spreads her strange wings and*
laughs at the horse *who must be*
guided by his rider
*although she is an absurd bird who
can't even fly.*

19 *And oh, of course—now let us speak of*
the horse!
Do you give *that creature* its power?
Do you adorn its neck with that
flowing mane?
20 Do you make it leap like a locust
and terrify *the enemy* with its
dreadful snorting?

* 38:36 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

21It paws *and stamps* the valley ground,
prancing and gloating at its strength;
and it greets the battle with a charge.
22It laughs at fear, is a stranger to panic,
and will not turn away from any *oncoming* blade.
23*Though* the quiver's *arrows* rattle at its side,
though the spear and lance flash *in its eyes,*
24It is a storm and a fury devouring the ground ahead,
set off by the blast of the trumpet, unable to stand still.
25Stirred by the trumpet sound *to charge,*
the horse responds with its own blast
and smells the *blood of* battle from a distance,
amid commands barked by officers and shouts of alarm.

26Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom,
stretching its wings toward the south?
27Does the eagle take flight at your command,
or build its nest in the towering heights?
28On *jutting* cliffs it lives and keeps the night;
on rocky crags it builds its mountain stronghold.
29From there it spies its prey;
its *keen* eyes discover its victim still far off.
30Its young ones feast on blood,
and wherever the slain lie, there it is.

40 The Eternal continued speaking to Job.

Eternal One: 2*Have you heard enough?*
Will the one who finds fault with the Highest One* now make his case?
Let God's accuser answer Him!

3Job answered the Eternal.

Job: 4Oh, I am so small. How can I reply to You?
I'll cover my mouth with my hand,
for I've already said too much.
5One time I have spoken, and I have no answer *to give*—
two times, and I have nothing more to add.

6The Eternal spoke to Job from the *raging* storm.

Eternal One: 7Now, prepare yourself
and gather your courage like a warrior.
Prepare yourself for the task at hand.
I'll be asking the questions, now—
you will supply the answers.
8*Let Me ask you a new question:*
Would you go so far as to call into question My judgment?
Would you imagine Me guilty *merely* in order to justify yourself?
9Do you have an arm just as *powerful as* God's
and does your voice thunder as His does?

10Then dress yourself up in majesty and dignity.
Deck yourself out in honor and splendor
11*And indulge your anger*.
Unleash your wrath!
Look *down* on each and every proud soul, and cut him low.
12Look *down* on all who are proud, and humiliate them.
Raise your mighty foot, and stomp the wicked where they stand.
13Bury them all together in the dirt,
and shroud their *frozen* faces in *the secret recesses of* the grave.
14*If you can execute all this,*
then I—*yes,* even I—will praise you,
for your *great and mighty* right hand earned you the victory!

15*But before you undertake My challenge,*
turn your attention to Behemoth,
The beast which I fashioned along with you.

► Behemoth isn't just any beast. Because of the Hebrew grammatical construction, it is apparent that Behemoth is the largest, strongest beast the Lord ever created. With the exception

* 40:2 Hebrew, *Shaddai*

In modern times, a leviathan is understood as something large and formidable. It may apply to an abstract entity, such as a totalitarian state, or to an actual monster, such as Captain Nemo's giant squid. That modern idea is based on an ancient creation myth. Psalm 74 alludes to God's conquest of Leviathan, a seven-headed monster that breathed fire, before His creation of the world. Leviathan was the master of chaos, living somewhere in the deep along with Rahab, another sea monster. The story goes that God chopped off six of Leviathan's heads and imprisoned it in the deepest parts of the ocean, where it remains today. Leviathan creeps up occasionally in the Bible as a terrifying adversary, most notably in Revelation where it is described as a dragon or beast that comes up out of the sea and is specifically identified as Satan (Revelation 12:9; 13:1-3). So Leviathan will get another chance to fight God, but once again it will fall to the One who brought divine order to chaos.

of his dreadful size and strength, Behemoth's description seems to be one of a peaceful animal—hanging out by the river and chewing its cud. Ancient Jewish myth describes him otherwise: the primal land monster will one day fight against the primal sea monster, Leviathan, bringing chaos; their deaths will end the world. This legend may be the backdrop of Behemoth's description here, and some see it obliquely referenced in the New Testament. In Revelation the beast who is the antichrist is accompanied by the false prophet; but Leviathan isn't the one who kills Behemoth, or the false prophet as some see him. God throws the false prophet and the antichrist into the "lake of fire that burns with sulfur" (Revelation 19:20; 20:10).

Eternal One: It eats grass like an ox.
16 Look carefully: it has a sturdy, muscular base
and draws its power from its brawny core.
17 Its bends like a cedar,
the sinews of its *powerful* thighs are woven tightly.
18 Its bones, *unbreakable,* are like tubes of bronze;
its whole skeletal structure is like a framework of iron.
19 It is *one of* My most marvelous creations;
only I, its Maker, can threaten its existence.
20 The hillsides offer it food *as it grazes near*
where the wild animals *bustle and* play.
21 It lies *beside the river* under the *shade of the* lotus,
hidden by the reeds of the marsh;
22 The lotus trees cover it with their shadows;
the willows of the stream surround it.
23 It is not alarmed when the river *rises and* rages;
it stands confident, *firmly fixed,*
Even when the Jordan swells *and* rushes against it.
24 Can anyone capture this beast while it is watching
or trap it and pierce its nose *to haul it off*?

41 **Eternal One:** *Now let us not stop here.*
What of Leviathan?
Can you haul it in on the end of a hook
or strap down its tongue with your line?
2 Will you subdue it with a *fragile* reed through its nose
or pierce its jaw with a hook?
3 *Do you imagine* it will beg you endlessly for mercy
or lower its voice to a whisper when speaking to you?
4 Will it strike a deal with you
and enter into your service as a lifelong slave?
5 Will you play with it as you would a *pet* bird
or put it on a leash for your girls?
6 Will traders haggle over its price
and others seek to divide it up among the merchants?
7 Can you fill its hide with harpoons
or its head with fishing spears?

8 *If you are able to* lay a hand on it,
You will remember the struggle *all of your days,*
and you will never do it again.
9 *Now* look, any expectation you could subdue it will be shattered.
Just the sight of it is enough to overpower you.
10 No one is fierce enough to dare disturb it.
So is there anyone *in all the earth* who dares to stand up to Me?
11 Who could ever confront Me and force Me to repay him?
Everything *and everyone* under heaven is Mine!*

12 I will not be silent regarding Leviathan's *powerful* limbs,
its enormous strength, or its beautiful form.
13 Who can reveal what is under its outer *armor* covering
or penetrate down through its double coat of mail?
14 Who can pry open its enormous jaws?
Remember: its teeth are a terror from every angle.
15 Its back is *covered with* rows of shields that *overlap and* shut with a tight seal—
16 One against another,
so close that no wind passes between them.
17 They are joined to one another,
inseparably locked.
18 When it sneezes, light flashes *from its nostrils*;
its eyes are like the rays of the morning sun.
19 Fire streams from its mouth
as fiery sparks fly outward.
20 Smoke pours from its nostrils
as from a boiling pot or a brush fire.
21 Its *searing* breath sets coals ablaze;
its flaming *tongue* darts from its mouth.
22 Leviathan's neck *bristles* with *raw* power;
terror dances before him.
23 The creases in its flesh fuse together:
firm, *fixed,* immovable.
24 Its heart is rock hard,
as hard as a lower millstone, *impervious to grinding.*
25 When the beast rises up *and moves near,*
the mighty ones shudder in fear;
when it crashes down, they retreat.
26 The sword that reaches it *may strike but* to no effect,
so, too, the spear, the dart, and the lance.
27 *For* it treats iron as straw
and bronze as rotten wood.
28 The arrow cannot force its retreat,
and the stone from the sling shatters *on impact.*
29 A club is *no more dangerous* to it *than* a piece of straw;
it *taunts and* laughs at the rattling lance.
30 Its underbelly is as sharp as broken pottery shards;
it easily dredges a channel in the mud behind it.
31 It brings the deep to a *rolling* boil like a pot *over a hot fire;*
in its course it stirs the sea like a pot of ointment.
32 Behind it, the wake is *bright and* shining,
as if the sea has *long* white hair.
33 Nothing on earth is its equal,
this creature fashioned without fear.
34 It looks upon all the high *and mighty*—
this king over the children of pride.

42 Job answered the Eternal One.

Job: 2 I know You can do everything;
nothing You do can be foiled *or frustrated.*
3 *You asked,*
"Who is this that conceals counsel with *empty* words void of knowledge?"*
And now I see that I spoke of—but did not comprehend—
great wonders that are beyond me. I didn't know.
4 *You said,* "Hear Me now, and I will speak.
I'll be asking the questions, and you will supply the answers."*
5 Before I knew only what I had heard of You,
but now I have seen You.
6 Therefore *I realize the truth:*
I disavow and mourn *all I have said* and repent in dust and ash.

7 After the Eternal had spoken these words to Job, He *turned and* spoke to Eliphaz from Teman.

* 41:11 Romans 11:35 * 42:3 Job 38:2 * 42:4 Job 38:3; 40:7

Eternal One: My anger is burning against you and your two friends because you have not spoken rightly of Me, as My servant Job has. [8]So now, *gather your friends and* bring seven bulls and seven rams. Then go to My servant Job, make a burnt offering for yourselves, and he will pray for you. I will accept his prayer. *Despite the fact that* you have not spoken rightly of Me, as My servant Job did, I will not deal with you according to your foolish ways.

[9]So Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuhah, and Zophar from Naamath went and did as the Eternal commanded, and He accepted Job's prayer *for them.*

[10]The Eternal restored the fortunes of Job after he prayed for his friends; He even doubled the wealth he had before. [11]All of his brothers and sisters, along with those he had known earlier, came and shared meals with him at his house. They sympathized with him and consoled him regarding the great distress the Eternal had brought on him. Each guest gave him a sum of money and each, a golden ring. [12]The Eternal One blessed the last part of Job's life even more than the first part. He went on to possess 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. [13]He also fathered 7 *more* sons and 3 *more* daughters. [14]He named his first daughter Jemimah, *his* second Keziah, and his third Keren-happuch. [15]Nowhere in all the land could one find women as *captivatingly* beautiful as Job's daughters, *or as independently wealthy:* their father gave them each a share of *the family* inheritance along with their brothers. [16]After all this, Job lived 140 years. He lived to see his children and their children *and so on,* to the fourth generation. [17]Then Job died, old, and satisfied with his days.

PSALMS

The collected psalms to be sung or read in worship

By David and other gifted musicians

01 02 03 04 05 06

Psalms is an anthology of hymns, laments, and songs composed of Hebrew poetry and collected over five centuries. It functioned as a kind of hymnbook for Israel, expressing the love and devotion of God's people. The Greek word *psalmos* refers to plucking a string or playing an instrument. So these "psalms" contain the words chanted and sung by priests, Levites, and perhaps other worshipers to musical accompaniment. It is likely that many were sung along with sacrifices, offerings, and general prayers to God offered in the Jerusalem temple.

Tradition associates Psalms with King David, a celebrated musician and poet in his own right (1 Samuel 16:16-23; 2 Samuel 1:17-27), who not only composed psalms but inspired them as well. As later generations of priests collected individual psalms, they added superscriptions to many that attribute authorship, provide musical direction, and offer a historical context for the psalms. The association with David is so thorough that many psalms are said to offer insight into the mind of David during some of his most difficult days.

The Book of Psalms is comprised of many different kinds of songs. The most common are hymns of praise or thanksgiving that celebrate God's love and goodness to His people. Another large group of psalms are laments that complain to God about some threat (individual or national) and plead for His assistance. Then there are royal psalms that celebrate the reign of God's anointed king. Psalms 120–134 form a collection of psalms that were sung, apparently, on the journey to the Jerusalem temple. Then there are wisdom psalms that teach and encourage the faithful to pursue life according to God's teachings. These categories are not exhaustive but do represent the rich prayers and expressions of praise in Israel's response to God and His covenant.

In its current form, the Book of Psalms is divided unevenly into five books, a clear association with the Torah (the first five books of the Scriptures). Psalms offers a different kind of vehicle to teach about God's past, present, and future engagement with His people providing comfort as well as instruction. Jesus and His disciples read some of the psalms prophetically and saw parts of their own story written within their lines. Today many people read the psalms devotionally, discovering in these ancient verses a way of expressing their cares, concerns, and love for the one True God.

Book One (Psalms 1–41) is attributed almost entirely to David; all but four of the psalms (1–2; 10; 33) are ascribed to him. In Hebrew Psalm 10 is a continuation of Psalm 9 because it was composed as an acrostic poem. Likewise, many Hebrew manuscripts combine Psalm 33 with 32. Only later are these divided into separate psalms. Psalm 1 sets the stage for the entire collection by explaining that the study of the Word of God is the foundation of a meaningful, prosperous life.

BOOK ONE

Psalm 1

[1]*God's* blessings follow you *and await you at every turn:*
when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes,
When you avoid sin's highway,
when judgment and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse.
[2]For you, the Eternal's Word is your happiness.
It is your focus—from dusk to dawn.
[3]You are like a tree,
planted by *flowing, cool* streams of water *that never run dry.*
Your fruit ripens in its time;
your leaves never fade or curl *in the summer sun.*
No matter what you do, you prosper.

[4]For those who focus on sin, the story is different.
They are like the fallen husk of wheat, tossed by an open wind, *left deserted and alone.*
[5]In the end, the wicked will fall in judgment;
the guilty will be separated from the innocent.
[6]Their road suddenly will end in death,
yet the journey of the righteous has been charted by the Eternal.

Psalm 2

[1]*You are wondering:* What has provoked the nations to embrace *anger and* chaos?*
Why are the people making plans to pursue their own vacant and empty greatness?
[2]Leaders of nations stand united;
rulers put their heads together,
plotting against the Eternal One and His Anointed *King,* trying to figure out
[3]How they can throw off the gentle reign of God's love,
step out from under the restrictions of His claims *to advance their own schemes.*

[4]*At first,* the Power of heaven laughs *at their silliness.*
The Eternal mocks their *ignorant selfishness.*
[5]But His laughter turns to rage, and He rebukes them.
As God displays His *righteous* anger, they begin to know *the meaning of* fear. He says,
[6]"I am the One who appointed My king who reigns from Zion, My mount of holiness.
He is the one in charge."

[7]I am telling *all of you the truth. I have heard* the Eternal's decree.
He said *clearly* to me, "You are My son.
Today I have become your Father.
[8]The nations shall be yours for the asking,
and the entire earth will belong to you.
[9]They are yours to crush with an iron scepter,
yours to shatter like fragile, clay pots."

[10]So *leaders,* kings, and judges,
be wise, and be warned.
[11]*There is only one God,* the Eternal;
worship Him with respect and awe;
take delight in Him and tremble.
[12]Bow down before God's son.
If you don't, you will face His anger *and retribution,*
And you won't stand a chance.
For it doesn't take long to kindle *royal* wrath,

But blessings await all who *trust in Him.*
They will find God a *gentle* refuge.

* 2:1 Greek manuscripts read, "rage."

Psalm 3

A song of David *composed* while fleeing from his son Absalom.

This Davidic psalm recalls the time when David fled from Jerusalem after Absalom, his son, rebelled and claimed the throne (2 Samuel 15–17).

1 Eternal One, my adversaries are many,
too many to count.
Now they have taken a stand
against me!
2 Right to my face they say,
"God will not save you!"

[pause]*

3 But You, Eternal One, wrap around me
like an *impenetrable* shield.
You give me glory and lift my eyes
up to the heavens.
4 I lift my voice to You, Eternal One,
and You answer me from Your
sacred heights.

[pause]

5 I lie down *at night* and fall asleep.
I awake in the morning—*healthy,
strong, vibrant*—because the
Eternal supports me.
6 No longer will I fear my tens of
thousands of enemies
who have surrounded me!

7 Rise up, O Eternal One!
Rescue me, O God!
For You have dealt my enemies a strong
blow to the jaw!
You have shattered their teeth! *Do
so again.*

8 Liberation truly comes from the
Eternal.
Let Your blessings shower down
upon Your people.

[pause]

Psalm 4

For the worship leader. A song of David accompanied by strings.

1 Answer my prayers, O True God, *the
righteous,* who makes me right.
I was hopelessly surrounded, and
You rescued me.
Once again hear me; hide me in Your
favor;
*bring victory in defeat and hope in
hopelessness.*

2 How long will you sons of Adam *steal
my dignity,* reduce my glory to
shame?
Why pine for the fruitless and
dream a delusion?

[pause]*

3 Understand this: The Eternal One
treats as special those like Him.
The Eternal will answer my prayers
and save me.

4 Think long; think hard. When you are
angry, don't let it carry you into
sin.
When night comes, *in calm* be silent.

[pause]

5 *From this day forward,* offer *to God* the
right sacrifice from a heart made
right *by God.*
Entrust yourself to the Eternal.

6 Crowds *of disheartened people* ask, "Who
can show us what is good?"
Let Your brilliant face shine upon
us, O Eternal One, *that we may
know the undeniable answer.*
7 You have filled me with joy, *and
happiness has risen* in my heart,
great delight and unrivaled joy,
even more than when bread
abounds and wine flows freely.
8 *Tonight* I will sleep securely on a bed
of peace
because I trust You, You alone,
O Eternal One, will keep me safe.

Psalm 5

For the worship leader. A song of David accompanied by flutes.*

► The various psalms reflect nearly every human emotion: unbridled joy, deep-seated jealousy, seething anger,

* 3:2 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 4:2 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 5:title Hebrew, *nehiloth,* meaning is uncertain. Only use of this word in the Old Testament.

hope, and depression. These are only a few of the emotions behind the poetry we hear expressed in individual psalms. Feelings and emotions are central to what it means to be human. We cannot escape them nor should we. Psalms invites us to take the emotions we feel and bring them before God. This book models how to come before God in times of sadness, brokenness, and joy. Psalm 5 is a cry for help and a plea for guidance by a person who suffered at the hands of an enemy. It talks about the morning as the time to pray and listen for God to answer. Like many laments, it begins with a cry but ends in confidence.

[1]Bend Your ear to me and listen to my
words, O Eternal One;
hear the deep cry of my heart.
[2]Listen to my call *for help,*
my King, my True God;
to You *alone* I pray.
[3]In the morning, O Eternal One, listen
for my voice;
in the day's first light, I will offer
my prayer to You and watch
expectantly *for Your answer.*

[4]You're not a God who smiles at sin;
You cannot abide with evil.
[5]The proud wither in Your presence;
You hate all who pervert and
destroy what is good.
[6]You destroy those with lying lips;
the Eternal detests those who
murder and deceive.

[7]Yet I, by Your loving grace,
am welcomed into Your house;
I will turn my face toward Your holy
place
and fall on my knees in reverence
before You.
[8]O Eternal One, lead me in *the path of*
Your righteousness
amidst those who wish me harm;
make Your way clear to me.

[9]Their words cannot be trusted;
they are destructive to their cores.
What comes out of their mouths is as
foul as a rotting corpse;
their words stink of flattery.

[10]Find them guilty, O True God;
let their own devices bring them
ruin.
Throw them out, *and let them drown* in
the deluge of their sin,
for in revolt they *brazenly* spit in
Your face.

[11]But let those who run to You for safety
be glad they did;
let them break out in joyful song.
May You keep them safe—
their love for You resounding in
their hearts.
[12]You, O Eternal, are the One who lays
all good things in the laps of the
right-hearted.
Your blessings surround them like
a shield.

Psalm 6

For the worship leader. A song of David accompanied by the lyre.*

[1]O Eternal One, don't punish me in Your
anger
or harshly correct me.
[2]Show me grace, Eternal God. I am
completely undone.
Bring me back together, Eternal
One. Mend my shattered bones.
[3]My soul is drowning in darkness.
How long can You, the Eternal, let
things go on like this?

[4]Come back, Eternal One, and lead me
to Your saving light.
Rescue me because I know You are
truly compassionate.
[5]*I'm alive for a reason*—I can't worship
You if I'm dead.
If I'm six feet under, how can
I thank You?

[6]I'm exhausted. *I cannot even speak,* my
voice fading as sighs.
Every day ends *in the same place*—
lying in bed, covered in tears,
my pillow wet with sorrow.
[7]My eyes burn, devoured with grief;
they grow weak as I constantly
watch for my enemies.

[8]All who are evil, stay away from me
because the Eternal hears my voice,
listens as I cry.
[9]The Eternal God hears my simple
prayers;
He receives my request.

* 6:title Hebrew, *sheminith,* perhaps an eight-stringed instrument from a root meaning "eight"

10All who seek to destroy me will be
humiliated;
they will turn away and suddenly
crumble in shame.

Psalm 7

A song* of David to the Eternal regarding Cush,
the Benjaminite.

1O Eternal my God, in You I seek refuge.
Save me from those who are
chasing me. Rescue me,
2Or else they will tear me to pieces as a
lion *devours his prey;*
they will carry me off with no one
to snatch me *from their jaws.*

3O Eternal my God, if I have done
anything wrong *to deserve this,*
if there is blood on my hands,
4If I have mistreated a friend,
or if I have stolen from an adversary
without *just* cause,
5Then let my enemy come after me and
catch me,
stomping me into the ground,
ending my life,
and grinding my honor into the
dirt.

[pause]*

6Arise, O Eternal One, inflamed by Your
anger.
Come and counter the rage of my
adversaries;
open Your eyes, my God; hear my
plea for justice *once and for all.*

7Let the people gather around You.
Return to Your *rightful* place above
them in the high *court.*
8The Eternal will judge the nations.
Judge me now, Eternal One,
according to my virtue and
integrity.

9Please, bring the evil actions of these
wicked, *wicked* people to an end!
But secure the righteous,
For You, righteous God,
examine our hearts and minds.
10God is my defender;
He rescues those who have a pure
heart.
11God is a just judge;
He passes judgment daily *against*
the person who does evil.
12If the wicked do not turn *from their*
evil deeds, God will sharpen His
sword;
He will bend His bow, stringing it *in*
readiness.
13*Yes,* He has prepared His deadly
weapons
with His arrows flaming hot.
14See, my enemies are fertile with evil.
They conceive trouble
and give birth to deception.
15They prepare a trap, digging a *deep* pit,
and fall into the snare they have
made.
16The trouble they plan will return to
punish them,
and their violent acts will come
back to haunt them.

17*As a result,* I will thank the Eternal for
His justice
and sing praises in honor of the
Eternal, Most High.

Psalm 8

For the worship leader. A song of David
accompanied by the harp.*

This Davidic psalm based on Genesis 1 celebrates not only God's majesty as Creator but also the unique place of human beings in His creation.

1O Eternal, our Lord,
Your majestic name is heard
throughout the earth;
Your magnificent glory shines far above
the skies.
2From the mouths *and souls* of infants
and toddlers, *the most innocent,*
You have decreed power to stop
Your adversaries
and quash those who seek revenge.

3When I gaze to the skies and meditate
on Your creation—
on the moon, stars, *and all* You
have made,
4I can't help but wonder why You care
about mortals—
sons *and daughters* of men—
specks of dust floating about the
cosmos.

5But You placed the son of man just
beneath God

* 7:title Hebrew, *shiggaion,* meaning is uncertain. * 7:5 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 8:title Hebrew, *gittith,* a winepress or a musical instrument from Gath

and honored him like royalty,
crowning him with glory and honor.
6You ordained him to govern the works of Your hands,
to nurture the offspring of Your divine imagination;
You placed everything *on earth* beneath his feet:
7All kinds of domesticated animals,
even the wild animals in the fields *and forests*,
8The birds of the sky and the fish of the sea,
all *the multitudes of living things* that travel the currents of the oceans.

9O Eternal, our Lord,
Your majestic name is heard throughout the earth.

Psalm 9*

For the worship leader. A song of David to the tune "Death of a Son."*

► In the Hebrew manuscripts, Psalms 9 and 10 work as a unit because together they form an acrostic poem, meaning each stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This literary device has several functions. First, it provides a mnemonic device for easier memorization. Second, it is inherently beautiful; the rigid structure is a showcase for the author's literary talents. Finally, it conveys the idea of completion by describing the reasons God is to be praised "from A to Z." Psalm 9 offers David's thanks and praise to God for defeating his enemies. Psalm 10, on the other hand, is a lament complaining that God is far off while the poor and helpless suffer.

1All my heart will give thanks to You, Eternal One.
I will tell others about Your amazing works.
2I will be glad and celebrate You!
I will praise You, O Most High!

3When my adversaries turned and fled,
they fell and died right in front of You,
4For You supported my just cause.
From Your throne, You have judged wisely.

5You confronted the nations; You have destroyed the wicked.
You have erased their names from history.
6The enemy is finished, their time is up;
their cities will lie in ruin forever;
all memory of them is gone.

7Still the Eternal remains and will reign forever;
He has taken His place on His throne for judgment.
8So He will judge the world rightly.
He shall execute that judgment equally on all people.

9For the Eternal will be a shelter for those who know misery,
a refuge during troubling times.
10Those who know Your name will rely on You,
for You, O Eternal One, have not abandoned those who search for You.

11Praise Him who lives on Zion's holy hill.
Tell *the story of* His great acts among the people!
12For He remembers the victims of violence and avenges their blood;
He does not turn a deaf ear to the cry of the needy.

13Be gracious to me, O Eternal One.
Notice the harm I have suffered because of my enemies,
You who carry me safely away from death's door,
14So that I may rehearse Your deeds, declare Your praise,
and rejoice in Your rescue
when I take my stand in the gates of Zion.

15The nations have fallen into the pit they dug *for others,*
their own feet caught, snared by the net they hid.
16The Eternal is *well* known, *for He has taken action* and secured justice;

* Psalm 9 Psalms 9–10 were originally a single acrostic poem.
* 9:title Hebrew, *muth-labben*, perhaps the melody to which the song is sung

He has trapped the wicked through
the work of their own hands.

[pause with music]*

17The wicked are headed for death and
the grave;
all the nations who forget the True
God *will share a similar fate*.

18For those in need shall not always be
forgotten,
and the hope of the poor will never
die.

19Eternal One, arise! Do not allow mere
mortals to win the day.
Judge the nations Yourself.
20Put the fear *of God* in them, Eternal One!
Remind the nations they are mere
men, *not gods*.

[pause]*

Psalm 10*

1Why, O Eternal One, are You so far
away?
Why can't You be found during
troubling times?
2Mean and haughty people hunt down
the poor.
May they get caught up in their
own wicked schemes.

3For the wicked celebrates the evil
cravings of his heart
as the greedy curses and rejects the
Eternal.
4The arrogance of the wicked one keeps
him from seeking the True God.
He truly thinks, "There is no God."

5His ways *seem* always to be successful;
Your judgments, too, *seem* far
beyond him, out of his reach.
He looks down on all his enemies.
6In his heart he has decided, "Nothing
will faze me.
From generation to generation
I will not face trouble."

7His mouth is full of curses, lies, and
oppression.*
Beneath his tongue lie trouble and
wickedness.
8He hides in the shadows of the villages,
waiting to ambush and kill the
innocent in dark corners.
He eyes the weak and the poor.
9*Ominously,* like a lion in its lair,
he lurks in secret to waylay those
who are downtrodden.
When he catches them, he draws them in
and drags them off with his net.

10Quietly crouching, lying low,
ready to overwhelm the next by his
strength,
11The wicked thinks in his heart, "God
has forgotten us!
He has covered His face and will
never notice!"

12Arise, O Eternal, *my* True God. Lift up
Your hand.
Do not forget the downtrodden.
13Why does the wicked revile the True
God?
He has decided, "He will not hold
me responsible."

14But *wait!* You have seen,
and You will consider the trouble
and grief *he caused*.
You will impose consequences for
his actions.
The helpless, the orphans, commit
themselves to You,
and You have been their Helper.

15Break the arm of the one guilty of doing
evil;
investigate all his wicked acts;
hold him responsible for every last
one of them.
16The Eternal will reign as King forever.
The *other* nations will be swept off
His land.

17O Eternal One, You have heard the
longings of the poor and lowly.
You will strengthen them; You *who
are of heaven* will hear them,
18Vindicating the orphan and the
oppressed
so that men who are of the earth
will terrify them no more.

Psalm 11

For the worship leader. *A song* of David.

► Psalm 11 is a Davidic psalm expressing trust in the Eternal as a refuge and fortress for those who do what is right. David spent many years

* 9:16 Hebrew, *higgaion selah,* meaning is uncertain, possibly a musical direction * 9:20 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * Psalm 10 Psalms 9–10 were originally a single acrostic poem. * 10:7 Romans 3:14

struggling first with Saul, then with the neighboring nations, and finally against the rebellion led by his son Absalom.

[1]I am already in the soft embrace of the Eternal,
so why do you beckon me *to leave,* saying,
"Fly like a bird to the mountains.
[2]Look! The wicked approach with bows bent,
sneaking around in the shadows,
setting their arrows against their bowstrings to pierce everyone whose heart is pure.
[3]If the foundations are crumbling,
is there hope for the righteous?"

[4]But the Eternal *has not moved*; He remains in His holy temple.
He sits *squarely* on His heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of Adam *and daughters of Eve, examining us within and without,*
exploring every fiber of our beings.
[5]The Eternal searches the hearts of those who are good,
but He despises all those who can't get enough of *perversion and* violence.
[6]If you are evil, He will rain hot lava over your head,
will fill your cup with burning wind and *liquid* fire *to scorch your insides.*

[7]The Eternal is right in all His ways;
He cherishes all that is upright.
Those who do what is right in His eyes will see His face.

Psalm 12

For the worship leader. A song of David accompanied by the lyre.*

[1]Help me, O Eternal One, for I can't find anyone who follows You.
The faithful have fallen out of sight.
[2]Everyone tells lies through sweet-talking lips
and speaks from a hollow and deceptive heart.

[3]May the Eternal silence all sweet-talking lips,
stop all boasting tongues,
[4]Of those who say, "With our words we will win;
our lips are our own. Who is the master of our souls?"

[5]"I will rise up," says the Eternal,
"because the poor are being trampled, and the needy groan *for My saving help.*
I will lift them up to the safety they long for."
[6]The promises of the Eternal, *they are true,* they are pure—
like silver refined in a furnace,
purified seven times, *they will be without impurity.*

[7]You, O Eternal, will be their protector.
You will keep them safe from those around them forever.
[8]All around, those who are wicked parade—*proud and arrogant*—
and people applaud their emptiness.

Psalm 13

For the worship leader. A song of David.

[1]How long, O Eternal One? How long will You forget me? Forever?
How long will You look the other way?

[2]How long must I agonize,
grieving Your absence in my heart every day?
How long will You let my enemies win?

[3]Turn back; respond to me, O Eternal, my True God!
Put the spark of life in my eyes, or I'm dead.
[4]My enemies will boast they have beaten me;
my foes will celebrate that I have stumbled.

[5]But I trust in Your faithful love;
my heart leaps at the thought of imminent deliverance by You.
[6]I will sing to the Eternal,
for He is always generous with me.

Psalm 14

For the worship leader. *A song* of David.

► This is a wisdom psalm that grieves over the pervasiveness of sin and its

* 12:title Hebrew, *sheminith,* perhaps an eight-stringed instrument from a root meaning "eight"

sad effects. It is repeated with minor changes in Psalm 53. Paul refers to this Davidic psalm to explain how all of humanity is tainted by sin (Romans 3:1-12).

[1]A *wicked and* foolish man truly believes
there is no God.
They are vile, *their sinfulness*
nauseating to their Creator;
their actions are *soiled and*
repulsive; *every deed is depraved;*
not one of them does good.

[2]The Eternal leans over from heaven to
survey the sons of Adam.
No one is missed, and no one can
hide.
He searches to see who
understands *true wisdom,*
who desires to know the True God.

[3]They all turn *their backs,* walking their
own roads;
they are rancid, *leaving a trail of*
rotten footsteps behind them;
not one of them does good,
not even one.

[4]Do the wicked have no clue *about what*
really matters?
They devour my brothers and
sisters the way a man eats his
dinner.
They ignore the Eternal *and don't*
call on Him, rejecting His reality
and truth.

[5]They shall *secretly* tremble *behind*
closed doors, hearts beating hard
within their chests,
knowing that God always avenges
the upright.
[6]You laugh at the counsel of the poor,
the needy, the troubled *who put*
their trust in God.
You try to take away their only hope,
but the Eternal is a strong shelter *in*
the heaviest storm.
[7]May *a new day, a day of* deliverance
come for Israel, starting with
Zion.
When the Eternal breaks the chains
of His oppressed people,
the family of Jacob will rejoice, and
Israel will be delighted.

* 16:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain.

Psalm 15

A song of David.

► A recurring theme in the psalms is the dwelling place of God and its importance in worship. This Davidic psalm considers the moral qualities of the person who wishes to approach God.

[1]Eternal One, who is invited to stay in
Your dwelling?
Who is granted passage to Your
holy mountain?

[2]*Here is the answer:* The one who lives
with integrity, does what is
right,
and speaks *honestly* with truth from
the heart.
[3]The one who doesn't speak evil against
others
or wrong his neighbor,
or slander his friends.
[4]The one who loathes the loathsome,
honors those who fear the
Eternal,
And keeps all promises no matter the
cost.
[5]The one who does not lend money
with gain in mind
and cannot be bought to harm an
innocent name.

If you live this way, you will not be
shaken *and will live together with*
the Lord.

Psalm 16

A prayer* of David.

[1]Protect me, God, for the only safety
I know is found in the moments
I seek You.
[2]I told You, Eternal One, "You are my
Lord,
for the only good I know in this
world is found in You alone."

[3]The beauty of faith-filled people
encompasses me.
They are true, and my heart is
thrilled beyond measure.

4*All the while* the despair of many,
who abandoned Your goodness for
the empty promises of false gods,
increases day by day.
I refuse to pour out blood offerings,
to utter their names from my lips.

5You, Eternal One, are my sustenance
and my *life-giving* cup.
In that cup, You hold my future and
my eternal riches.
6My home is surrounded in beauty;
You have gifted me with *abundance
and* a rich legacy.

7I will bless the Eternal, whose wise
teaching orchestrates my days
and centers my mind at night.
8He is ever present with me;
at all times He goes before me.
I will not live in fear *or abandon my
calling*
because He stands at my right
hand.

9*This is a good life*—my heart is glad, my
soul is full of joy,
and my body is at rest.
Who could want for more?
10You will not abandon me to experience
death and the grave
or leave me to rot alone.

11*Instead,* You direct me on the path that
leads to *a beautiful* life.
As I walk with You, the pleasures
are never-ending,
and I know true joy *and
contentment.*

Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

1Listen, O Eternal One, to my cry for
justice.
These words of mine are true—turn
Your ear toward me.
2Announce that I am free of all the
charges against me—*only You
can see into my heart to know
that to be true.*
Treat me with fairness; look at me
with justice.
3You have searched me—my heart
and soul—awakened me *from
dreaming* and tested me.
You've found nothing against me.
I have resolved not to sin in what
I say.

4The path violent men have followed,
I will not travel. Violence is not my
way.
Your ways and Your voice now guide
my journey.
5*I will press on*—moving steadfastly
forward along Your path.
I will not look back. I will not
stumble.

6I am crying aloud to You, O True God,
for I long to know Your answer.
Hear me, *O God.* Hear my plea. *Hear
my prayer for help.*
7Put Your marvelous love on display *for
all to see.*
Liberator of those who long for
shelter beside You,
set them safely away from their
enemies, *ever welcomed by grace.*

8Keep *close watch over* me as the apple
of Your eye;
shelter me in the shadow of Your
wings.
9*Protect me* from the wicked who are
poised to attack,
from the enemies swarming around
me *and closing in quickly.*
10*Like clay baking in the sun,* their hearts
have hardened;
arrogance spills from their mouths.
11They've tracked me down *like quarry.*
They're surrounding me
and are poised to throw me down
into the dirt.
12Like a lion—*crouching in the brush*—
they are ready to tear *me apart.*
Like young lions in their hiding
places, they are poised to strike.

13Rise up and confront them, O Eternal
One! Make them pay.
By Your sword, set me free from my
wicked enemies!
14*May Your rescue find me here.*
By Your hand, save me from my
enemies, Eternal One.
Save me from men whose hopes are
rooted in this world.
But as for those You cherish,
may they feast on all You have set
aside for them;
may their children never be in need;
may they have enough so their
children will inherit their
wealth.

15But as for me, my hope is to see Your
face.

When I am vindicated, I will look
upon the *holy* face of God,
and when I awake, *the longing of* my
soul will be satisfied in *the glow
of* Your presence.

Psalm 18

For the worship leader. A song of David, the Eternal One's servant, who addressed these words to the Eternal after He had rescued him from Saul and his other enemies.

This Davidic psalm is also found in 2 Samuel 22. It expresses gratitude to God for saving him.

1 I love You, Eternal One, *source of* my
power.
2 The Eternal is my rock, my fortress,
and my salvation;
He is my True God, the stronghold
in which I hide,
my strong shield, the horn that calls
forth help, and my tall-walled
tower.
3 I call out to the Eternal, who is worthy
to be praised—
that's how I will be rescued from
my enemies.

4 The bonds of death encircled me;
the currents of destruction tugged
at me;
5 The sorrows of the grave wrap
around me;
the traps of death lay in wait
for me.

6 In my time of need, I called to the
Eternal;
I begged my True God for help.
He heard my voice echo up to His
temple,
and my cry came to His ears.

7 Because of His great anger, the earth
shook and staggered;
the roots of the mountains shifted.
8 Smoke poured out from His nose,
and devouring fire burst from His
mouth.
Coals glowed from Him.
9 He bent the heavens and descended;
inky darkness was beneath His feet.
10 He rode upon a heavenly creature,*
flying;
He was carried quickly on the wings
of the wind.
11 He took darkness as His hiding place—
both the dark waters *of the seas* and
the dark clouds of the sky.
12 Out from His brilliance
hailstones and burning coals
broke through the clouds.
13 The Eternal thundered in the heavens;
the Highest spoke; His voice
rumbled [in the midst of hail
and lightning].*
14 He shot forth His arrows and scattered
the wicked;
He flung forth His lightning and
struck them.
15 Then the deepest channels of the seas
were visible,
and the very foundations of the
world were uncovered
At Your rebuke, O Eternal One,
at the blast of wind from Your
nostrils.

16 He reached down *His hand* from above
me; He held me.
He lifted me from the raging waters.
17 He rescued me from my strongest
enemy,
from all those who sought my
death,
for they were too strong.
18 They came for me in the day of my
destruction,
but the Eternal was the support of
my life.
19 He set me down in a safe place;
He saved me to His delight; *He took
joy* in me.

20 The Eternal One responded to me
according to my goodness;
I kept my hands clean, and He
blessed me.
21 I kept the ways of the Eternal
and have not walked away from my
True God in wickedness.
22 All His laws were there before me,
and I did not push His statutes
away.
23 I was blameless before Him;
I kept myself from guilt *and shame.*
24 That's why the Eternal has rewarded
me for my right living;
He's rewarded me because He saw
my hands were clean.

25 You are loyal to those who are loyal;
with the innocent, You prove to be
innocent;

* 18:10 Hebrew, *cherub* * 18:13 Greek manuscripts and some Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

26With the clean, You prove to be clean;
and with the twisted, You make
Yourself contrary.
27For You rescue humble people,
but You bring the proud back in
line.
28You are the lamp who lights my way;
the Eternal, my God, lights up my
darkness.
29With Your help, I can conquer an army;
I can leap over walls with a helping
hand from You.
30Everything God does is perfect;
the promise of the Eternal rings
true;
He stands as a shield for all who
hide in Him.

31Who is the True God except the
Eternal?
Who stands like a rock except our
God?
32The True God who encircled me with
strength
and made my pathway straight.
33He made me sure-footed as a deer
and placed me high up where I am
safe.
34He teaches me to fight
so that my arms can bend a bronze
bow.
35You have shielded me with Your
salvation,
supporting me with Your *strong*
right hand,
and it makes me strong.
36You taught me how to walk with care
so my feet will not slip.
37I chased my enemies and caught them
and did not stop until they were
destroyed.
38I broke them and threw them down
beneath my feet,
and they could not rise up again.
39For You equipped me for battle,
and You made my enemies fall
beneath me.
40You made my enemies turn tail and run,
and all who wanted my destruction,
I destroyed.
41They looked everywhere, but no one
came to rescue them;
they asked the Eternal, but He did
not answer them.
42I beat them to sand, to dust that blows
in the wind;
I flung them away like trash in the
gutters.
43You rescued me from conflict with the
peoples;
You raised me up to rule over
nations.
People who did not know me have
come to serve me.
44Strangers come to me, afraid.
As soon as they hear about me,
they serve me;
45Strangers who have lost heart
come fearfully *to me* from behind
their high walls.

46The Eternal is alive! My Rock is blessed,
and exalted is the True God of my
deliverance—
47The God who avenged me
and placed the peoples under me,
48Who rescued me from all my foes.
Truly, You raised me up above my
enemies
and saved me from the violent
ones.

49For this I will praise You among the
nations, O Eternal,
and sing praises to Your name.
50He is a tower of salvation for His king
and shows His enduring love to His
anointed,
to David and his descendants
forever.

Psalm 19

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1The celestial realms announce God's
glory;
the skies testify of His hands' great
work.
2Each day pours out more of their
sayings;
each night, more *to hear and more*
to learn.
3Inaudible words are their manner of
speech,
and silence, their means to convey.
4Yet from here to the ends of the earth,
their voices* have gone out;
the whole world can hear what
they say.*

God stretched out in these heavens a
tent for the sun,
5And the sun is like a groom
who, after leaving his room, *arrives*
at the wedding in splendor;
He is the strong runner

* 19:4 Hebrew manuscripts read, "line." * 19:4 Romans 10:18

who, *favored to win in his race,* is
eager to face his challenge.
6He rises at one end of the skies
and runs in an arc overhead;
nothing can hide from his heat,
from the swelter of his daily tread.

7The Eternal's law is perfect,
turning lives around.
His words are reliable and true,
instilling wisdom to open minds.
8The Eternal's directions are correct,
giving satisfaction to the heart.
God's commandments are clear,
lending clarity to the eyes.
9The awe of the Eternal is clean,
sustaining for all of eternity.
The Eternal's decisions are sound;
they are right through and through.
10They are worth more than gold—
even more than abundant, pure
gold.
They are sweeter *to the tongue* than
honey
or the drippings of the honeycomb.

11In addition *to all that has been said,*
Your servant will find, *hidden in
Your commandments,* both a
strong warning
and a great reward for keeping
them.
12Who could possibly know all that he
has done wrong?
Forgive my hidden *and unknown*
faults.
13As I am Your servant, protect me from
my bent toward pride,
and keep sin from ruling my life.
If You do this, I will be without blame,
innocent of the great breach.

14May the words that come out of my
mouth and the musings of my
heart
meet with Your gracious approval,
O Eternal, my Rock,
O Eternal, my Redeemer.

Psalm 20

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1May the Eternal's answer find you,
come to rescue you,
when you desperately cling to the
end of your rope.
May the name of the True God of Jacob
be your shelter.
2May He extend *hope and* help to you
from His *holy* sanctuary
and support you from *His sacred
city of* Zion.
3May He remember all that you have
offered Him;
may your burnt sacrifices serve as a
prelude to His mercy.

[pause]*

4May He grant the dreams of your heart
and see your plans through to the
end.
5When you win, *we will not be silent!* We
will shout
and raise high our banners in the
great name of our God!
May the Eternal say yes to all your
requests.

6*I don't fear;* I'm confident that help will
come to the one anointed by the
Eternal:
heaven will respond to his plea;
His mighty right hand will win the
battle.
7Many put their hope in chariots, others
in horses,
but we place our trust in the name
of the Eternal One, our True
God.
8Soon our enemies will collapse and fall,
never to return home;
all the while, we will rise and stand
firm.

9Eternal One, grant victory to our king!
Answer our plea *for help.*

Psalm 21

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1The king is glad because You,
O Eternal, are strong.
In *light of* Your salvation, he is
singing Your name.
2You have given him all he could wish
for.
After hearing his prayer, You
withheld nothing.

[pause]*

3True blessings You lavished upon the
king;
a crown of precious gold You placed
upon his head.

* 20:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 21:2 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

4His prayer was to live *fully*. You
responded with even more—
a never-ending life to enjoy.
5With Your help, his fame and glory
have grown;
You raise him high and cover him
in majesty.
6You shower him with blessings that last
forever;
he finds joy in knowing Your
presence *and loving You.*
7For the king puts his trust in the
Eternal,
so he will not be shaken
because of the persistent love of the
Most High God.

8*King,* your hand will reach for all your
enemies;
your right hand will seize all who
hate you.
9When you arrive *at the battle's edge,*
you will seem to them a furnace.
For the fire of the Eternal's anger, the
heat of His wrath
will burn and consume them.
10You will cut off their children,
*lop off the branches of their family
tree.*
The earth will never know them,
nor will they ever be numbered
among Adam's kin.
11When they scheme against you,
when they conspire their mischief,
such efforts will be in vain.
12At the sight of you, they will sound the
retreat;
your bows, drawn back, will aim
directly at their faces.

13Put Your strength, Eternal One, on
display for all to see;
we will sing and make music of
Your mighty power.

Psalm 22

For the worship leader. A song of David to *the tune* "Deer of the Dawn."*

Jesus prayed this individual lament from the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Though it begins with a sense of abandonment, it ends on a triumphant note.

1My God, my God, why have You turned
Your back on me?
Your ears are deaf to my groans.
2O my God, I cry all day and You are
silent;
my tears in the night bring no relief.

3Still, You are holy;
You make Your home on the praises
of Israel.
4Our *mothers and* fathers trusted in You;
they trusted, and You rescued
them.
5They cried out to You *for help* and were
spared;
they trusted in You and were
vindicated.

6But I am a worm and not a human
being,
a disgrace and an object of scorn.
7Everyone who sees me laughs at me;
they whisper *to one another* I'm a
loser; they sneer and mock me,
saying,
8"He relies on the Eternal; let the Eternal
rescue him
and keep him safe because He is
happy with him."

9But You are the One who granted me
life;
You endowed me with trust as
I nursed at my mother's breast.
10I was dedicated to You at birth;
You've been my God from my
mother's womb.
11Stay close to me—
trouble is at my door;
no one else can help me.

12I'm surrounded by many tormenters;
like strong bulls of Bashan,* they
circle around me *with their
taunts.*
13They open their mouths wide at me
like ravenous, roaring lions.

14My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones have slipped out
of joint.
My heart melts like wax inside me.
15My strength is gone, dried up like
shards of pottery;
my *dry* tongue sticks to the roof of
my mouth;
You lay me in the dust of death.

16A throng of evil ones has
surrounded me
like *a pack of wild* dogs;

* 22:title Hebrew, *ayyeleth ha-shachar,* perhaps the melody to which the song is sung * 22:12 A region east of the Sea of Galilee

Psalm 23 is the best known and most beloved psalm in the collection. Surprisingly, it casts humanity as sheep—stupid, helpless sheep. But the long-lasting appeal of Psalm 23 is a direct result of that casting because the imagery is both soothing and accessible.

When he was a boy, King David was a shepherd watching his father's flocks in the hills around Bethlehem. In those days, too, it was common to refer to kings in the Near East as shepherds; but not all shepherd-kings cared for their sheep. Though David tried to shepherd his people well, he knew the truth: the Eternal is the true Shepherd.

In John 10:11 Jesus makes a bold claim. He declares that He is the good shepherd. Immediately His disciples detected the resonance of Psalm 23 in His words. Those of us who follow Jesus today come to know Him as that gentle but strong shepherd who guides us through life if we will follow Him.

They* pierced my hands and *ripped a hole in* my feet.
17I count all my bones;
people gawk and stare at me.
18They *make a game out of* dividing my clothes among themselves;
they cast lots for the clothes on my back.

19But You, O Eternal, stay close;
O You, my help, hurry to my side.
20Save my life from violence,
my *sweet* life from the teeth of the wild dog.
21Rescue me from the mouth of the lion.
From the horns of the wild oxen, You responded to my plea.

22I will speak Your Name to my brothers and sisters
when I praise You in the midst of the community.
23You who revere the Eternal, praise Him—
descendants of Jacob, worship Him;
be struck with wonder before Him, all you children of Israel.
24He's not put off
by the suffering of the suffering one;
He doesn't pretend He hasn't seen him;
when he pleaded for help, He listened.

25You stir my praise in the great assembly;
I will fulfill my vows before those who humble their hearts before Him.
26Those who are suffering will eat and be nourished;
those who seek Him will praise the Eternal.
May your hearts beat strong forever!
27Those from the farthest reaches of the earth will remember
and turn back to *look for* the Eternal;
All the families of the nations will worship You.
28The Eternal owns the world;
He exercises His *gentle* rule over all the nations.

29All the wealthy of the world will eat and worship;
all those who fall in the dust will bow before Him,
even the life that is headed to the grave.
30Our children will serve Him;
future generations will hear the story of *how* the Lord *rescued us.*
31They will tell the generations to come
of the righteousness of the Lord,
of what He has done.

* 22:16 Most Hebrew manuscripts read, "like the lion."

Psalm 23

A song of David.

1The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always.
2He provides me rest in rich, green fields
beside streams of refreshing water.
He soothes my fears;
3He makes me whole again,
steering me *off worn, hard paths*
to roads where *truth and* righteousness echo His name.

4Even in the *unending* shadows of death's darkness,
I am not overcome by fear.

Because You are with me *in those dark moments,*
near with Your protection and guidance,
I am comforted.

5You spread out a table before me,
provisions in the midst of *attack from* my enemies;
You *care for all my needs,* anointing my head with *soothing, fragrant* oil,
filling my cup again and again *with Your grace.*
6Certainly Your faithful protection and loving provision will pursue me
where I go, always, everywhere.
I will always be with the Eternal,
in Your house forever.

Psalm 24

A song of David.

1The earth and all that's upon it belong to the Eternal.
The world is His, with every living creature on it.
2With seas as foundations and rivers as boundaries,
He shaped the continents, fashioned the earth.

3Who can *possibly* ascend the mountain of the Eternal?
Who can stand before Him in sacred spaces?
4Only those whose hands have been washed and hearts made pure,
men and women who are not given to lies or deception.
5The Eternal will stand close to them with blessing *and mercy at hand,*
and the God who redeems will right what has been wrong.
6These are the people who chase after Him;
[like Jacob, they look for the face of God].*

[pause]*

7City gates—open wide!
Ancient doors—stand back!
For the glorious King shall soon pass your way.
8Who is the glorious King?
The Eternal who is powerful and mightily equipped for battle.
9City gates—open wide!
Ancient doors—stand back!
For the glorious King shall soon pass your way.
10Who is the glorious King?
The Eternal, Commander of *heaven's* army,
He is the glorious King.

[pause]

Psalm 25

A song of David.

1*ALWAYS* I will lift up my soul to You, Eternal One,
2*BECAUSE You are* my God and I put my trust in You.
Do not let me be humiliated.
Do not let my enemies celebrate at my expense.
3CERTAINLY none of the people who rely on You will be shamed,
but those who are unfaithful, who intentionally deceive,
they are the ones who will be disgraced.

4DEMONSTRATE Your ways, O Eternal One.
Teach me *to understand* so I can follow.
5EASE me down *the path of* Your truth.
FEED me Your word
because You are the True God who has saved me.
I wait all day long, *hoping, trusting* in *You.*

6GRACIOUS Eternal One, remember Your compassion; *rekindle Your* concern and love,
which have always been *part of Your actions toward those who are Yours.*
7Do not HOLD against me the sins I committed when I was young;
instead, deal with me according to Your mercy and love.
Then Your goodness may be *demonstrated in all the world,* Eternal One.

8*IMMENSELY* good and honorable is the Eternal;
that's why He teaches sinners the way.

* 24:6 Most Hebrew manuscripts read, "they look for your face, Jacob." * 24:6 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

9With JUSTICE, He directs the humble
in all that is right,
and He shows them His way.
10KIND and true are all the ways of the Eternal
to the people who keep His covenant and His words.

11O LORD, *the Eternal,* bring glory to Your name,
and forgive my sins because they are beyond number.
12MAY anyone who fears the Eternal be shown the path he should choose.

13His soul will *NOT only* live in goodness, but his children will inherit the land.
14ONLY those who stand in awe of the Eternal will have intimacy with Him,
and He will reveal His covenant to them.
15PERPETUALLY my focus takes me to the Eternal
because He will set me free from the traps *laid for me.*

16*QUIETLY* turn *Your eyes* to me and be compassionate toward me
because I am lonely and persecuted.
17*RAPIDLY* my heart beats as troubles build *on the horizon.*
Come relieve me from these threats.
18SEE my troubles and my misery,
and forgive all my sins.
19TAKE notice of my enemies.
See how there are so many of them who hate me and would seek my violent destruction.
20Watch over my soul,
and let me face shame and defeat UNASHAMED because You are my refuge.
21May honor and strong character keep me safe.
VIGILANTLY I wait for You, *hoping, trusting.*

22Save Israel from all its troubles,
O True God.

Psalm 26

A song of David.

1Declare my innocence, O Eternal One!
I have walked blamelessly *down this path.*
I placed my trust in the Eternal and have yet to stumble.

2Put me on trial and examine me, O Eternal One!
Search me *through and through*—from my deepest longings to every thought that crosses my mind.
3Your unfailing love is always before me;
I have journeyed down Your *path of* truth.

► A great theme throughout the psalms is the experience of coming before God. This Davidic psalm affirms the integrity of the worshiper before the Lord even while pleading for God's mercy.

4My life is not wasted among liars;
my days are not spent among cheaters.
5I despise every crowd intent on evil;
I do not commune with the wicked.

6I wash my hands in *the fountain of* innocence
so that I might join *the gathering that surrounds* Your altar, O Eternal One.
7*From my soul,* I will join the songs of thanksgiving;
I will *sing and* proclaim Your wonder *and mystery.*

8Your house, home to Your glory, O Eternal One, *radiates its light.*
I am fixed on this place *and long to be nowhere else.*
9When *Your wrath* pursues those who oppose You,
those swift to sin and thirsty for blood,
spare my soul and grant me life.
10These men hold deceit in their *left* hands,
and in their right hands, bribery *and lies.*

11But *God,* I have walked blamelessly *down this path,*
and this is my plea for redemption.
This is my cry for Your mercy.
12Here I stand secure and confident before all the people; I will praise the Eternal.

Psalm 27

A song of David.

[1]The Eternal is my light *amidst my darkness*
and my rescue *in times of trouble.*
So whom shall I fear?
He surrounds me with a fortress of protection.
So nothing should cause me alarm.

► The psalms provide us with a way to think about and pray through the various threats we face. Our enemies today may not be the same as in biblical times, but they are no less real. Consider the threats on the horizon. Some may be national. Others may be more personal. Still they come to surround us and destroy us if they could only get the chance. The reality is there are times when our enemies appear to have the upper hand and our cause is lost. But wait and listen to the psalm! All is not lost because, ultimately, God is our light and salvation. The darkness will lift, and our Savior will come. He will settle all scores, and we will live in the beauty of His presence.

[2]When my enemies advanced
to devour me alive,
They tripped and fell *flat on their faces into the soil.*

[3]When the armies *of the enemy* surround me,
I will not be afraid.
When death calls for me in the midst of war,
my soul is confident *and unmoved.*

[4]I am pleading with the Eternal for this one thing,
my *soul's* desire:
To live with Him all of my days—
in *the shadow of* His temple,
To behold His beauty and ponder His ways
in the company of His people.

[5]His house is my shelter and secret retreat.
It is there I find peace in the midst of storm and turmoil.
Safety sits with me in the hiding place of God.
He will set me on a rock, high *above the fray.*

[6]*God* lifts me high above those with thoughts
of death and deceit that call for my life.
I will enter *His presence,* offering sacrifices *and praise.*
In His house, I am overcome with joy
As I sing, yes, *and play music* for the Eternal *alone.*
[7]*I cannot shout any louder.* Eternal One—hear my cry
and respond with Your grace.
[8]The prodding of my heart leads me to chase after You.
I am seeking You, Eternal One—
don't retreat from me.
[9]*You have always answered my call.*
Don't hide from me now.

Don't give up on me in anger at Your servant.
You have always been there for me.
Don't throw me to the side and forget me,
my God and only salvation.
[10]My father and mother have deserted me,
yet the Eternal will take me in.

[11]O Eternal, show me Your way,
shine Your light brightly on this path,
and make it level for me,
for my enemies are lurking *in the recesses and ravines along the way.*
[12]*They are watching—hoping to seize me.*
Do not release me to their desires
or surrender me to their will!
Liars are standing against me,
breathing out cruel lies *hoping that I will die.*

[13]*I will move past my enemies with this one, sure hope:*
that with my own eyes, I will see the goodness of the Eternal
in the land of the living.

[14]*Please answer me:* Don't give up.
Wait for the Eternal in expectation, and be strong.
Again, wait for the Eternal.

Psalm 28

A song of David.

[1]Eternal One, I am calling out to You;
You are the foundation of my life.
Please, don't turn Your ear
from me.
If You respond to my pleas with silence,
I will lose all hope like those
silenced by death's grave.
[2]Listen to my voice.
You will hear me begging for Your
help
With my hands lifted up *in prayer,*
my body turned toward Your holy
home.

► This Davidic psalm pleads with God to spare him and repay his enemies. It would be difficult to locate this psalm in any one event. During his life David faced many threats from different enemies; not only were these threats from outside his realm, but some of his most difficult challenges came from inside his own family.

[3]*I beg You;* don't punish me with the
most heinous men.
They spend their days doing evil.
Even when they engage their neighbors
in pleasantness,
they are scheming against them.
[4]Pay them back for their deeds;
hold them accountable for their
malice.
Give them what they deserve.
[5]Because these are people who have no
respect for You, O Eternal,
they ignore everything You have
done.
So He will tear them down *with His
powerful hands*;
never will they be built again.

[6]The Eternal should be honored and
revered;
He has heard my cries for help.
[7]The Eternal is the source of my
strength and the shield that
guards me.
When I *learn to rest and* truly trust
Him,
He sends His help. This is why my
heart is singing!
I open my mouth to praise Him,
and thankfulness rises as song.

[8]The Eternal gives *life and* power to all
His chosen ones;
to His anointed He is a sturdy
fortress.
[9]Rescue Your people, and bring
prosperity to Your legacy;
may they know You as a shepherd,
carrying them at all times.

Psalm 29

A song of David.

[1]Give *all credit* to the Eternal,
O heavenly creatures;
give *praise* to Him for His glory and
power.
[2]Give to the Eternal the glory due His
name;
worship Him with *lavish displays of*
sacred splendor.

[3]The voice of the Eternal echoes over
the great waters;
God's magnificence roars like
thunder.
The Eternal's presence hovers over
all the waters.
[4]His voice explodes in great power *over
the earth.*
His voice is both regal and grand.

[5]The Eternal's voice shatters the
cedars;
His power splinters the great cedars
of Lebanon.
[6]He speaks, and Lebanon leaps like a
young calf;
Sirion jumps like a wild,
youthful ox.

[7]The voice of the Eternal cuts through
with flames of fire.
[8]The voice of the Eternal rumbles
through the wilderness
with great quakes;
He causes Kadesh to tremble.

[9]The Eternal's voice brings life from the
doe's womb;
His voice strips the forest bare,
and all the people in the temple
declare, "Glory!"

[10]The Eternal is enthroned over the great
flood;
His reign is unending.

11We ask You, Eternal One, to give
strength to Your people;
Eternal One, bless them with *the gift of* peace.

Psalm 30

A song of David. For the dedication of the temple.

1I praise You, Eternal One. You lifted me
out of that deep, dark pit
and denied my opponents the pleasure of rubbing in their success.
2Eternal One, my True God, I cried out to You for help;
You mended the shattered pieces of my life.
3You lifted me from the grave *with a mighty hand,*
gave me another chance,
and saved me from joining those in that *dreadful* pit.

4Sing, all you who remain faithful!
Pour out your hearts to the Eternal with praise and melodies;
let grateful music *fill the air and* bless His name.
5His wrath, you see, is fleeting,
but His grace lasts a lifetime.
The deepest pains may linger through the night,
but joy greets the soul with the *smile of* morning.

6When *things were quiet and* life was easy, I said *in arrogance,*
"Nothing can shake me."
7By Your grace, Eternal,
I thought I was as strong as a mountain;
But when You *left my side and* hid away,
I crumbled in fear.

8O Eternal One, I called out to You;
I pleaded for Your compassion *and forgiveness*:
9"*I'm no good to You dead!* What benefits come from my rotting corpse?
My body in the grave *will not praise You.*
No songs will rise up from the dust *of my bones.*
From dust comes no proclamation of Your faithfulness.
10Hear me, Eternal Lord—please help me,
Eternal One—be merciful!"
11*You did it:* You turned my deepest pains into joyful dancing;
You stripped off my dark clothing and covered me with joyful light.
12*You have restored my honor.* My heart is ready to explode, erupt in new songs!
It's impossible to keep quiet!
Eternal One, my God, *my Life-Giver,*
I will thank You forever.

Psalm 31

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1You are my shelter, O Eternal One—
my soul's sanctuary!
Shield me from shame;
rescue me by Your righteousness.
2*Hear me, Lord!* Turn Your ear in my direction.
Come quick! Save me!
Be my rock, my shelter,
my fortress of salvation!

3You are my rock and my fortress—
my soul's sanctuary!
Therefore, for the sake of Your reputation, be my leader,
my guide, *my navigator, my commander.*
4Save me from the snare that has been secretly set out for me,
for You are my protection.
5I entrust my spirit into Your hands.*
You have redeemed me, O Eternal,
God of *faithfulness and* truth.

6I despise the people who pay respect to breathless idols,
and I trust *only* in You, Eternal One.
7I will gladly rejoice because of Your gracious love
because You recognized *the sadness of* my affliction.
You felt deep compassion when You saw the pains of my soul.
8You did not hand me over to the enemy,
but instead, You liberated me
and made me secure in a *good and* spacious land.

9Show me Your grace, Eternal One, for I am in a tight spot.
My eyes are aching with grief;
my body and soul *are withering with miseries.*
10My life is devoured by sorrow,
and my years *are haunted* with mourning.

* 31:5 Luke 23:46

My sin has sapped me of all my
strength;
my body withers *under the weight of
this suffering.*

11To all my enemies I am *an object of*
scorn.
My neighbors especially are
ashamed *of me.*
My friends are afraid to be seen
with me.
When I walk down the street,
people go out of their way to
avoid me.
12I am as good as dead to them.
Forgotten!
Like a shattered clay pot, *I am easily
discarded and gladly replaced.*
13For I hear their whispered plans;
terror is everywhere!
They conspire together,
planning, plotting, scheming to take
my life.

14But I pour my trust into You, Eternal
One.
I'm *glad to* say, "You are my God!"
15I give the moments of my life over to
You, *Eternal One.*
Rescue me from those who hate me
and who hound me *with their
threats.*
16*Look toward me, and* let Your face shine
down upon Your servant.
Because of Your gracious love,
save me!
17Spare me shame, O Eternal One,
for I *turn and* call to You.
Instead, let those who hate me be
shamed;
let death's silence claim them.
18Seal their lying lips *forever,*
for with pride and contempt *boiling
in their hearts,*
they speak boldly against the
righteous *and persecute those
who poured their trust into You.*

19Your overflowing goodness
You have kept for those who live in
awe of You,
And You share Your goodness with
those who make You their
sanctuary.
20You hide them, You shelter them in
Your presence,
safe from the conspiracies of sinful
men.
You keep them in Your tent,
safe from the slander of accusing
tongues.

21Bless the Eternal!
For He has revealed His gracious
love to me
when I was trapped like a city
under siege.
22I began to panic so I yelled out,
"I'm cut off. You no longer see me!"
But You heard my cry for help *that day*
when I called out to You.

23Love the Eternal, all of you, His faithful
people!
He protects those who are true to
Him,
but He pays back the proud in kind.
24Be strong, and live courageously,
all of you who set your hope in the
Eternal!

Psalm 32

A contemplative song* of David.

► The psalms celebrate God's forgiveness that comes through confession and repentance. Some interpreters link this psalm to David's sin with Bathsheba after Nathan had exposed his transgression, but the king certainly had other failings. Even if we do not associate this psalm with any personal transgression by David, it serves well as a model confession for those who are painfully aware of their sin.

1How happy is the one whose wrongs
are forgiven,
whose sin is hidden *from sight.*
2How happy is the person whose sin
the Eternal will not take into
account.*
How happy are those who no longer
lie, *to themselves or others.*

3When I refused to admit my wrongs,
I was miserable,
moaning and complaining all day
long
so that even my bones felt brittle.
4Day and night, Your hand kept pressing
on me.

* 32:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 32:1-2 Romans 4:7-8

My strength dried up *like water* in the summer heat;
You wore me down.

[pause]*

5*When I finally saw my own lies,*
I owned up to my sins before You,
and I did not try to hide my evil deeds *from You.*
I said *to myself,* "I'll admit *all* my sins to the Eternal,"
and You *lifted and* carried away the guilt of my sin.

[pause]

6So let all who are devoted to You speak honestly to You now, *while You are still listening.*
For then when the floods come, surely the rushing water will not even reach them.
7You are my hiding place.
You will keep me out of trouble and envelop me with songs that remind me I am free.

[pause]

8I will teach you and tell you the way to go *and how to get there*;
I will give you good counsel, and I will watch over you.
9But don't be *stubborn and* stupid like horses and mules
who, if not reined by leather and metal,
will run wild, ignoring their masters.

10Tormented *and empty* are wicked *and destructive* people,
but the one who trusts in the Eternal is wrapped tightly in His gracious love.
11Express your joy; be happy in Him, you who are good and true.
Go ahead, shout *and* rejoice aloud, you whose hearts are *honest and* straightforward.

Psalm 33

1Release your heart's joy *in sweet music* to the Eternal.
When the upright passionately sing glory-filled songs *to Him,* everything is in its right place.
2Worship the Eternal with your instruments, strings *offering their praise*;
write *awe-filled* songs to Him on the 10-stringed harp.
3Sing to Him a new song;
play each the best way you can,
and don't be afraid to be bold with your joyful feelings.

4For the word of the Eternal is perfect and true;
His actions are always faithful *and right.*
5He loves virtue and equity;
the Eternal's love fills the whole earth.

6The *unfathomable* cosmos came into being at the word of the Eternal's *imagination, a solitary voice in endless darkness.*
The breath of His mouth whispered the sea of stars into existence.
7He gathers every drop of every ocean as in a jar,
securing the ocean depths as *His watery* treasure.

8Let all people stand in awe of the Eternal;
let every man, woman, and child live in wonder of Him.
9For He spoke, and all things came into being.
A *single* command *from His lips,* and all creation *obeyed and* stood its ground.

10The Eternal cripples the schemes of the other nations;
He impedes the plans of *rival* peoples.
11The Eternal's purposes will last to the end of time;
the thoughts of His heart *will awaken and stir* all generations.
12The nation whose True God is the Eternal is *truly* blessed;
fortunate are all whom He chooses to inherit His legacy.

13The Eternal peers down from heaven and watches all of humanity;
14He observes every soul from His divine residence.
15He has formed every human heart, *breathing life into every human spirit;*

* 32:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

He knows the deeds of each person,
inside and out.
16A king is not delivered by the might of
his army.
Even the *strongest* warrior is not
saved by his own strength.
17A horse is not the way to victory;
its great strength cannot rescue.

18Listen, the eye of the Eternal is upon
those who live in awe of Him,
those who hope in His steadfast
love,
19That He may save them from the
darkness of the grave
and be kept alive during the lean
seasons.

20*We live with hope in* the Eternal. We
wait for Him,
for He is our *Divine* Help and
Impenetrable Shield.
21Our hearts erupt with joy in Him
because we trust His holy name.
22O Eternal, drench us with Your endless
love,
even now as we wait for You.

Psalm 34

A song of David as he pretended to be insane to escape from Abimelech.

► While there is nothing specific to tie this Davidic psalm to the events in 1 Samuel 21:10-15, the superscription recalls a time when David pretended to be insane to protect himself from the Philistines.

1I will praise the Eternal in every
moment *through every situation.*
Whenever I speak, my words will
always praise Him.
2Everything within me wants to pay
tribute to Him.
Whenever the *poor and* humble
hear of His greatness, they will
celebrate too!
3*Come and* lift up the Eternal with me;
let's praise His name together!

4*When I needed the Lord,* I looked for
Him;
I called out to Him, and He *heard me
and* responded.
He *came and* rescued me from
everything that made me so
afraid.
5Look to Him and shine,
so shame will never contort your
faces.
6This poor soul cried, and the Eternal
heard me.
He rescued me from my troubles.
7The messenger of the Eternal God
surrounds
everyone who walks with Him and
is always there to *protect and*
rescue us.
8Taste of His goodness; see how
wonderful the Eternal truly is.
Anyone who puts trust in Him will
be blessed *and comforted.*
9Revere the Eternal, you His saints,
for those who worship Him will
possess everything important
in life.
10Young lions may grow tired and hungry,
but those intent on knowing
the Eternal God will have
everything they need.

11Gather around, children, listen to what
I'm saying;
I will teach you how to revere the
Eternal.
12If you love life
and want to live a good, long time,
13Take care with the things you say.
Don't lie or spread gossip or talk
about improper things.
14Walk away from the evil *things of the
world,*
and always seek peace and
pursue it.

15For the Eternal watches over the
righteous,
and His ears are attuned to their
prayers. *He is always listening.*
16But He will punish evildoers,
and nothing they do will last. They
will soon be forgotten.
17When the upright *need help and* cry to
the Eternal, He hears *their cries*
and rescues them from all of their
troubles.
18When someone is hurting or
brokenhearted, the Eternal
moves in close
and revives him in his pain.

19Hard times may well be the plight of
the righteous—
they may often seem overwhelmed—

but the Eternal rescues the righteous
from what oppresses them.
20He will protect all of their bones;
not even one bone will be broken.
21Evil *moves in and ultimately* murders
the wicked;
the enemies of the righteous will be
condemned.
22The Eternal will liberate His servants;
those who seek refuge in Him will
never be condemned.

Psalm 35

A song of David.

1Make a case against those who struggle
with me, Eternal One.
Battle against those who battle
against me.
2Be my shield and protection;
stand with me and rescue me!
3Draw the spear and javelin
to meet my pursuers.
Reassure my soul and say,
"I will deliver you."

4Shame and dishonor those *ruthless*
enemies
who wish to end my life.
Turn back those who conspire
against me,
defeated and humiliated!
5Let them be separated *from the
righteous* as chaff *is separated
from the grain,*
blown by the wind,
driven *far, far* away by the Eternal's
messenger.
6Make their way unsure and *dangerously*
dark,
a gauntlet of gloom
chased through the darkness by the
Eternal's messenger.

7For no reason at all, they set a trap for
me—*a net, a snare—*
then, without cause, they disguised
a pit to capture my soul—
another cowardly snare.
8May they be surprised by their own
destruction.
May they become tangled in their own
net
and fall into the pit *which they,
themselves, dug.*

9*When that day comes,* my soul will
celebrate the Eternal
and be glad in His salvation.
10Every fiber of my being* will shout,
"Eternal One, there is none like
You!
You save the poor
from those who try to overpower
them
and rescue the weak and the needy
from those who steal from
them."

11False witnesses step forward;
they ask me *strange* questions for
which I have no answers.
12When I do good *to them,* they do evil
to me,
bringing misery to my soul.
13When they were sick,
I *mourned for them and* wore
sackcloth;
I chose to humble myself by fasting.
But my prayers came back
unanswered.
14So I mourned *more deeply* as if I grieved
for my brother or friend;
I went around bowed down by
sorrow, *dressed in black,*
as if I were weeping for my mother.
15But when I stumbled, they gathered
together
and celebrated *my fall* with joy;
People attacked me when I wasn't
expecting it;
they slandered me with no end.
16Like godless mockers at a festival,*
their words tore at me.

17Lord, how long will You *do nothing but*
watch?
Save me from their evil assaults,
plots, and plunder;
rescue my life from these *hungry
beasts, these ruthless* lions!
18Then I will praise You and thank You at
the great gathering,
in the company of the entire
congregation.

19Do not allow my enemies to boast at
my expense,
for they despise me without any
cause—*
yet they wink at me—malicious,
taunting winks.
20Their words have no ring of peace.
They plan evil rumors *and
incriminations*
against those who live peacefully in
the land.

* 35:10 Literally, all my bones * 35:16 Greek manuscripts read, "Like the godless they cruelly mocked." * 35:19 John 15:25

21They speak *lying* accusations
against me;
they say, "Aha! Aha! *We know what you've been up to.*
We've seen it with our own eyes!"

22You have seen *what's happening,*
Eternal One; don't remain silent!
Lord, do not stay far away from me!
23Wake up; come to my defense!
Fight for me, my Lord and my God!
24Pass Your judgment, Eternal One, my True God;
do it by the standards of Your righteousness.
Do not allow my enemies to boast over me.
25Do not allow them to gloat *over me,*
"Aha, we have won! We got what we wanted!"
Do not allow them to brag,
"We chewed him up and spit him out."

26Shame and confuse those who celebrate my suffering;
may those who exalt themselves above me be covered with shame—
wrapped in a cloak of dishonor!

27As for those who desire my vindication,
may they be joyful and glad.
May they forever say,
"The Eternal is indeed great!
He takes pleasure when good things happen to His servant!"
28*That's why* I will speak of Your righteousness
and *sing* praises to You all day long.

Psalm 36

For the worship leader. *A song* of David, the Eternal's servant.

1Sin speaks in the depths of the soul of those who oppose God; *they listen closely to its urgings.*
You'll never see the fear of God in their eyes,
2For they flatter themselves—
convinced their sin will remain *secret,* undiscovered, and so unhated.
3They speak words of evil and deceit.
Wisdom and goodness, they deserted *long ago.*
4Even as they sleep, they are plotting mischief.
They journey along a path far from anything good,
gravitating to trouble, welcoming evil.

5Your love, O Eternal One, towers high into the heavens.
Even the skies are lower than Your faithfulness.
6Your justice is like the majestic mountains.
Your judgments are as deep as the oceans, *and yet in Your greatness,*
You, O Eternal, offer life for every person and animal.

7Your strong love, O True God, is precious.
All people run for shelter under the shadow of Your wings.
8In Your house, they eat and are full at Your table.
They drink from the river of Your *overflowing* kindness.
9You have the fountain of life *that quenches our thirst.*
Your light has opened our eyes *and awakened our souls.*

10May Your love continue to grow deeply in the lives of all who know You.
May Your salvation reach every heart committed to do right.
11Give me shelter from prideful feet that hunt me down
and wicked hands that push me from Your path.
12It is there, *far away from You,* that the wicked will be forced down,
face to the earth, never again returning to their feet.

Psalm 37*

A song of David.

1Don't be worried with evil workers
or envy the gains of people with all-wrong-upside-down ways.
2Soon enough they will wither like grass,
like green herbs fading *in summer's heat.*

3Believe in the Eternal, and do what is good—
live in the land *He provides; roam,*
and rest in God's faithfulness.
4Take great joy in the Eternal!
His gifts are coming, and they are all your heart desires!

* Psalm 37 A Hebrew acrostic poem

5Commit your path to the Eternal; *let*
Him direct you.
Put your confidence in Him, and He
will follow through *with you.*
6He will spread out righteousness for you
as a sunrise *spreads radiance over*
the land;
He will deliver justice for you into
the light of the high sun.

7Be still. Be patient. Expect the Eternal
to arrive *and set things right.*
Don't get upset when you see the
worldly ones rising up the ladder.
Don't be bothered by those who are
anchored in wicked ways.

8So turn from anger. Don't rage,
and don't worry—these ways frame
the doorway to evil.
9Besides, those who act from evil
motives will be cut off from the
land;
but those who wait, hoping in the
Eternal, will enjoy its riches.

10You'll see . . . the wicked *won't know*
what hit them;
you'll blink, and they'll be gone;
you'll go out looking for them, but
you won't find them.
11But the humble-hearted will inherit the
land;
they will take pleasure in its peace
and enjoy its abundance.

12How that wicked man devises evil
against God's righteous ones!
He grits his teeth, *consumed by hate*
for the upright.
13But oh, how the Lord laughs at him!
He knows the wicked man will get
his; the day is coming.

14The wicked unsheathe their swords,
pull taut their bows;
the poor and needy are their victims,
and evil is on the prowl to kill those
with integrity, *God's beloved.*
15But their swords will bend back to
pierce their own hearts—
yes, their bows will snap in two.

16The righteous are better off with the
little *God blessed them with*
than *living under the curse of* the
wealth of the wicked.
17*Their time is short,* their arms will be
broken,
but the Eternal will hold His
righteous children high.

18All their days are *measured and* known
by the Eternal;
their inheritance is kept safe forever.
19When calamity comes, they will escape
with their dignity.
When famine invades the nations,
they will be fed to their fill.

20But immoral ones will find their lives
cut short;
they'll vanish as quickly as
wildflowers in the fields.
Yes, enemies of the Eternal will vanish
like smoke *into the cool night air.*

21Evil people borrow and never repay
their debts,
while the good give generously *from*
their hearts.
22For God's blessed *children* will inherit
the land,
but those cursed by Him stand to
gain nothing.

23*If you are right with God,* He
strengthens you for the journey;
the Eternal will be pleased with
your life.
24And even though you trip up, you will
not fall on your face
because He holds you by the hand.

25Through my whole life (young and
old),
I have never witnessed God
forsaking those who do right,
nor have I seen their children
begging for crumbs,
26Because they are always giving and
sharing;
truly, their children are a joyful
blessing.

27Walk away from evil. Do good
so you, too, will enjoy never-ending
life
28Because the Eternal cherishes justice
and will not abandon those loyal
to Him.

He will guard *and care for* them
forever,
but any child born of evil will
be *rooted out, cut down, and*
destroyed.
29Those leading God-pleasing lives will
inherit His land
and settle there forever.

30Wisdom fills the mouth of the right-
living;

justice *and truth* roll from their tongues.
31The True God's law is imprinted upon their hearts,
and they do not stumble.

32The wicked stalk God's good ones, looking to kill them,
33But the Eternal will never leave them to *the dogs of* evil,
nor will they be found guilty when the verdict is read.

34Wait for the Eternal. Keep to His path. *Mind His will.*
He will *come for you,* exalt you; you will inherit the land.
Before your very eyes you will see the end of the wicked.

35*I passed by* a wicked man with a cold-blooded nature;
I looked, and he seemed as large as a cedar of Lebanon.
36But then again, I passed that same way and there was nothing left of him.
I went out looking for him, but he was nowhere to be found.

37Keep your eye on the innocent. Model your life after the blameless.
Everyone who loves peace has a future.
38But sinners will be doomed.
The forecast for the wicked: *utter destruction.*
There will be none left, *not one child of darkness.*

39The Eternal saves His faithful;
He lends His strength in hard times;
40The Eternal comes and frees them—
frees them from evildoers and saves them *for eternity*—
simply because they seek shelter in Him.

Psalm 38

A song of David for remembering.

► This is one of a group of psalms known in later tradition as the penitential psalms, namely, psalms that confess sins and express confidence in God's mercy. In this psalm a serious illness threatens the life of the worshiper.

1O Eternal One, please do not scold me in Your anger;
though Your wrath is just, do not correct me in Your fury.
2The arrows *from Your bow* have penetrated my flesh;
Your hand has come down *hard* on me.

3Because Your anger *has infected the depths of my being and stolen my health,*
my flesh is ill.
My bones are no longer sound because of all the sins I have committed.
4My guilt has covered me; *it's more than I can handle;*
this burden is too heavy for me to carry.

5Now sores cover me—infected and putrid sores,
because of all the foolish things I have done.
6I am bent down, *cowering in fear,* prostrate on the ground;
I spend the day in mourning, *guilty tears stinging and burning my eyes.*
7My back aches. *I'm full of fever;*
my body is no longer whole, *no longer well.*
8I am *completely numb,* totally spent, hopelessly crushed.
The agitation of my heart makes me groan.

9O Lord, You know all my desires;
nothing escapes You; *You hear* my every moan.
10My heart pounds against my chest; my vigor is completely drained;
my eyes were once bright, but now the brightness is all gone.
11Even my friends and loved ones turn away when they see this marked man;
those closest to me are no longer close at all.

12Those who want me dead lay traps upon my path;
those who desire my downfall threaten—*my end is near*—
they spend their days plotting against me.

13Like one who is deaf, my ears do not
hear.
Like one who is mute, my tongue
cannot speak.
14The truth is this: I am like one who
cannot hear;
I cannot even protest *against them.*

15Still I wait *expectantly* for You,
O Eternal One—
knowing You will answer me *in
some way,* O Lord, my True
God.
16I only asked, "When I stumble *on the
narrow path,*
don't let them boast or celebrate *my
failure.*"

17I am prepared for what may come; *my
time must be short;*
my pain and suffering a constant
companion.
18I confess, "I have sinned,"
and I regret the wrong I have
done.
19My enemies are alive *and well,*
they are powerful and on the
increase,
and for no reason, they hate me.
20When I do good, my opponents reward
me with evil;
though I pursue what is right, they
stand against me.

21Eternal One, do not leave me *to their
mercy;*
my True God, don't be far from me
when they are near.
22I need Your help now—*not later.*
O Lord, be my Rescuer.

Psalm 39

For the worship leader, Jeduthun.*
A song of David.

As an individual lament, Psalm 39 grieves over the brevity of life. The superscription recalls David's appointment of Jeduthun as one of the tabernacle's leading musicians (1 Chronicles 16:41-42).

1I promised, "I'll be careful on life's
journey
not to sin with my words;
I'll seal my lips
when wicked people are around."
2I kept my mouth shut;
I had nothing to say—not even
anything good—
which came to grieve me more and
more.
3*I felt* my heart become hot inside me
as I thought on these things; a fire
ignited and burned.
Then I said,

4"Eternal One, let me understand my
end
and how brief my earthly
existence is;
help me realize my life is fleeting.
5You have determined the length of my
days,
and my life is nothing *compared* to
You.
Even the longest life is only a breath."

[pause]*

6In truth, each of us journeys through
life like a shadow.
We busy ourselves accomplishing
nothing, piling up assets we can
never keep;
We can't even know who will end up
with those things.

7In light of all this, Lord, what am
I really waiting for?
You are my hope.
8Keep me from all the wrong I would do;
don't let the foolish laugh at me.
9I am quiet; I keep my mouth closed
because this has come from You.
10Take Your curse from me;
I can't endure Your punishment.

11You discipline us for our sins.
Like a moth, You consume
everything we treasure;
it's evident we are merely a breath.

[pause]

12Hear me, O Eternal One;
listen to my pleading,
and don't ignore my tears
Because I am estranged from You—
a wanderer like my fathers
before me.
13Look away from me so I might have
a chance to *recover my joy and*
smile again
before I lay this life down and am
no more.

* 39:title 1 Chronicles 9:16 * 39:5 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

Psalm 40

For the worship leader. A song of David.

[1]I waited a long time for the Eternal;
He *finally* knelt down to hear me.
He listened to my *weak and whispered* cry.
[2]He reached down and drew me
from the deep, dark hole where
I was *stranded,* mired in the muck and clay.
With a gentle hand, He pulled me out
To set me down safely on a *warm* rock;
He held me until I was steady enough to continue the journey again.
[3]*As if that were not enough,*
because of Him my mind is clearing up.
Now I have a new song to sing—
a song of praise to the One *who saved me.*
Because of what He's done, many people will see
and come to trust in the Eternal.

[4]Surely those who trust the Eternal—
who don't trust in proud, *powerful* people
Or in people who care little *for reality,* chasing false gods—
surely they are happy, as I have become.
[5]You have done so many wonderful things,
had so many *tender* thoughts toward us, Eternal my God,
that go on and on, ever increasing.
Who can compare with You?

[6]Sacrifices and offerings are not what You want,
but You've opened my ears,* *and now I understand.*
Burnt offerings and sin offerings are not what please You.
[7]So I said, "See, I have come *to do Your will,*
as it is inscribed of me in the scroll.
[8]I am pleased to live how You want, my God.
Your law is etched into my heart *and my soul.*"

[9]I have encouraged *Your people* with the message of righteousness,
in Your great assembly (look and see),
I haven't kept quiet about these things;
You know this, Eternal One.
[10]I have not kept Your righteousness to myself, sealed up in the secret places of my heart;
instead, I *boldly* tell others how You save and how loyal You are.
I haven't been shy to talk about Your love, *nor have I been afraid* to tell Your truth
before the great assembly *of Your people.*

[11]Please, Eternal One, don't hold back Your kind ways from me.
I need Your strong love and truth to *stand watch over me and* keep me from harm.
[12]Right now *I can't see because* I am surrounded by troubles;
my sins *and shortcomings* have caught up to me,
so I am swimming in darkness.
Like the hairs on my head, there are too many to count,
so my heart deserts me.

[13]O Eternal One, please rescue me.
O Eternal One, hurry; I need Your help.
[14]May those who are trying to destroy me
be humiliated and ashamed instead;
May those who want to ruin my reputation
be cut off and embarrassed.
[15]May those *who try to catch me off guard,*
those who look at me and say, "Aha, *we've trapped you,*"
be caught in their own shame instead.

[16]But may all who look for You
discover true joy and happiness in You;
May those who cherish how You save them
always say, "O Eternal One, You are great *and are first in our hearts.*"
[17]Meanwhile, I am empty and need so much,
but *I know* the Lord is thinking of me.
You are my help; only You can save me, my True God.
Please hurry.

* 40:6 Greek manuscripts read, "but You have prepared a body for me."

Psalm 41

For the worship leader. A song of David.

► The first four books of Psalms end with a variation of the doxology found in verse 13: "Blessed is the Eternal, the True God of Israel. Always and Eternal. Amen and Amen." This declaration not only provides a natural break—a seam—between the five books, but it also summarizes an essential theme of the psalms. You see, the Book of Psalms is primarily a book of praise to God for His creation, mercy, and salvation. Even when life is hard, our enemies strong, and our health poor, God can be praised for life itself and the ultimate victory to come for those who trust Him.

1 Blessed are those who consider the
helpless.
The Eternal will *stay near them,*
leading them to safety in times
of bitter struggle.
2 The Eternal defends them and
preserves them,
and His blessing will find them in
the land *He gave them.*
He moves ahead to frustrate their
enemies' plans.
3 When sickness comes, the Eternal is
beside them—
to comfort them on their sickbeds
and restore them to health.

4 And me? I cry out to Him,
"Heal my soul, O Eternal One, and
show mercy
because I have sinned against You!"
5 My enemies are talking about me *even*
now:
"When will death come for him and
his name be forgotten?"
6 As they sit with me *under my roof, their*
well wishes are empty lies.
They listen to my story
and then turn it around to tell their
own version on the street.
7 *Across the city,* crowds whisper lies
about me.
Their hate is strong, and they search
for ways to harm me.

8 *Some are saying:* "Some vile disease has
gotten hold of him.
The bed he lies in will be his
deathbed."
9 Even my best friend, my confidant
who has eaten my bread will stab
me in the back.*
10 But You, Eternal One, show mercy
to me.
Extend Your gracious hand, and help
me up.
I need to pay them back *for what*
they've done to me.

11 I realize now that Your favor has come
to me,
for my enemies have yet to declare
victory over me.
12 You know and uphold me—a man of
honor.
You grant me *strength and* life
forever in Your presence.

13 Blessed is the Eternal, the True God of
Israel.
Always and Eternal. Amen and
Amen.

BOOK TWO

Psalm 42*

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of the sons of Korah.

1 My soul *is dry and* thirsts for You, True
God,
as a deer thirsts for water.
2 I long for the True God who lives.
When can I stand before Him *and*
feel His comfort?
3 *Right now I'm overwhelmed by my*
sorrow and pain;
I can't stop feasting on my tears.
People crowd around me and say,
"Where is your True God *whom you*
claim will save?"

4 With a broken heart,
I remember times before
When I was with Your people. *Those*
were better days.
I used to lead them *happily* into the
True God's house,
Singing with joy, shouting
thanksgivings with *abandon,*
joining the congregation in the
celebration.
5 Why am I so overwrought?
Why am I so disturbed?

* 41:9 John 13:18 * Psalm 42 Psalms 42–43 are a single poem in many Hebrew manuscripts. * 42:title Hebrew, *maskil*

This second book of psalms (Psalms 42–72) has a few unique features. First, it is the only book of the five that contains psalms ascribed to the sons of Korah, a group of Levite temple singers. Second, it uses two rather obscure Hebrew terms in the superscriptions of almost half of these psalms. *Maskil,* which may be related to contemplation, is translated "contemplative poem" or "song" (42; 44–45; 52–55) and *miktam,* whose meaning is unclear, is translated "a prayer" (56–60). Third, in referring to God this second book shows a preference for the word "God" over the name "the Eternal One" that appears as "YHWH" in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Throughout the Bible, the creator and covenant God is referred to in many ways. Generally speaking, the names and titles used indicate something of His character and nature. The title "God" implies His unique majesty and power; no one is like Him. The name, translated "The Eternal One" and also "The Eternal," is God's covenant name revealed uniquely to Israel. As the translation suggests, the divine name implies that the one True God transcends time and yet He is "with" His people.

Why can't I just hope in God?
Despite all my emotions, I will
believe and praise the One
who saves me *and is my life.*
[6]My God, my soul is so traumatized;
the only help is remembering You
wherever I may be;
From the land of the Jordan to
Hermon's high place
to Mount Mizar.
[7]In the roar of Your waterfalls,
ancient depths *surge,* calling out to
the deep.
All Your waves break over me;
am I drowning?
[8]Yet in the light of day, the Eternal
shows me His love.
When night settles in *and all is*
dark, He keeps me company—
His *soothing* song, a prayerful
melody to the True God of my
life.

[9]*Even still,* I will say to the True God, my
rock *and strength:*
"Why have You forgotten me?
Why must I live my life so depressed,
crying endlessly
while my enemies have the upper
hand?"
[10]My enemies taunt me.
They shatter my soul the way a
sword shatters a man's bones.
They keep taunting all the day long,
"Where is He, your True God?"

[11]Why am I so overwrought,
Why am I so disturbed?
Why can't I just hope in God?
Despite all my emotions, I will
believe and praise the One
who saves me, my God.

Psalm 43*

[1]Plead for me; *clear my name,* O God.
Prove me innocent
before immoral people;
Save me from their lies,
their unjust *thoughts and deeds.*
[2]You are the True God—my shelter, my
protector, *the one whom I lean on.*
Why have You turned away from
me? *Rejected me?*
Why must I go around, overwrought,
mourning,
suffering under the weight of my
enemies?

[3]*O my God,* shine Your light and truth
to help me see clearly,
To lead me to Your holy mountain,
to Your home.
[4]Then I will go to God's altar *with*
nothing to hide.
I will go to God, my rapture;
I will sing praises to You and play my
strings,
unloading my cares, unleashing my
joys, to You, God, my God.

[5]O my soul, why are you so
overwrought?
Why are you so disturbed?
Why can't I just hope in God? *Despite*
all my emotions, I will hope in
God again.
I will *believe and* praise the One
who saves me and is my life,
My Savior and my God.

* Psalm 43 Psalms 42–43 are a single poem in many Hebrew manuscripts.

Psalm 44

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of the sons of Korah.

1 With our own ears, O God, we have heard the stories
our ancestors recited of Your deeds in their days, days long past—
how You saved the day.
2 With a powerful hand, You drove the nations *from this land,*
but then You planted our parents here.
You fought for us against people of this land;
You set our parents free *to enjoy its goodness.*
3 They did not win the land with their swords.
It wasn't their strength that won them victory.
It was *Your strength*—Your right hand, Your arm,
and the light of Your presence *that gave them success,*
for You loved them.

4 You are my King, my God!
You ordained victories for Jacob *and his people!*
5 You are *our victory,* pushing back the enemy;
at the sound of Your name, we crush the opposition.
6 I don't trust in my weapons
or in my strength to win me victory.
7 But You rescue us from our foes;
You shame our enemies.
8 We shout Your name all day long;
we will praise Your name forever!

[pause]*

9 *But wait, God, where have You gone?*
Why have You shamed us?
Why do our armies stand alone?
10 Without Your help we must retreat from our enemy,
and the very ones who despise us pillage us.
11 You have offered us up *to our enemies,*
like sheep to the slaughter, *meat for their feast,*
and You have dispersed us among the nations.
12 You sold Your people for mere pennies,
and You gained nothing from the deal.
13 You have made us a joke to our *friends and* neighbors,
mocked and ridiculed by all those around us.
14 You have brought us infamy among the nations
and made us an object of scorn and laughter to our neighbors.
15 Disgrace follows me everywhere I go;
I am constantly embarrassed.
Shame is written across my face
16 Because of the taunting and berating of those who are against me,
because the enemy seeks revenge against me.

17 All this has happened to us,
yet we have never forgotten You;
we have not broken Your covenant with us.
18 Our hearts stayed true to You;
we have never left Your path;
we follow on.
19 Yet You have *tested us,* left us defeated in a land of jackals,
and shrouded us with the veil of death.

20 Even if we had forgotten the name of our God
or offered praise to another god,
21 Would not the True God have known it?
For He can see the hidden places of our hearts.
22 On Your behalf, our lives are endangered constantly;
we are like sheep awaiting slaughter.*

23 Wake up, Lord! Why do You slumber?
Get up! Do not reject us any longer!
24 Why are You still hiding from us?
Why are You still ignoring our suffering and trouble?
25 *Look and You will see* our souls now dwell in the dust;
our bodies hug the earth.
26 Rise up and help us;
restore us for the sake of Your boundless love.

Psalm 45

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of the sons of Korah to *the tune* "The Lilies."* A love song.

1 My heart is bursting with a new song;
lyrics to my king *erupt like a spring for my king, to my king;*
my tongue is the pen of a poet, ready *and willing.*

* 44:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 44:8 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"
* 44:22 Romans 8:36 * 45:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 45:title Hebrew, *shoshannim,* white lily-like flowers, perhaps the melody to which the song is sung

Psalm 45 describes the beauty, power, and influence of God's anointed king and may have been composed in honor of a royal wedding.

Whether we realize it or not, the overall well-being of a nation is tied directly to its leaders. When the leaders are just and make good decisions, then the welfare of a nation is secure. But when leaders are unjust and make poor decisions, and they pursue personal agendas rather than the public good, then nations suffer. This is why Scripture instructs those of faith to pray for all people everywhere, especially that those in authority would lead the world to dignity and peace (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

Psalm 45 celebrates that rare breed, a godly king who pursues truth and justice. It anticipates a joyful union and future children who will one day follow in the steps of their father. May the world witness a new breed of leader, fashioned in the image of this psalm.

2 Better by far are you than all others,
my king;
gracious words flow from your lips;
indeed, God has blessed you forever.
3 With your sword at your side,
you are glorious, majestic,
a mighty warrior.

4 Ride on in splendor; ride into battle victorious,
for the sake of truth, humility, and justice.
Perform awesome acts, trained by your *powerful* right hand.
5 Razor-sharp arrows *leap from your bow*
to pierce the heart of the king's foes;
they lie, defeated, before you.

6 O God, Your throne is eternal;
You will rule your kingdom with a scepter of justice.
7 You have loved what is right and hated what is evil.

That is why God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness *and lifted you* above your companions.*
8 All of your clothing *is drenched* in *the rich scent of* myrrh, aloes, and cassia;
In palaces decked out with ivory, *beautiful* stringed instruments play for your pleasure.
9 *At a royal wedding* with the daughters of kings among the guests of honor,
your bride-queen stands at your right, adorned in gold from Ophir.

10 Hear this, daughter; pay close attention to what I am about to say:
you must forget your people and *even* your father's house.
11 Because the king yearns for your beauty,
humble yourself before him, for he is *now* your lord.
12 The daughter of Tyre arrives with a gift;
the wealthy will *bow and* plead for your favor.
13 A stunning bride, the king's daughter waits within;
her clothing is *skillfully* woven with gold.
14 She, in her richly embroidered gown, is carried to the king,
her virgin companions following *close behind.*

15 They walk in a spirit of celebration *and gratefulness.*
In delight, they enter the palace of the king.

16 O king, in this place where your ancestors *reigned,* you will have sons;
you will make them princes throughout all the land.
17 I will make sure your name is remembered by all *future* generations
so that the people will offer you thanks and praise *now and* forever.

Psalm 46

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah, a song for sopranos.*

► This song is attributed to the sons of Korah. It praises God for His strength and protection and for Jerusalem and

* 45:6-7 Hebrews 1:8-9 * 46:title Hebrew, *alamoth,* meaning is uncertain, perhaps "young women."

its temple where God uniquely dwells. It invites the world to witness a future when wars and striving will cease and all the nations know and worship the one True God.

1 God is our shelter and our strength.
When troubles seem near, God is nearer, and He's ready to help.
So why run and hide?
2 No fear, *no pacing, no biting fingernails.*
When the earth spins out of control, *we are sure and fearless.*
When mountains crumble and the waters run wild, *we are sure and fearless.*
3 Even in heavy winds and huge waves,
or as mountains shake, *we are sure and fearless.*

[pause]*

4 A *pure* stream flows—*never to be cut off—*
bringing joy to the city where God makes His home,
the sacred site where the Most High *chooses to* live.
5 The True God *never sleeps and* always resides in the city *of joy*;
He makes it unstoppable, unshakable.
When it awakes at dawn, the True God has already been at work.
6 Trouble is *on the horizon* for the outside nations, *not long until* kingdoms will fall;
God's voice thunders and the earth shakes.
7 *You know* the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies, surrounds us *and protects us;*
the True God of Jacob is our shelter, *close to His heart.*

[pause]

8 Come, gaze, *fix your eyes* on what the Eternal can do.
Amazing, He has worked desolation here on *this battlefield,* earth.
9 God can stop wars anywhere in the world.
He can *make scrap of all weapons:* snap bows, shatter spears, and burn shields.
10 "Be still, *be calm, see,* and understand
I am the True God.
I am honored among all the nations.
I am honored over all the earth."
11 *You know* the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies, surrounds us *and protects us;*
the True God of Jacob is our shelter, *close to His heart.*

[pause]

Psalm 47

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah.

1 Clap your hands, all of you;
raise your voices joyfully and loudly.
Give honor for the True God *of the universe;*
2 Here's why: The Eternal, the Most High, is awesome *and deserves our great respect.*
He is the great King over everything in this world.
3 He's helped us win wars, suppressed our enemies,
and made nations *bow* at our feet.
4 He decides *the extent of* our inheritance *and selects the land where we and our children will live,*
for we are the pride of Jacob, the ones He loves.

[pause]*

5 The True God ascends *the throne acclaimed* by shouts of the people.
The Eternal *is announced* by the blast of a trumpet.
6 Sing! Shout! *Play instruments!*
Praise our God and King; sing praises *to Him who is worthy.*
7 For He is the King of all the earth. *Sing praise, all who can.*
Put words to music, and then sing praises
8 *At the feet of the* God who sits on His holy throne,
ruling over all the nations.
9 All those with influence in this world—princes, *kings, and satraps*—
gather with those who follow Abraham's God.
For these defenders belong to God who reigns over the nations!

* 46:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 47:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

Psalm 48

A song of the sons of Korah.

1The Eternal is great *and mighty,* worthy
of great praise
in the city of our True God, upon
His holy mountain.
2Situated high above, Mount Zion is
beautiful to see,
the pleasure of the entire earth.
Mount Zion, in the north,*
is the city of the great King.
3In her palaces, the True God
has revealed Himself as a mighty
fortress.

4*Not long ago, enemy* kings gathered
together
and moved forward as one *to attack
the city*.
5When they saw Mount Zion, they were
amazed;
amazement became fear, *then
panic.* They fled *for their lives.*
6They were overtaken by terror,
trembling in anguish
like a woman in childbirth.
7*God,* You shattered the ships of
Tarshish
with the *mighty* east wind.
8As we have heard *stories of Your
greatness,*
now we have also seen it *with our
own eyes*
right here, in the city of the Eternal,
the Commander of *heavenly*
armies.
Right here, in our God's city,
the True God will preserve her
forever.

[pause]*

9We have meditated upon Your loyal
love, O God,
within Your *holy* temple.
10Just as Your name reaches to the ends
of the earth, O God,
so Your praise flows there too;
Your right hand holds justice.
11So because of Your judgments,
may Mount Zion be delighted!
May the villages of Judah celebrate!

12Explore Zion; make an accounting,
note all her towers;
13Reflect upon her defenses;
stroll through her palaces
So that you can tell the coming
generation all about her.
14For so is God,
our True God, forever and ever;
He will be our guide till the end.

Psalm 49

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah.

► Some songs are described as "wisdom psalms." Similar in theme to the short sayings of Proverbs or the reflective essays of Ecclesiastes, these songs offer practical advice to the worshiper of the one True God. In Psalm 49 we find a meditation on wealth and wisdom, but others describe daily activities (127–128; 133), encouragement when evil succeeds (37; 73), and the results of following God or wickedness (112). The purpose of these songs is to edify those who sing and those who hear, reminding them, and us, how to live life as God intends.

1Listen up, everyone!
All you who reside in this world,
give an ear!
2*Everyone*—rich and poor,
young and old, wise and foolish,
humble and mighty—
3My mouth will overflow with wisdom;
the reflections of my heart will
guide you to understand *the
nature of life*.
4I will tune my ear to *the words of* a
proverb;
to the sounds of a harp, I will reveal
my riddle.

5Why should I be afraid when dark evils
swirl about me,
when I am walking among the sin
of evildoers—
6Those who depend on their own
fortunes,
who boast about their earthly riches?
7One person can't grant salvation to
another
or make a payment to the True God
for another.

* 48:2 Hebrew, *zaphon* * 48:8 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

8Redeeming a life is costly;
no premium is enough, ever enough,
9That one's body might live on forever
and never fear the grave's decay.

10Everyone knows that even the wisest ones die,
perishing together with the foolish and the stupid.
For all die—beggars and kings, fools and wise men.
Their wealth remains behind for others.
11*Although they wish to dwell in fine houses* forever,
their graves are their real resting places.
Their homes are for all future generations,
yet *for a while* they have named lands after themselves.
12[No one, regardless of how *rich or* important, can live forever;
he is]* just like the animals that perish *and decay*.

13This is the destiny of those foolish souls *who have faith only in themselves;*
this will be the end of those happy to follow in their ways.

[pause]*

14The fate of fools is the grave, and just like sheep,
death will feast on them.
The righteous will rule over them at dawn,
their bodies, their outward forms, rotting in the grave
far away from their great mansions.
15But God will reach into the grave and save my life from its power.
He will fetch me *and take me into His eternal house.*

[pause]

16Do not be afraid of the rich *and powerful*
as their prestige and honor grow,
17For they cannot take anything with them when they die.
Their fame and glory will not follow them into the grave.
18During their lives, they seek every blessing *and advantage*
because others praise you when you've done well.
19But they will soon join their ancestors, for all of time,
among the tombs of the faithless—
a place of no light.
20Anyone who is *rich or* important without understanding
is just like the animals that perish *and decay*.

Psalm 50

A song of Asaph.

1The Mighty God, the Eternal—*God of past, present, and future—*
has spoken over the world,
calling together all things from sunrise to sunset.
2From Zion, that perfectly beautiful *holy* place,
shines *the radiance of* God.

3Our God will come, and He will not enter on a whisper.
A fire will devour *the earth* before Him;
the *wind will* storm wildly about Him.
4He calls heaven above and earth *below*
to assist in bringing judgment on His people.
5"Gather up those who are aligned with Me; bring them to Me;
bring everyone who belongs to Me who have made covenant sacrifice."
6And the heavens shout of His justice,
for He is the True God, an *honest* judge.

[pause]*

7"Listen, My people, I have something to say:
O Israel, My testimony comes against you;
I am God, your God.
8I am not going to scold you because of your sacrifices;
your burnt offerings are always before Me.
9I will not accept the *best* bull from your fields
or goats from your meadow,
10For they are already Mine, just as the forest beast
and the cattle grazing over a thousand hills *are Mine.*

* 49:12 Greek manuscripts read, "Anyone who is rich without understanding." * 49:13 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 50:6 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

One of the most difficult episodes in King David's life was his affair with Bathsheba and all that resulted from it. Psalm 51 reflects the emotions he felt after Nathan confronted him with stealing Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11–12).

At one time or another, all people experience the painful consequences of sin. Psalm 51 has been a comfort and a help to millions who have prayed these words as their own. It invites all who are broken to come before God and lean upon His compassion. It teaches that we need not only to be forgiven for the wrong we have done, but we also need to be cleansed of its effects on us. Ultimately, it helps us recognize that if we are to be healed, it is the work of God to create in us a heart that is clean and a spirit that is strong.

11 Every bird flying over the mountains
I know;
every animal roaming over the
fields belongs to Me.

12 I would not come to you if I were hungry,
for the world and all it contains are
Mine.
13 Do *you really think* I eat bull meat?
Or drink goat's blood?
14 Set out a sacrifice I can accept: your
thankfulness.
Be true to your word to the Most
High.
15 When you are in trouble, call for Me.
I will *come and* rescue you,
and you will honor Me."

16 But to those acting against Him, God
says,
"Who do you think you are?
Listing off My laws,
acting as if your life is in alignment
with My ways?
17 For *it's clear that* you despise My
guidance;
you throw My *wise* words over your
shoulder.
18 You play with thieves,
spend your time with adulterers.

19 Evil runs out of your mouth;
your tongue is wrapped in deceit.
20 You sit back and gossip about your
brother;
you slander your mother's son.
21 While you did these things, I kept silent;
somehow you got the idea that
I was like you.
But now *My silence ends, and* I am
going to indict you.
I'll state the charge against you
clearly, face-to-face.

22 All you who have forgotten *Me, your*
God, should think about what
I have said,
or I will tear you apart and leave no
one to save you.
23 Set out a sacrifice *I can accept:* your
thankfulness.
Do this, and you will honor Me.
Those who straighten up their
lives
will know the saving grace of
God."

Psalm 51

For the worship leader. A song of David after Nathan the prophet accused him of infidelity with Bathsheba.

1 Look on me with a heart of mercy,
O God,
according to Your generous love.
According to Your great compassion,
wipe out *every consequence of* my
shameful crimes.
2 Thoroughly wash me, *inside and out,* of
all my crooked deeds.
Cleanse me from my sins.

3 For I am *fully* aware of all I have done
wrong,
and my guilt is there, staring me in
the face.
4 It was against You, only You, that
I sinned,
for I have done what You say is
wrong, right before Your eyes.
So when You speak, You are in the
right.
When You judge, Your judgments
are pure and true.*
5 For I was guilty from the day I was
born,
a sinner from the time my mother
became pregnant with me.

* 51:4 Romans 3:4

6But still, You long *to enthrone* truth
throughout my being;
in unseen places deep within me,
You show me wisdom.
7Cleanse me *of my wickedness* with
hyssop, and I will be clean.
If You wash me, I will be whiter
than snow.
8Help me hear joy and happiness *as my
accompaniment,*
so my bones, which You have
broken, will *dance in* delight
instead.
9Cover Your face so You will not see my
sins,
and erase my guilt *from the record.*

10Create in me a clean heart, O God;
restore within me a sense of being
brand new.
11Do not throw me far away from Your
presence,
and do not remove Your Holy Spirit
from me.
12Give back to me the *deep* delight of
being saved by You;
let Your willing Spirit sustain me.

13If You do, I promise to teach rebels
Your ways
and help sinners find their way
back to You.
14Free me from the guilt *of murder,* of
shedding *a man's* blood,
O God who saves me.
Now my tongue, *which was used to
destroy,* will be used to sing with
deep delight of how right *and
just* You are.

15O Lord, *pry* open my lips
that this mouth will sing *joyfully* of
Your greatness.
16I would surrender *my dearest
possessions or destroy all that
I prize to prove my regret,*
but You don't take pleasure in
sacrifices or burnt offerings.
17What sacrifice I can offer You is my
broken spirit
because a broken spirit, O God,
a heart that honestly regrets the
past,
You won't detest.

18Be good to Zion; grant her Your favor.
Make Jerusalem's walls steady and
strong.
19Then there will be sacrifices made,
burnt offerings and whole burnt
offerings,
With right motives that will delight
You.
And *costly* young bulls will be offered
up to Your altar, *only the best.*

Psalm 52

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of David when the Edomite Doeg told Saul that David had received help from Ahimelech.

► Psalm 52 recalls the callous way Doeg and Saul put to death the 85 priests of Nob (1 Samuel 22:6-19). The psalm ends with a memorable image: the one who keeps faith with God is like a lush olive tree cared for in His garden. While those who do not trust in Him are snatched up and torn away, those who do right will flourish under His care.

1Why do you boast of all the trouble you
stir up, O mighty one,
when the constant, unfailing love of
God is what truly lasts?
2*Have you listened to yourself?*
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,
full of lies *that slash and tear* right
to the soul.
3You've fallen in love with evil and have
no interest in *what He calls*
good.
You prefer your own lies to
speaking what is true.

[pause]*

4You love words that destroy people,
don't you,
lying tongue?

5*You won't be smiling*
when the True God *brings His justice
and* destroys you forever.
He will come into your home,
snatch you away,
and pull you from the land of the
living.

[pause]

* 52:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 52:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

6Those who are just will see *what happens to* you and be afraid.
And some of them will laugh and say,
7"Hey, look! Over there is the one who didn't take
shelter in the True God;
Instead, he trusted in his great wealth
and got what he wanted by destroying others!"

8But my life is *abundant*—like a lush olive tree
cared for at the house of the *one* True God.
I put my trust in His kind love
forever and ever; *it will never fail.*
9Because of all You have done,
I will *humble myself and* thank You forever.
With Your faithful people at my side,
I will put my hope in Your good reputation.

Psalm 53

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of David. *A song* for the dance.*

1The foolish are convinced deep down
that there is no God.
Their souls are polluted, and they commit gross injustice.
Not one of them does good.

2From heaven the *one* True God examines the earth
to see if any understand *the big picture,*
if any seek to know the True God.

3All have turned back *to their wicked ways;*
they've become *totally* perverse.
Not one of them does good,
not even one.

4Do the wicked relish their ignorance,
the wicked ones who consume My people as if they were bread
and fail to call upon the True God?

5They trembled with great fear,
though they'd never been afraid before,
Because the True God ravaged the bones of those who rose against you.
You humiliated them because the True God spat them out.

6Oh, that the liberation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When the True God reclaims His people,
let Jacob celebrate; let Israel rejoice.

Psalm 54

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of David when *his friends,* the Ziphites, betrayed him to Saul. Accompanied by strings.

► This is a lament reflecting the time when David was betrayed to Saul (1 Samuel 23:6-29). It expresses hope that God will save by His name. The name refers to the covenant name given to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 3). We have translated it "the Eternal One." For the ancients the name of God has power precisely because it embodies the presence of God. To call upon the name was to call upon God to remember His covenant promises and be present in power in order to rescue His people.

1Liberate me, O God, by *the authority of* Your name.
Vindicate me through Your *legendary* power.
2Hear my prayer, O God;
let the words of my mouth reach Your *sympathetic* ear.

3*The truth is, these* strangers are rallying against me;
cold-blooded men seek to slay me;
they have no respect for You.

[pause]*

4But see now! God comes to rescue me;
the Lord is my *valiant* supporter.
5He will repay my enemies for the harm they have done; *they are doomed!*
According to Your faithful promises, silence them.

6I will sacrifice to You willingly;
I will lift Your name by shouts of thanksgiving, O Eternal One, for Your name is good.

* 53:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 53:title Hebrew, *mahalath,* meaning is uncertain. * 54:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 54:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

7God has pulled me out from every one of
the troubles *that encompass me,*
and I have seen *what it means*
to stand over my enemies in
triumph.

Psalm 55

For the worship leader. A contemplative song* of David *accompanied* by strings.

1*Hear me,* O God.
Tune Your ear to my plea,
and do not turn Your face from my
prayer.
2Give me Your attention.
Answer *these sighs of sorrow;*
my troubles have made me
restless—I groan from anxiety
3All because of my enemy! Because his
voice speaks against me,
his wickedness torments me!
He casts down misfortune upon me;
his anger flares; his grudges grow
against me.

4My heart seizes within my chest; *I am*
in anguish!
I am terrified my life could end *on*
any breath.
5I shiver and shudder in fear;
I can't stop because this horror is
just too much.
6I said, "If only my arms were wings like
the dove's!
I would fly away *from here* and find
rest—
7Yes, I would venture far
and weave a nest in the wilderness.

[pause]*

8"I would rush to take refuge
away from the violent storm and
pounding winds."

9Throw them off, O Lord. Confuse their
speech, *and frustrate their plans,*
for violence and contention are
building within the city.
I can see it *with my own eyes.*
10They plot day and night, scurrying the
city walls *like rats,*
trouble and evil lurking *everywhere.*
11In the heart of the city, destruction
awaits.
Oppression and lies swarm the
streets,
and they will not take leave; *no, they*
will not go.
12If it were just an enemy sneering at me,
I could take it.
If it were just someone who has *always*
hated me, treating me like dirt,
I'd simply hide away.
13But it is you! A man like me,
my old friend, my companion.
14We enjoyed sweet conversation,
walking together in the house of
God among the pressing crowds.
15Let death sneak up on them,
swallow them alive into the pit of
death.
Why? Because evil stirs in their
homes; *evil is* all around them.
16But I, I shall call upon God,
and *by His word,* the Eternal shall
save me.
17Evening, morning, and noon *I will*
plead;
I will grumble and moan *before Him*
until He hears my voice.
18And He will rescue my soul, *untouched,*
plucked safely from the battle,
despite the many who are warring
against me.
19God, enthroned from ancient times
through eternity,
will hear my prayers and strike
them down.

[pause]

For they have refused change;
they *supply their every need and*
have no fear of God.

20My friend has become a foe, *breaking*
faith, tearing down peace.
He's betrayed our covenant.
21Oh, how his *pleasant* voice is smoother
than butter,
while his heart is enchanted by war.
Oh, how his words are smoother than
oil,
and yet each is a sword drawn *in*
his hand.

22Cast your troubles upon the Eternal;
His care is unceasing!
He will not allow
His righteous to be shaken.

23But You, O God, You will drive them
into the lowest* pit—
Violent, lying people
won't live beyond their middle
years.
But I place my trust in You.

* 55:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 55:7 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 55:23 Greek manuscripts read, "pit of destruction." The idea is the grave or place of death.

Psalm 56

For the worship leader. A prayer* of David to *the tune* "Silent Dove *in the* Distance,"* when the Philistine oppressors seized him in Gath.

► Psalm 56 brings to mind the time when David fled from Saul and sought help from the Philistines, his former enemies (1 Samuel 21:10-15). In his time of panic and fear, David found courage in trusting God to do what could not be done by human power and ingenuity alone.

[1]Show mercy to me, O God, because
people are crushing me—
grinding me down like dirt
underfoot—all day long.
No matter what I do, I can't get
myself out from under them.
[2]My enemies are crushing me, *yes* all
day long, *O Highest of High,*
for many come proud and raise
their hands against me.
[3]When struck by fear,
I let go, depending *securely* upon
You *alone*.
[4]In God—whose word I praise—
in God I place my trust. I shall not
let fear come in,
for what can measly men do to me?
[5]All day long they warp my words;
all their thoughts against me are
mangled by evil.
[6]They conspire, then lurk about.
They eye my every move,
Waiting to steal my very life.
[7]Because they are wicked *through and*
through, drag them out.
In Your *just* anger, O God, cast them
down!

[8]You have taken note of my journey
through life,
caught *each of* my tears in Your
bottle.
But *God,* are they not *also blots* on
Your book?
[9]Then my enemies shall turn back *and*
scatter
on the day I call out *to You.*
This I know *for certain:* God is on
my side.
[10]In God whose word I praise
and in the Eternal whose word
I praise—
[11]In God I have placed my trust. I shall
not let fear come in,
for what can *measly* men do to me?

[12]I am bound by Your promise, O God.
My life is my offering of
thanksgiving to You,
[13]For You have saved my soul from *the*
darkness of death,
steadied my feet from stumbling
So I might *continue to* walk before God,
embraced in the light of the living.

Psalm 57

For the worship leader. A prayer* of David to *the tune* "Do Not Destroy,"* when he hid from Saul in a cave.

► This individual lament refers back to those perilous times when David fled from Saul and hid in caves (1 Samuel 22; 24). David found real security not in the hidden recesses of the caves but in the shadow of God's wings.

[1]Mercy. May Your mercy come to me,
O God,
for my soul is safe within You, *the*
guardian of my life.
I will seek protection in the shade of
Your wings
until the destruction has passed.
[2]I cry out to God, the Most High,
to God who always does what is
good for me.
[3]Out of heaven my rescue comes.
He dispatches His mercy and truth
And goes after whoever tries to run
over me.

[pause]*

[4]I am surrounded by lions;
I lie in a den of ravenous beasts.
Those *around me* have spears and
arrows for teeth,
a sharpened blade for a tongue.

[5]O God, be lifted up above the heavens;
may Your glory cover the earth.

* 56:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain. * 56:title Hebrew, *yonath elem rehokim,* meaning is uncertain. * 57:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain. * 57:title Hebrew, *al-tashheth,* meaning is uncertain. * 57:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

6Yet my foes cast a net to catch my feet
and bring me to my knees.
I am weary from all of this.
They dug a pit to snare me
but fell into their own trap.

[pause]

7My heart is ready, O God;
my heart is ready,
And I will sing!
Yes, I will sing praise!
8Wake up, my glory!
Wake up, harp and lyre;
I will stir the sleepy dawn *with praise*!
9I will offer You my thanks, O Lord,
before the nations *of the world*;
I will sing of Your greatness no matter where I am.
10For Your amazing mercy ascends far into the heavens;
Your truth rises above the clouds.
11O God, be lifted up above the heavens;
may Your glory cover the earth.

Psalm 58

For the worship leader. A prayer* of David to *the tune* "Do Not Destroy."*

1Can you, *panel of* judges, *get anything right?*
When you judge people, do you tell the truth and pursue justice?
2No, *your real selves have been revealed.*
You have wickedness in your heart,
and many people have suffered by your hands.

3Evildoers are naturally offensive,
wayward at birth!
They were born telling lies *and willfully wandering from the truth.*
4*Their bite is painful;* their venom is like the *deadly* poison of a snake;
they are like a cobra that closes up its ears
5To escape the voice of the charmers,
no matter how enchanting the spells may be.

6O God, shatter their teeth in their mouths!
Render the young lions *harmless;*
break out their fangs, O Eternal One.
7Let them run off like the waters *of a flood,*
and though they aim their arrows,
let them fly without their heads.
8Let them melt like a snail that oozes along;
may they be like a stillborn that *never catches its first breath,*
never sees the sun.
9Before your *cook* pots know the *furious flame of a* fire of thorns—
whether green or burning—He will blow the wicked away.

10Cheers will rise as the right-living watch Him settle the score,
their feet washed in the blood *after the onslaught* of the wicked.
11And it will be heard, "Those who seek justice will be rewarded.
Indeed, there is a God who brings justice to the earth!"

Psalm 59

For the worship leader. A prayer* of David to *the tune* "Do Not Destroy,"* when Saul sent assassins to David's house.

► Psalm 59 was inspired by the time there was a plan to kill David that was thwarted by David's wife, Michal, who was Saul's own daughter. She warned her husband, lowered him out of a window, and then deceived her father's officers into believing David was bedridden with illness (1 Samuel 19:11-17).

1Rescue me! *Save me,* O my God, from my enemies;
set me in a safe place, far above any who come to attack me.
2Rescue me from those malicious people,
and save me from blood-thirsty murderers.

3They have staked out my life; *they are going to ambush me!*
Those brutes are aligned, ready to attack me
For no good cause, my Eternal One.
I have not crossed them.

* 58:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain. * 58:title Hebrew, *al-tashheth,* meaning is uncertain. * 59:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain. * 59:title Hebrew, *al-tashheth,* meaning is uncertain.

4I've done nothing wrong, yet they rush
ahead to start the assault.
I beg You to help me; come and see
for Yourself!
5*I plead with* You, Eternal One,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
True God of Israel,
to get up and punish these people;
do not let any betrayer off the hook;
show no mercy to malicious
evildoers!

[pause]*

6Treacherous souls return to the city in
the evening;
they prowl about,
howling like dogs.
7Watch them! Snarling, dribbling *their*
malicious insults.
Their words *cut loose* from their lips
like swords,
and *in their backstabbing* they say,
"Who's listening anyway?"

8But You, O Eternal One, laugh at them;
You make fun of all the nations.
9I will watch for You, for You keep me
strong.
God, You are my security!
10My God is *one step* ahead of me with
His mercy;
He will show me the victory I desire
over my enemies.
11Don't wipe them out, or my people may
one day forget.
Instead, use Your power to scatter
and bring them to ruin.
O Lord, You are our protection.
12Sin pours from their mouths, *cruel*
words from their lips.
May they be caught in their pride.
For their *foul* curses and lies,
13devour them with *Your* wrath,
eat them up, leave no one alive.
Then people will surely know that the
one True God rules over Jacob,
even to the *far* ends of the earth.

[pause]

14Treacherous souls return to the city in
the evening;
they prowl about,
howling like dogs.
15They search through the city,
scavenging for meat
as they growl *and grumble* in
dissatisfaction.

16But me? I will sing of Your strength.
I will awake with the sun to sing of
Your loving mercy
Because in my most troubled hour,
You defended me. You were my
shelter.
17I will *lift my voice to* sing Your praise,
O my Strength—
for You came to my defense.
O God, You have shown me Your
loving mercy.

Psalm 60

For the worship leader. A prayer* of David after his victory over the Arameans, Joab's return, and the striking down of 12,000 Edomites in the valley of Salt. *A song* for instruction to *the tune* "A Lily Reminds *Us.*"*

This is a communal lament recalling David's battles with Zobah and Naharaim from Aram (Syria) and Joab's victory over the Edomites (2 Samuel 8).

1God, You have turned away from us;
You have shattered us *into a million*
tiny pieces;
You have boiled with anger.
Now put us back together, *and*
refresh us with Your mercy.
2You have made the earth shake; You
have cracked it open *effortlessly*.
Heal the fissures in the earth, for it
is unsteady.
3You have caused Your people to suffer;
You have provided us with wine
that makes us stagger.

4You have unfurled a banner for those
who revere You,
a signal to gather *in safety* out of the
enemy's reach.

[pause]*

5So that Your treasured ones may be
saved,
rescue us with Your right hand, and
answer our pleas!

6God's voice has been heard in His holy
sanctuary:
"I will celebrate; I will allocate
Shechem
and the Succoth Valley *to My*
people.

* 59:5 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 60:title Hebrew, *miktam,* meaning is uncertain. * 60:title Hebrew, *shushan eduth,* meaning is uncertain. * 60:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

7Gilead belongs to Me, and so does
Manasseh;
Ephraim is the helmet that protects
My head;
Judah is the scepter through which
I rule;
8Moab is the washpot in which I rinse
My feet.
I will throw My shoe over Edom *in
conquest;*
prepare for My victory, Philistia. Cry
out because of Me!"

9But who will take me into the fortified
city?
Who will lead me into Edom?
10Have You not turned Your back on us,
O God?
Will You *stay away and* not
accompany our armies, O God?
11Help us against our enemy; *we need
Your help!*
It's useless to trust in *the hand of*
man for liberation.
12*Only* through God can we be successful.
It is God *alone* who will defeat our
enemies *and bring us victory*!

Psalm 61

For the worship leader. *A song* of David
accompanied by strings.

1Hear me, O God, when I cry;
listen to my prayer.
2You are the One I will call when pushed
to the edge,
when my heart is faint.
Shoulder me to the rock above me.
3For You are my protection,
an impenetrable fortress from my
enemies.

4Let me live in Your sanctuary forever;
let me find safety in the shadow of
Your wings.

[pause]*

5You have heard the promises I made,
O God.
You have laid upon me the legacy
due to those who fear Your name.

6Extend the king's life, *day after day;*
increase his years for many
generations.
7May he be ever present before God,
attended and guarded by Your loyal
love and truth.

8So I will never stop singing Your
praise;
as long as I live, I will fulfill my
promise.

Psalm 62

For the worship leader, Jeduthun. A song
of David.

1My soul quietly waits for the True God
alone;
my salvation comes from Him.
2He alone is my rock and my
deliverance,
my citadel *high on the hill*; I will not
be shaken.

3How long will you attack a man?
How long will all of you strive to
crush your prey
when he's like a leaning fence or a
wall on the verge of collapse?
4Their only purpose *in life* is to knock
him down from his prominent
position;
they love deceit.
When others are around, they speak a
blessing *on someone,*
but inwardly they are mumbling a
curse.

[pause]

5My soul quietly waits for the True God
alone
because I hope only in Him.
6He alone is my rock and deliverance,
my citadel *high on a hill*;
I will not be shaken.
7My salvation and my significance
depend *ultimately* on God;
the core of my strength, my shelter,
is in the True God.

8Have faith in Him in all circumstances,
dear people.
Open up your heart to Him;
the True God shelters us *in His
arms.*

[pause]

9Human beings disappear like a breath;
even people of rank live artificial
lives.
Their weight is that of a breath in a
balance—*nothing.*
Added together, they're still lighter
than air.

* 61:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

10 Do not resort to oppression;
resist the temptation of ill-gotten gain.
If you achieve wealth, don't let your heart get attached.

11 The True God spoke this once,
and twice I've heard:
That *You,* the True God, hold all power;
12 Your love never fails, O Lord,
for You pay every person back according to his deeds.

Psalm 63

A song of David while in the wilderness of Judah.

1 O True God, You are my God, *the One whom I trust.*
I seek You *with every fiber of my being.*
In this dry and weary land with no water in sight,
my soul is dry and longs for You.
My body aches for You, *for Your presence.*
2 I have seen You in Your sanctuary
and have been awed by Your power and glory.
3 Your steadfast love is better than life itself,
so my lips will give You *all my* praise.
4 I will bless You with every breath of my life;
I will lift up my hands in *praise to* Your name.

5 My soul overflows with satisfaction,
as when I feast on *foods rich in* marrow and fat;
with *excitement in my heart and* joy on my lips, I offer You praise.
6 Often at night I lie in bed and remember You,
meditating on Your *greatness* till morning *smiles through my window.*
7 You have been my *constant* helper;
therefore, I sing for joy under the protection of Your wings.
8 My soul clings to You;
Your right hand *reaches down and* holds me up.

9 But as for those who try to destroy my life,
they will descend *into eternal shadows,* deep beneath the earth.
10 They will fall by the sword,
and wild dogs will feast on their corpses.
11 But the king will find his joy in the True God;
all who make pledges and invoke His name will celebrate,
while the mindless prattle of *cheaters and* deceivers will be silenced.

Psalm 64

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1 O True God, hear my voice! Listen to my complaint!
Guard my life; *keep me safe* from my enemy's threats.
2 Hide me from the sinful circle that conspires against me,
from the band of rebels out to make trouble,
3 Who sharpen their tongues into swords,
who take aim with poisonous words like arrows.
4 They hide in the shadows and shoot at the innocent;
they shoot at them without warning and without any fear.
5 They persist in their evil purpose
and plan in secret to lay their traps.
And they say, "Who will see them?"
6 They plot their offense *with precision* and say,
"Now we have the perfect crime."
The human heart and mind are deep *and complex.*

7 But without hesitation the True God will shoot at them;
His arrow will *surely* wound them.
8 He will use their very own words to bring them to destruction;
all who see will be appalled at *what happens to* them.
9 Then everyone will fear the True God;
they will proclaim His deeds
and will reflect upon all He has done.

10 The righteous will delight in the Eternal
and will take shelter in Him.
All those with an honest heart will glorify Him!

Psalm 65

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1 *All will stand in awe to* praise You.
Praise will sweep through Zion, *the Sacred City,* O God.
Solemn vows uttered to You will now be performed.
2 You hear us pray *in words and silence;*
all humanity comes into Your presence.
3 Injustice overwhelms me!
But You forgive our sins, *restoring as only You can.*
4 You invite us near, drawing us into Your courts—what an honor *and a privilege*!
We feast until we're full on the goodness of Your house,
Your sacred temple *made manifest.*

5 *You leave us breathless* when Your awesome works answer us by putting everything right.
God of our liberation—
You are the hope of all *creation,* from the far corners of the earth to distant *life-giving* oceans.
6 With immense power, You erected mountains.
Wrapped in strength, *You compelled*
7 Choppy seas,
crashing waves,
and crowds of people
To sit in *astonished* silence.
8 Those who inhabit the boundaries of the earth are awed by Your signs,
strong and subtle hints of Your indelible presence.
Even the dawn and dusk respond to You with joy.

9 You spend time on the *good* earth,
watering and nourishing *the networks of the living.*
God's river is full of water!
By preparing the land,
You have provided us grain *for nourishment.*
10 You *are the gentle equalizer*: soaking the furrows,
smoothing soil's ridges,
Softening *sun-baked* earth with *generous* showers,
blessing the fruit *of the ground.*
11 You crown the year with a fruitful harvest;
the paths are *worn down by carts* overflowing with unstoppable growth.
12 Barren desert pastures yield *fruit*;
craggy hills are now dressed for celebration.
13 Meadows are clothed with frolicking flocks *of lambs*;
valleys are covered with *a carpet of autumn-harvest* grain;
the land shouts and sings in joyous celebration.

Psalm 66

For the worship leader. A song.

1 Shout out to God, all the earth.
Erupt with joy *to the one True God*!
2 Sing of the glory due His name!
Offer Him the most magnificent praises!
3 Say to God, "All You have done is wondrous and causes fear!
Your power is mighty, and Your enemies pretend to submit to You.
4 The entire earth will *bow down to* worship You
and will sing glory-songs to You;
they will sing praises to Your name!

[pause]*

5 Come and witness the True God's *endless* works.
His *miraculous* deeds done on behalf of humanity inspire fear.
6 He transformed the sea into dry land;
our people passed through the river on foot!
Rejoice in Him; *celebrate what He did* there!
7 By His great might, He rules forever;
His eyes watch over all the nations,
so no one should go up against Him.

[pause]

8 Everyone, bless our True God!
Let praise-filled voices be heard *near and far—at home and on foreign soil!*
9 *Praise the One* who *gives us life and* keeps us safe,
who does not allow us to stumble *in the darkness.*
10 For You have put us to the test, O God;
You have refined us as silver is refined.

* 66:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

11You trapped us with a snare;
You have laid upon our backs a heavy burden.
12You *allowed us to be conquered and* let our enemies run over us.
We journeyed *through dangers,* through fire and flood,
But You led us *finally* to a *safe* place, a land rich and abundant.

13I will come into Your temple with burnt offerings;
I will fulfill my promises to You—
14The oaths that parted my lips
and *were promises* my mouth *freely* made when I was *suffering and* in anguish.
15I will bring You my sacrifices—plump beasts
and the sweet smoke of *consecrated* rams—
I will also offer You bulls and goats.

[pause]

16Come and listen, everyone who reveres the True God,
and I will tell you what He has done for me.
17I cried out to Him with my mouth,
and I praised Him with my tongue.
18If I entertain evil in my heart,
the Lord will not hear me.
19But surely God has heard me;
He has paid attention to *the urgency of* my request.

20May the True God be blessed,
for He did not turn away from my prayer
nor did He hold back His loyal love from me.

Psalm 67

For the worship leader. A song *accompanied* by strings.

Psalm 67 echoes the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) and invites all nations to join in praise to the one True God.

1May God pour His grace and blessings into us
and turn His face to shine *His light* on us.

[pause]*

2So *all* those on earth will learn *to follow* Your way
and see Your saving power come to *redeem* all nations.
3May all people *live to* praise You, Our True God;
may all come to praise You.

4May *all* nations celebrate *together,* singing joy-filled songs *of praise to You*
because You judge the people fairly
and give guidance to *all* the nations of the earth.

[pause]

5May the people praise You *with their whole hearts,* O God;
may every man, woman, and child on the earth praise You.

6The land has supplied a *bountiful* harvest,
and the True God, our God, has poured out His blessings to us *all.*
7God is the source of our blessings;
may every corner of the earth respect and revere Him.

Psalm 68

For the worship leader. A song of David.

Psalm 68 is a hymn describing God as a Divine Warrior, marching from Sinai through the wilderness to make His home in Jerusalem.

1May the True God rise up *and show Himself;*
may those *who are united* against Him be dispersed,
while the people who hate Him run away at the sight of Him.
2As smoke disappears when it is blown *by the wind,*
may You blow away Your enemies *forever.*
As wax melts in the presence of fire,
may the wicked heart melt away in God's presence.
3But may those who are righteous rejoice
in the presence of the True God—so may they be glad and rejoice.
Yes, let them celebrate with joy!

* 67:1 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

4Sing songs of praise to the name that
belongs to the True God!
Let your voices ring out in songs *of*
praise to Him, *the One* who rides
through the deserted places.
His name is the Eternal;
celebrate in His *glorious* presence.

5The True God who inhabits sacred space
is a father to the fatherless, a
defender of widows.
6He makes a home for those who are
alone.
He frees the prisoners and leads
them to prosper.
Yet those who rebel *against Him* live
in the barren land *without His*
blessings and prosperity.

7O True God, when You led Your
enslaved people *from Egypt,*
when You journeyed *with us*
through the wilderness,

[pause]*

8The whole world trembled! The sky
poured down rain
at *the power of* Your presence; even
Mount Sinai trembled in *Your*
presence,
the presence of the True God, the
God of Israel.
9You sent a heavy downpour *to soak the*
ground, O True God.
You refreshed the land—*the land*
Your people would inherit—
when it was *parched and* dry.
10Your *covenant* people made their
homes in the land,
and because You are so good, You
provided for those crushed by
poverty, O True God.

11The Lord gives the word;
there are very many women ready
to tell the good news:
12"Kings who lead the armies are on the
run!
They are on the run!
And the woman who stays at home *is*
ready, too,
ready to enjoy the treasures *that*
they've left behind!"
13When they lay down among the
campfires *and open the*
saddlebags, imagine what they'll
find—
a *beautiful* dove, its wings covered
with silver,
its feathers a shimmering gold.

14When the Almighty scattered the kings
from that place,
it was snowing in Zalmon.

15O Mount Bashan, you *mighty* mountain
of the True God;
mountain of many peaks, O Mount
Bashan.
16Why are you so jealous, O mountain of
many peaks,
when you look at the mountain
the True God has chosen as His
dwelling place?
The Eternal will surely abide on
Mount Zion forever.

17The chariots of God are innumerable;
there are thousands upon
thousands of them.
The Lord is in their midst, just as He
was at Mount Sinai.
He has come into the holy place.
18When You ascended the sacred
mountain,
with Your prisoners in tow, Your
captives *in chains,*
You *sat in triumph* receiving gifts
from men,
Even from those who rebel *against You,*
so that *You,* the Eternal God,
might take up residence there.
19Blessed be the Lord
who carries our heavy loads every
day,
the True God who is our salvation.

[pause]

20*We know* our God is the God who
delivers us,
and the Eternal, the Lord, is the
One who saves us from *the grip*
of death.

21The True God will certainly shatter the
skulls of those who oppose Him;
He'll smash the hairy head of the
man who continues on his sinful
ways.
22The Lord said,
"I will bring the enemy back from
Bashan.
I will bring them back from the deepest
parts of the sea,

* 68:7 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

23So that you may plant your feet in their blood
and your dogs may lick up their portion of the foe."
24The *solemn* march in Your honor, O True God, has come into view;
the march that celebrates my God, my King, has come into the sanctuary.
25The singers went first, and the musicians came last
between *rows of* girls who played tambourines.
26Come, let us gather to bless the True God
and to praise the Eternal, He who is the fountain of Israel, *the source of our life!*
27Look! There *are the rulers of* Benjamin, the youngest in the lead.
A great crowd follows
The princes of Judah,
the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

28[Your God *is the One who* has given you strength];*
show Your power, O True God, as You have done for us.
29Because of Your *magnificent* temple in Jerusalem,
many kings will *line up to* bring You gifts.
30Reprimand the beasts in the tall grass,
the herds of bulls that are with the people's calves,
Trampling over the pieces of silver.
He has driven out the people who love to be at war.
31Ambassadors will come from Egypt;
the people of Ethiopia* will reach out their hands to the *one* True God.

32Let all the kingdoms of the earth sing to the True God.
Sing songs of praise to the Lord.

[pause]

33To Him who rides high up beyond the heavens, which have been since ancient times,
watch *and listen.* His voice speaks, and it is powerful *and strong.*
34Attribute power to the *one* True God;
His royal splendor is *evident* over Israel,
and His power courses through the clouds.
35O True God, You are awesome from the holy place where You dwell.
The True God of Israel Himself grants strength and power to His people.

Blessed be *our* God!

Psalm 69

For the worship leader. *A song* of David to *the tune* "Lilies."*

► This Davidic lament complains to God of enemies, false witnesses, insults, abandonment by friends and family, and even poisoning. Early Christians interpreted this psalm prophetically in order to understand Jesus' experience in His suffering and death on the cross.

1*Reach down for me,* True God;
deliver me.
The waters have risen to my neck;
I am going down!
2My feet are swallowed in this murky bog;
I am sinking—there is no sturdy ground.
I am in the deep;
the floods are crashing in!
3I am weary of howling;
my throat is scratched dry.
I still look for my God
even though my eyes fail.

4My enemies despise me without any cause;
they outnumber the hairs on my head.
They torment me with their power;
they have absolutely no reason to hate me.
Now I am set to pay for crimes
I have never committed!
5O True God, my foolish ways are plain before You;
my mistakes—no, nothing can be hidden from You.

* 68:28 Other manuscripts read, "Call on Your strength, O God." * 68:31 Literally, Cush * 69:title Hebrew, *shoshannim,* white lily-like flowers, perhaps the melody to which the song is sung

6Don't let Your hopeful followers face
disgrace because of me,
O Lord, Eternal One, Commander
of *heaven's* armies;
Don't let Your seekers be shamed on
account of me,
O True God of Israel.
7I have been mocked when I stood up
for You;
I cower, shamefaced.
8*You know* my brothers and sisters?
They now reject me—*they act as if
I never existed.*
I'm like a stranger to my own
family.

9And here's why: I am consumed with
You, completely devoted to
protecting Your house;
when they insult You, they
insult me.
10When I mourn and discipline my soul
by fasting,
they deride me.
11And when I put on sackcloth,
they mock me.
12Those who sit at the gate gossip
about me;
I am *shamed by* the *slurred* songs of
drunkards.

13But, Eternal One, I just pray the time
is right
that You would hear me. And, True
God,
because You are enduring love, that
You would answer.
In Your faithfulness, please, save me.
14Pluck me from this murky bog;
don't let it pull me down!
Pull me from this rising water;
take me away from my enemies *to
dry land.*
15Don't let the flood take me under
or let me, Your servant, be
swallowed into the deep
or let the yawning pit seal me in!

16O Eternal One, *hear me.* Answer me.
For Your enduring love is good
comfort;
in Your great mercy, turn
toward me.
17Yes, shine Your face upon *me,* Your
servant;
put an end to my anguish—don't
wait another minute.
18Come near; rescue me!
Set me free from my enemies.

19You know all my opponents;
You see them, see the way they
treat me—
humiliating me with insults, trying
to disgrace me.
20All this ridicule has broken my heart,
killed my spirit.
I searched for sympathy, and I came up
empty.
I looked for supporters, but there
was no one.
21*Even more,* they gave me poison for my
food
and offered me *only sour* vinegar to
drink.

22Let them be ambushed at the *dinner*
table,
caught in a trap when they least
expect it.
23Cloud their vision so they cannot see;
make their bodies shake, *their knees
knock in terror.*
24Pour out Your *fiery* wrath upon them!
Make a clean sweep; engulf them
with Your flaming fury.
25May their camps be bleak
with not one left in any tent.
26Because they have persecuted the one
You have struck,
add insult to those whom You have
wounded.
27Compound their sins; *don't let them off
the hook!*
Keep them from entering into Your
mercy.
28Blot out their names from Your book
of life
so they will not be recorded alongside
those who are upright *before You.*
29I am living in pain; I'm suffering,
so save me, True God, and keep me
safe *in troubled times*!

30The name of the True God will be my
song,
an uplifting tune of *praise and*
thanksgiving!
31My praise will please the Eternal more
than *if I were to sacrifice* an ox
or the finest bull. (Horns, hooves,
and all!)
32Those who humbly serve will see and
rejoice!
All you seekers-after-God will
revive your souls!
33The Eternal listens to the *prayers of the*
poor
and has regard for His people held
in bondage.

34 *All God's creation:* join together in His
praise! All heaven, all earth,
all seas, all creatures of the ocean
deep!
35 The True God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah
So that His servants may own it and
live there *once again*.
36 Their children and children's children
shall have it as their inheritance,
and those who love His name will
live in it.

Psalm 70

For the worship leader. *A song* of David
for remembering.

1 O God, hurry to save me;
Eternal One, hurry to my side.
2 For those who seek to kill me,
God, may they burn in disgrace and
humiliation!
Repulse the attacks; ridicule the efforts
of those taking pleasure in my pain.
3 I hear their taunts: "Nah, nah, nah . . . ."
Let those hecklers fall back *upon
their brays*—ashamed *and
confused*—

4 But let those who pursue You
celebrate and have joy because of
You.
And let the song of those who love
Your saving *grace*
never cease: "God is great!"
5 But I am poor and in *serious* need,
so hurry to my side, God,
Because You are my helper, my
liberator.
Eternal One, please don't wait.

Psalm 71

1 I have found shelter in You, Eternal
One;
I count on You to shield me always
from humiliation and disgrace.
2 Rescue and save me in Your justice.
Turn Your ear to me, and *hurry to*
deliver me *from my enemies*.
3 Be my rock of refuge where I can
always hide.
You have given the order to keep
me safe;
You are *my solid ground*—my rock
and my fortress.

4 Save me from the power of sinful
people, O my God,
from the grip of unjust and cruel
men.

5 For You are my hope, Eternal One;
You, Lord, have been *the source
of* my confidence since I was
young.
6 I have leaned upon You since I came
into this world;
I have relied on You since You took
me *safely* from my mother's
body,
So I will ever praise You.

7 Many find me a mystery,
but You are my rock and my
shelter—*my soul's asylum*.
8 My mouth overflows with praise to You
and proclaims Your magnificence
all day long.
9 Do not set me aside when I am old;
do not abandon me when I am
worn out.
10 For my enemies *often* voice evil
against me;
those who desire to kill me plot
together *in secret*.
11 They say, "God has abandoned him;
let's go after him *right now* and
seize him.
There's no one around to rescue
him."

12 God, stay close by me.
Come quick, O my God, and
help me!
13 May my enemies be covered in shame
and *then* die;
may those who seek to harm me
be overwhelmed with contempt
and disgrace.
14 But I will keep hope alive,
and my praise to You will grow
exponentially.
15 I will bear witness to Your merciful
acts;
throughout the day I will speak of
all the ways You deliver,
although, *I admit,* I do not know the
entirety of either.
16 I will come with *stories of* Your great
acts, *my* Lord, the Eternal.
I will remind them of Your justice,
only Yours.

17 You have taught me since I was young,
O God,
and I still proclaim the wonderful
things You have done.
18 Now as I grow old and my hair turns
gray,
I ask that You not abandon me,
O God.

Allow me to share with the generation
to come
about Your power;
Let me speak about Your strength *and*
wonders
to all those yet to be born.
19God, Your justice stretches to the
heavens,
You who have done mighty things!
Who is like You, O God?

20You have made me see hard times: I've
experienced many miserable
days,
but You will restore me again.
You will raise me up
from the deep pit.
21You will greatly increase my status
and be my comfort *once again.*

22I will praise You with *music played on*
a harp
because You have been faithful,
O my God.
I will sing praises to You with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
23I will shout for joy
as I sing Your praises;
my soul *will celebrate* because You
have rescued me.
24All day long I will declare how Your
justice saved me,
for those who have plotted to bring
me harm
are now ashamed and humiliated.

Psalm 72

A song of Solomon.

1True God, bestow Your *honest*
judgments upon the king
and *anoint* the king's son with Your
righteousness.
2May he be honest and fair in his
judgments over Your people
and offer justice to the burdened
and suffering.
3*Under his reign,* may *this land of*
mountains and hills know peace
and experience justice for all the
people.
4May the king offer justice to the
burdened *and suffering,*
rescue the *poor and* needy,
and demolish the oppressor!

5[May the people fear You]* for as long
as the sun shines,
as long as the moon rises *in the night*
sky, throughout the generations.
6May the king be like the *refreshing*
rains, which fall upon *fields of*
freshly mown grass—
like showers that *cool and* nourish
the earth.
7May good and honest people flourish
for as long as he reigns,
and may peace fill the land until
the moon no longer rises.

8May the king rule from one sea to the
next,
and *may his rule extend* from
the *Euphrates* River to the far
reaches of the earth.
9Let the desert wanderers bow down
before him
and his enemies *lay prostrate and*
taste the dirt.
10Let the kings of Tarshish and the island
kings
shower him with gifts
And the kings of Sheba and Seba bring
him presents *as well.*
11Let every king *on earth* bow down
before him
and every nation be in his service.
12For he will rescue the needy when they
ask for help!
He will save the burdened and *come*
to the aid of those who have no
other help.
13He offers compassion to the weak and
the poor;
he will *help and* protect the lives of
the needy!
14He will liberate them from *the fierce*
sting of persecution and
violence;
in his eyes, their blood is precious.

15May he live *a long, long time*
and the gold of Sheba be given to
him.
May the people constantly lift up
prayers for him,
and may they call upon God to
bless him always.
16Let grain grow plentifully in this land *of*
promise,
let it sway *in the breeze* on the
hilltops,
let it grow *strong* as *do the cedars of*
Lebanon,
And may those who live in the city
bloom and flourish

* 72:5 Greek manuscripts read, "He will endure."

Woven throughout the psalms are songs describing and praising those anointed as kings over God's people. Psalm 2, one of the introductory psalms, describes the king as the son of God, the ruler of nations, and the anointed one. During the monarchical period in Israel, psalms like these were tied to the kings themselves, idealizing them as perfectly just and righteous and victorious. But during the exile, God's exiled people longed for freedom and the implications of these songs began to change. Many Jews began to interpret these psalms as referring to a coming ruler, a Davidic king who would usher in an eternal kingdom and perfect peace. This hope was realized in Jesus. So this is why the earliest followers of Jesus went back to the psalms again and again. They found within many of the psalms, the story of Jesus anticipated and celebrated.

just as the grass of the fields *and meadows.*
17 May his name live on forever
and his reputation grow for as long as the sun gives light.
May *people from* all nations find in him a blessing;
may all peoples declare him blessed.

18 May the Eternal God, the God of Israel, be blessed,
for He alone works *miracles and* wonders!
19 May His glorious name be blessed forever
and the whole earth be filled with His *eternal* glory!
Amen. Amen.

20 The prayers of *King* David, Jesse's son, are ended.

BOOK THREE

Psalm 73

A song of Asaph.

1 Truly God is good to *His people,* Israel,
to those with pure hearts.
2 *Though I know this is true,* I almost lost my footing;
yes, my steps were on slippery ground.
3 You see, *there was a time when* I envied arrogant men
and thought, "The wicked look pretty happy to me."

4 For they seem to live *carefree lives,* free of suffering;
their bodies are strong and healthy.
5 They don't know trouble as we do;
they are not plagued *with problems* as the rest of us are.
6 They've got *pearls of* pride strung around their necks;
they clothe their bodies with violence.
7 *They have so much more than enough.*
Their eyes bulge because they are so fat with possessions.
They have more than their hearts could have ever imagined.
8 *There is nothing sacred, and no one is safe.*
Vicious sarcasm drips from their lips;
they bully and threaten to crush *their enemies.*
9 They even mock God *as if He were not above;*
their *arrogant* tongues boast throughout the earth; *they feel invincible.*

10 Even God's people turn and are carried away by them;
they watch and listen, yet find no fault in them.
11 *You will hear* them say, "How can the True God *possibly* know anyway? *He's not even here.*
So how can the Most High have any knowledge *of what happens here?*"
12 Let me tell you *what I know* about the wicked:
they are comfortably at rest while their wealth is growing *and growing.*
13 *Oh, let this not be me!* It seems I have scrubbed my heart to keep it clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
And for what? Nothing.
14 For all day long, I am being punished,
each day awakening to *stern* chastisement.

Many of the psalms in Book Three (Psalms 73–89) are attributed to Asaph. He was a Levite musician appointed by David to lead the worship that surrounded the covenant chest in the congregation tent (1 Chronicles 16:4-6). Asaph and his descendants continued this work through much of Israel's history, specifically when Solomon dedicated the temple (2 Chronicles 5:12), when Josiah revived the worship of the Eternal One in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 35:15), and when Ezra and Nehemiah dedicated the wall around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:35).

The psalms attributed to Asaph were liturgical, that is, they were chanted or sung as a part of the regular worship of God in the temple by the priests, Levites, and perhaps other worshipers too. Whether songs of lament, requests for guidance, or pleas for mercy, these psalms were sung in the one place God would hear them best—at His temple—the nexus between heaven and earth.

15If I had said *to others* these kinds of
things *about the plight of God's*
good people,
then *I know* I would have betrayed
the next generation.
16Trying to solve this *mystery* on my own
exhausted me;
I couldn't bear to look at it any further.
17So I took my questions to the True God,
and in His sanctuary I realized
something so chilling and final:
their *lives have* a *deadly* end.
18*Because* You have certainly set the
wicked upon a slippery slope,
You've set them up to slide to their
destruction.
19*And they won't see it coming.* It will
happen so fast:
first, a flash of terror, and then
desolation.
20It is like a dream from which someone
awakes.
You will wake up, Lord, and loathe
what has become of them.
21*You see,* my heart overflowed with
bitterness *and cynicism*;
I felt as if someone stabbed me in
the back.
22But I didn't know *the truth*;
I have been acting like a stupid
animal toward You.
23But *look at this:* You are still holding my
right hand;
You have been all along.
24*Even though I was angry and hard-*
hearted, You gave me good
advice;
when it's all over, You will receive
me into Your glory.
25*For all my wanting,* I don't have anyone
but You in heaven.
There is nothing on earth that
I desire other than You.
26*I admit how* broken I am in body and
spirit,
but God is my strength, and He will
be mine forever.

27It will happen: whoever shuns You will
be silenced forever;
You will bring an end to all who
refuse to be true to You.
28But the closer I am to You, my God,
the better *because life with You*
is good.
O Lord, the Eternal, You keep me
safe—
I will tell everyone what You have
done.

Psalm 74

A contemplative song* of Asaph.

► This lament was written shortly after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. Now in exile and separated from God, His city, and His land, the people of God experience pain that is palpable.

1O True God, why have You *turned Your*
back on us and abandoned us
forever?
Why is *Your anger seething and* Your
wrath smoldering against the
sheep of Your pasture?
2Remember the congregation *of people*
You acquired long ago,
the tribe which You redeemed to be
Your very own.
Remember Mount Zion, where You
have chosen to live!

* 74:title Hebrew, *maskil*

3*Come,* direct Your attention to Your
sanctuary;
our enemy has demolished
everything and left it in
complete ruin.

4Your enemies roared *like lions* in Your
sacred chamber;
they have claimed it with their own
standards as signs.
5They acted like lumberjacks swinging
their axes
to cut down a stand of trees.
6They hacked up all the *beautifully*
carved items,
smashed them *to splinters* with
their axes and hammers.
7They have burned Your sanctuary to
the ground;
they have desecrated the place
where Your *holy* name lived in
honor;
8They have plotted in their hearts, "We
will crush them and bring them
to their knees!"
Then they scorched all of the places
in the land where the True God
met His people.

9We no longer receive signs,
there are no more prophets who
remain,
and not one of us knows how long
this situation will last.
10O True God, how much longer will the
enemy mock us?
Will this insult continue against
You forever?
11Why do You stand by and do nothing?
Unleash Your power and finish
them off!

12Even so, the True God is my King from
long ago,
bringing salvation *to His people*
throughout the land.
13You have divided the sea with Your
power;
You shattered the skulls of the
creatures of the sea;
14You smashed the heads of Leviathan
and fed his remains to the people of
the desert.
15You broke open *the earth* and springs
burst forth and streams filled
the crevices;
You dried up the great rivers.
16The day and the night are both Yours—
You fashioned the sun, moon,
and all the lights that pierce the
darkness.
17You have arranged the earth, set all its
boundaries;
You are the Architect of *the seasons*:
summer and winter.

18Eternal One, do not forget that the
enemy has taunted You
and a company of fools has rejected
Your name.
19We are Your *precious* turtledoves;
don't surrender our souls to the
wild beasts.
Do not forget the lives of Your poor,
afflicted, and brokenhearted ones
forever.

20Be mindful of Your covenant *with us,*
for the dark corners of the land are
filled with pockets of violence.
21Do not allow the persecuted to return
without honor;
may the poor, *wounded,* and needy
sing praises *to You;*
may they bring glory to Your name!
22O True God, rise up and defend Your
cause;
remember how the foolish man
insults You every hour of the
day.
23Do not forget the voices of Your
enemies,
the commotion and chaos of Your
foes, which continually grow.

Psalm 75

For the worship leader. A song of Asaph to *the tune* "Do Not Destroy."*

1We thank You, O True God.
Our *souls are overflowing with*
thanks! Your name is near;
Your people *remember and* tell of Your
marvelous works and wonders.

2*You say,* "At the time that I choose,
I will judge and do so fairly.
3When the earth and everyone living
upon it spin into chaos,
I am the One who stabilizes and
supports it."*

[pause]*

4"I *discipline* the arrogant by telling
them, 'No more bragging.'

* 75:title Hebrew, *al-tashheth,* meaning is uncertain. * 75:3 Literally, "steady its pillars" * 75:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

I discipline the wicked by saying,
'Do not raise your horn *to demonstrate your power*.*
5Do not thrust your horn into the air,
issuing a challenge,
and never speak with insolence
when you address Me.'"

6There is no one *on earth* who can raise up another *to grant honor,*
not from the east or the west, not from the desert.
There is no one. God is the only One.
7God is the *only* Judge.
He *is the only One who* can ruin or redeem a man.
8For the Eternal holds a full cup of wine in His hand—
a chalice well stirred and foaming *full of wrath.*
He pours the cup out,
and all wicked people of the earth drink it up—every drop of it!
9But I will tell *of His great deeds* forever.
I will sing praises to Jacob's True God.

10I will cut off the horns of *strength raised by* the wicked,
but I will lift up the horns *of strength* of the righteous.

Psalm 76

For the worship leader. A song of Asaph *accompanied* by strings.

This song of Asaph praises Jerusalem as God's earthly home and celebrates His victory there over enemies, where in the end "He squashes the arrogant spirit of the rulers."

1The One known in Judah is the True God;
in Israel, His name is great.
2He has made Salem* His home;
indeed, He rests in Zion.
3There He destroyed the instruments of war:
flaming arrows, shields, and swords.

[pause]*

4You *rise and* shine *like the dawn.*
You are more majestic than the mountains where game runs *wild.*
5The strong-hearted *enemies* were plundered;
they were buried in slumber.
Even the *noble* warriors
could not raise a hand *to stop You.*
6O True God of Jacob, with *just* Your rebuke
both horse and rider fell into a deep sleep.

7You are feared; yes, You.
And who can stand before You when Your anger flares?
8You decreed judgment from the heavens.
The earth *heard it and* was petrified with fear, completely still,
9When the True God arose for judgment to deliver all the meek of the earth.

[pause]

10For the wrath of man will end in praise of You,
and whatever wrath is left You will wrap around Yourself *like a belt.*
11Make vows to the Eternal your God, and do all you promised;
Let all the nations around you bring gifts
to the God who arouses *fear and* awe.
12He squashes the *arrogant* spirit of the rulers
and inspires fear in *the hearts of* the kings of the earth.

Psalm 77

For the worship leader, Jeduthun. A song of Asaph.

1I cry up to *heaven,*
"My God, True God," and He hears.
2In my darkest days, I seek the Lord.
Through the night, my hands are *raised up,* stretched out, *waiting;*
And though they do not grow tired, my soul is uneasy.
3I remember the True God and become distraught.
I think *about Him,* and my spirit becomes weak.

[pause]*

4You hold my eyes *wide* open.
I am troubled beyond words.

* 75:4 The horn was a symbol of power, and a raised horn indicated a challenge. * 76:2 Jerusalem * 76:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 77:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

5My mind drifts to thoughts of yesterdays
and yesteryears.
6I call to mind my music; *it keeps me*
company at night.
Together with my heart
I contemplate;
my spirit searches, *wondering,*
questioning:
7"What will the Lord do? Reject us for
good?
Will He never show us His favor
again?
8Has His loyal love *finally* worn down?
Have His promises reached an end?
9Has the True God forgotten how to be
gracious?
In His anger, has He withdrawn His
compassion?"

[pause]

10"I can't help but be distraught," I said,
"for the power of the Most High
that was once for us is now
against us."

11I will remember the actions the Eternal
has taken,
reminisce on Your ancient wonders.
12I will reflect on all of Your work;
indeed, I will study all You have
performed.
13O God, Your way is *so different, so*
distinct, so divine.
No other god compares with our
God.
14You, God, and Your works evoke wonder.
You have proved Your strength to
the nations.
15You used Your great power to release
Your people:
with a strong arm, You freed Jacob's
children, and Joseph's.

[pause]

16The waters saw You, O True God.
The seas saw You and swelled in
sorrow.
Even the deep trembled.
17Water poured from the clouds,
and the sky boomed out *in response*
as Your arrows *of lightning* flashed
this way and that.
18The sound of Your thunder whirled
within the wind
as Your lightning lit up the world.
Yes, the whole earth trembled and
shook.
19Your way ran through the sea,
Your path *cut* through great waters,
and still no one can spot Your
footprints.
20You led Your people as a flock
tended by the hands of Moses and
Aaron.

Psalm 78

A contemplative song* of Asaph.

1O my people, listen to me!
Hear my instruction; soak up every
word of what I am about to tell
you.
2I will open my mouth in parables;
I will speak of ancient mysteries—
3Things that we have heard about,
things that we have known,
things which our ancestors
declared to us *again and again.*
4We will not keep these things secret
from their children;
rather, we will tell the coming
generation
All about the praise that is due to the
Eternal One.
We will tell them all about His
strength, *power,* and wonders.

5He gave His *holy* law to Jacob,
His teaching to the people of Israel,
Which He instructed our fathers
to pass down to their children
6So that the coming generation would
know them *by heart,*
even the children who are not yet
born,
So that they might *one day* stand up
and teach them to their children,
7*tell them* to put their confidence
and hope in God,
And never forget the *wondrous* things
He has done.
They should obey His
commandments *always*
8And avoid following in the footsteps of
their parents,
a hard-headed and rebellious
generation—
A generation of uncultivated hearts,
whose spirits were unfaithful to
God.

9The sons of Ephraim were *master*
archers, armed with all the
necessary equipment,
yet when the battle hour arrived,
they ran away.

* 78:title Hebrew, *maskil*

10 They were not loyal to their covenant with God;
they *turned away and* refused to walk in it;
11 They did not remember all the *wondrous* things He had done,
even the great miracles He had revealed to them.
12 He did miraculous things in the presence of their ancestors
as they made their way out of Egypt, through the fields of Zoan.
13 He split the sea and made them pass through it;
He made the waters to rise, forming a wall *of water*.
14 Every day He led them with a cloud;
every night, with a fiery light.
15 He cracked open rocks in the wilderness
and provided them with all the water they needed, *as plentiful* as the depths of the ocean.
16 He caused streams to burst forth from the rock,
waters to rush in like a river.

17 Even after *witnessing all of these miracles,* they still chose to sin against God,
to act against the *will of the* Most High in the desert!
18 They tested God in their *stubborn* hearts
by demanding whatever food they happened to be craving.
19 Then they challenged God:
"Can God fill a table *with food* in the *middle of the* desert?
20 He split open the rock, and water gushed out;
streams *and rivers* were overflowing!
But can He also provide us with bread?
Can He supply meat to His sons and daughters?"

21 When the Eternal heard these words, He was furious;
His fiery anger erupted against Jacob;
His wrath grew against Israel.
22 *This all happened* because they did not trust God;
they did not have faith in His power to save them.
23 Nevertheless, He gave instructions to the clouds in the sky
and swung open heaven's doors;
24 He showered them with manna to soothe their *hungry* bellies
and provided them with the bread of heaven.
25 (*In that day* mortals ate the bread of heavenly messengers.)
God provided them with plenty of food.
26 He stirred up the east wind and blew it through the sky.
With His might, He whipped the south wind *into a storm*;
27 Like dust *from the sky,* He caused meat to fall on them.
Birds, like sand on the seashore, *fell to the earth.*
28 They landed all about the camp, all around their tents.
29 *God's* people feasted *on the food-blessings,* and their stomachs were filled;
He gave them exactly what they desired.
30 But before their bellies were soothed, while their mouths were still full of food,
31 God's wrath came at them *like a tidal wave*
and swallowed some of the *bravest,* strongest among them
and quieted the youth of Israel.

32 Even after all this, they continued to sin
and still did not trust *in Him or* in the incredible things He did.
33 So He *abruptly* ended their time; they vanished like a breath;
He ended their years suddenly, with terror.
34 After He took *some of* their lives,
those *left* turned back and sought God wholeheartedly.
35 *After all they had endured,* they remembered that God, the Most High,
was their Rock, their Redeemer,
36 But *even then* they tried to deceive Him with their words
and fool Him with a web of lies.
37 They were not consistently faithful to Him,
and they were untrue to their covenant with Him.
38 Yet by His great compassion,
He forgave them
and decided not to put an end to them.
Most of the time, He held back His anger
and did not unleash His wrath *against them.*

39He was mindful that they were human,
frail and fleeting,
like a wind *that touches one's skin*
for a moment, then vanishes.
40Oh, how often they disobeyed Him in
the wilderness
and frustrated Him *during their*
time in the desert!
41Over and over again, they tested God's
patience
and caused great pain for Israel's
Holy One.
42They failed to be mindful of His great
strength.
They forgot all about the day He
saved them from the enemy,
43When He displayed *all sorts of* signs
and wonders in Egypt,
and all the amazing things He did
in the region of Zoan*
44When He transformed their rivers into
blood
so that they could not drink from
their streams.
45He sent armies of flies to bite and
torment them
and *hordes of* frogs to *ruin and*
devastate them;
46He handed over *all of* their crops to
grasshoppers
and the fruit of all their labor to
locusts;
47He sent *violent* hailstorms, which
smashed all their vines,
and ruined their sycamore-fig trees
with biting frost.
48He handed over *all of* their cattle to the
hailstorms as well
and struck *all* their herds with
lightning.
49He poured His burning wrath upon
them—
anger, resentment, and trouble—
sending a company of heavenly
warriors to destroy them.
50He carved out a road for His wrath;
He did not spare any from *the sting*
of death
but handed them over to the *fangs*
of the plague.
51He killed all the firstborn of Egypt,
the first products of their manhood
in the tents of Ham, *the*
Egyptians' ancestor.
52But then He guided His people like
sheep *to safety*
and led them like a flock into the
desert *to freedom*;
53He took them on a safe route so that
they would not be afraid,
and He allowed the *hungry* sea to
swallow *all of* their enemies.
54He led them to His sacred land—
to this *holy* hill, which He had won
by *the power of* His right hand.
55He forced out the other nations *which*
were living there before them,
and He redistributed the lands as
an inheritance to His people;
He settled the tribes *and families* of
Israel *peaceably* in their tents.

56Even after *all this,* they disobeyed the
Most High God
and tested *His patience*
and did not live by His commands.
57Rather, they regressed to their fathers'
ways and lived faithlessly—
disloyal traitors!
They were as undependable *and*
untrustworthy as a defective
bow,
58For they triggered His wrath by setting
up high places,
altars to strange gods in His land;
they aroused His jealousy by
bowing down to idols *in the*
shadow of His presence.
59God boiled with wrath when He
witnessed what they were doing;
He totally rejected Israel.
60He deserted His own sanctuary at
Shiloh,
the tent where He had lived in the
midst of *His* people.
61He handed His strength over to
captivity;
He put His splendor under the
enemy's control.
62He handed His people over to the
sword,
and He was filled with anger
toward His chosen ones;
He was burning with wrath!
63*A great* fire consumed all the young
men,
and the virgin girls were without
the joy of their wedding songs.
64Priests met their doom by the *blade of*
a sword,
and widows *had no tears to cry*;
they could not weep.
65Then the Lord awoke like a man who
has been asleep,
like a warrior who has been
overcome with wine.

* 78:43 Hebrew, *Avaris*

66He forced all His enemies back;
He *defeated them,* weighing them
down with everlasting disgrace.

67He even rejected the tent of Joseph *as*
His home
and showed no favor toward the
tribe of Ephraim.
68Instead, He favored the tribe of Judah—
Mount Zion, the place He adored.
69He built His sanctuary like the
mountain heights;
like the earth, He created it to last
forever.
70He chose His servant David,
and called Him out of the sheep
pastures.
71From caring for the ewes, who *gently*
nurse their young,
He called him to shepherd His
people Jacob
and *to look after* Israel, His
inheritance.
72David shepherded them with the *honor*
and integrity of his heart;
he led them *in wisdom* with *strong*
and skillful hands.

Psalm 79

A song of Asaph.

1O God, the nations *around us* have
raided the land that belongs to
You;
they have defiled Your holy house
and crushed Jerusalem to a heap
of ruins.
2Your servants are dead;
birds of the air swoop down to pick
at their remains.
Scavengers of the earth eat what is
left of Your saints.
3The enemy poured out their blood;
it flowed like water
all over Jerusalem,
and there is *no one left,* no one to
bury *what remains of* them.
4The surrounding peoples taunt us.
We are nothing but a joke to them,
people to be ridiculed.

► The Book of Psalms records both the highs and lows in the lives of God's covenant people. Psalm 79 is an example of a communal lament after the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of God's temple. Songs like these address God with a complaint resulting from some sort of national tragedy.

Communal laments share a common structure. First, the singers address God and tell Him of their problems. Second, they beg Him for help and express trust that He will answer them, often remembering how He has saved Israel in the past. Finally, the singers promise to praise God once He has resolved their problem. The specifics of the situation determine the thrust of the song. Communal laments are often the people's poetic and practical response to their perception of God's inaction in their affairs.

5How long *can this go on,* O Eternal
One?
Will You stay angry *at us* forever?
Your jealousy burning like wildfire?
6Flood these outsiders with Your
wrath—
they have no knowledge of You!
Drown the kingdoms *of this world*
that call *on false gods and* not on
Your name.
7For these *nations* devoured Jacob,
consumed him,
and turned his home into a
wasteland.

8Do not hold the sins of our ancestors
against us,
but send Your compassion to meet
us quickly, *God.*
We are in deep despair.
9Help us, O God who saves us,
to the *honor and* glory of Your
name.
Pull us up, deliver us, and forgive our
sins,
for Your name's sake.
10Don't give these people any reason to
ask,
"Where is their God?"
Avenge the blood spilled by Your
servants.
Put it on display among the nations
before our very eyes.

11May the *deep* groans *and wistful sighs*
of the prisoners reach You,
and by Your great power, save those
condemned to die.

12Pay back each of our invaders
personally, seven times
for the shame they heaped on You,
O Lord!
13Then we, Your people, the sheep of
Your pasture,
will *pause and* give You thanks
forever;
Your praise will be told by our
generation to the next.

Psalm 80

For the worship leader. A song of Asaph to *the tune* "The Lilies."*

Psalm 80 is a communal lament composed in Judah (the Southern Kingdom) after the fall of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) in 722 B.C.

1Turn Your ear *toward us,* Shepherd of
Israel,
You who lead *the children of* Joseph
like a flock.
You who sit enthroned above heaven's
winged creatures,*
radiate Your light!
2In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin,
and Manasseh,
arouse Your *strength and* power,
and save us!

3Bring us back *to You,* God.
Turn the light of Your face *upon us*
so that we will be rescued *from*
this sea of darkness.

4O Eternal God, Commander of *heaven's*
armies,
how long will You remain angry
at the prayers of Your sons and
daughters?
5You have given them tears for food;
You have given them an abundance
of tears to drink.
6You have made us a source of trouble
for our neighbors—
our enemies laugh to each other
behind our backs.
7O God, Commander of *heaven's* armies,
bring us back *to You.*
Turn the light of Your face upon us
so that we will be rescued *from*
this sea of darkness.

8You took us *like* a grapevine dug from
the soil of Egypt;
You forced out the nations and
transplanted it *in Your land.*
9You groomed the ground around it,
planted it so it would root deep into
the earth, and it covered all the
land.
10*As it grew,* the mountains were
blanketed by its shadow;
the mighty cedars were covered by
its branches.
11The plant extended its branches to the
Mediterranean Sea,
and spread its shoots all the way to
the *Euphrates* River.
12*God,* why have You pulled down the
wall *that protected it*
so that everyone who wanders by
can pick its *sweet grapes*?
13The *wild* boar of the forest eats it all,
and the creatures of the field feast
upon it.

14O God, Commander of *heaven's* armies,
come back *to us.*
Gaze down from heaven and see
what has happened.
Keep watch over this vine, *and nourish it.*
15Look after the saplings which You
planted with Your *own* right
hand,
the child whom You have raised
and nurtured for Yourself.
16Your enemies have chopped it down
and burned it with fire;
may they be destroyed by the sight
of Your rebuke.
17Let Your *protective* hand rest on the
one *who is* at Your right hand,
the child of man whom You have
raised *and nurtured* for Yourself.
18Then we will not turn away from You.
Bring us back to life! And we will
call out for You!

19O Eternal God, Commander of *heaven's*
armies, bring us back *to You.*
Turn the light of Your face upon us
so that we will be rescued *from*
this sea of darkness.

Psalm 81

For the worship leader. *A song* of Asaph
accompanied by the harp.*

► God's covenant people celebrated many festivals honoring God and His provisions. Poets composed songs specifically for use on feast days.

* 80:title Hebrew, *shoshannim,* white lily-like flowers, perhaps the melody to which the song is sung * 80:1 Literally, cherubim * 81:title Hebrew, *gittith,* a winepress or a musical instrument from Gath

Psalm 81 is one of those. It was written to celebrate the Festival of Booths. God commanded His people to celebrate this festival every year so they would remember how God provided for them as they moved toward the promised land (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). A portion of this psalm (verses 5b-16) would have been sung by the lead musician as if he were speaking for God.

In the annual rhythm of festivals and praise, God is reminding the people of all He has done for them and of their past disobedience in spite of His love. He is also calling His people to renew their commitment to Him, a reasonable request on a holiday honoring Him.

[1]Sing with joy to God, our strength, *our fortress.*
Raise your voices to the True God of Jacob.
[2]Sing and strike up a melody;
sound the tambourine,
strum the sweet lyre and the harp.
[3]Blow the trumpet to announce the new moon,
the full moon, the day of our feast.*
[4]For this is prescribed for Israel,
a rule ordained by the True God of Jacob.
[5]A precept established by God in Joseph during His journey in Egypt.

I hear *it said in* a language foreign to me:
[6]"I removed the burden from your shoulders;
I removed *heavy* baskets from your hands.
[7]You cried out to Me, *I heard* your distress, and I delivered you;
I answered you from the secret place, *where clouds* of thunder *roll.*
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

[pause]*

[8]"O My people, hear Me; I will rebuke you.
Israel, *Israel!* If you would only listen to Me.
[9]Do not surround yourselves with other gods
or bow down to strange gods.
[10]I am the Eternal, your True God.
I *liberated you from slavery,* led you out from the land of Egypt.
If you open your mouth wide, I will fill it.

[11]"But My *own* people did not hear My voice!
Israel refused to obey Me.
[12]So I freed them to follow their hard hearts,
to do what they thought was best.
[13]If only My people would hear My voice
and Israel would follow My direction!
[14]Then I would not hesitate to humble their enemies
and defeat their opposition Myself.
[15]Those who hate the Eternal will *cower in His presence,* pretending to submit;
they *secretly* loathe Him, yet their doom is forever.
[16]But you—I will feed you the best wheat
and satisfy you with honey out of the rock."

Psalm 82

A song of Asaph.

Psalm 82 provides an image of a heavenly scene in which God accuses His heavenly messengers of not caring for the poor and pursuing justice.

[1]The True God stands *to preside* over the *heavenly* council.
He pronounces judgment on the *so-called* gods.
[2]*He asks:* "How long will you judge dishonestly
and be partial to the wicked?"

[pause]*

[3]"Stand up for the poor and the orphan;
advocate for the rights of the afflicted and those in need.
[4]Deliver the poor and the needy;
rescue them from their *evil* oppressors."

[5]These *bullies* are ignorant; they have no understanding *of My ways.*

* 81:3 Deuteronomy 16:13-15 * 81:7 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"
* 82:2 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

So as they walk in darkness,
the foundations of the earth tremble.

6I said, "*Though* you are gods*
and children of the Most High,
7You will die no differently than any mortal;
you will fall like one of the princes."

8Rise up, O True God; judge *the rulers of* the earth,
for all the nations are Yours.

Psalm 83

A song of Asaph.

1O True God, do not be quiet *any longer*.
Do not stay silent or be still, O God.
2Look now, Your enemies are causing a commotion;
those who hate You are rising up!
3They are conniving against Your people,
conspiring against those You cherish.
4They say, "Join us. Let's wipe the entire nation off the face of the earth
so no one will remember Israel's name."
5They are all in it together, thinking as one,
and making a pact against You:
6The people of Edom and Ishmael;
the Moabites and the Hagrites;
7Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek;
Philistia with the residents of Tyre.
8And the *powerful* Assyrians have joined the alliance
to *add their strength and* support the descendants of Lot: *Moab and Ammon.*

[pause]*

9Do to these nations what You did to Midian,
to Sisera and Jabin at the raging waters of Kishon.
10They were destroyed at En-dor;
they became like dung, *fertilizer* for the ground.
11Make their rulers like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
12Who schemed, "We should own the meadows of the True God,
let's take them!"
13O my God, blow them away like a tumbleweed,
scatter them like dust in a whirlwind.
14As a wildfire charges through the forest
or a flame *sprints* up the mountainside,
15Send Your raging winds to chase them,
hunt them down,
and terrify them with Your storm.
16Redden their faces in shame
so that they will *turn and* seek Your *holy* name, Eternal One.
17May they face disappointment and anxiety forever;
may they be ashamed and die.
18May they know that *You and* You alone,
whose name is the Eternal,
are the Most High, *the Supreme Ruler* over all the earth.

Psalm 84

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah *accompanied* by the harp.*

1How lovely is *Your temple,* Your dwelling place *on earth,*
O Eternal One, Commander of *heaven's* armies.
2How I long *to be there*—my soul is spent,
wanting, *waiting to walk in* the courts of the Eternal.
My whole being sings joyfully
to the living God.
3Just as the sparrow seeks her home,
and the swallow finds in her own nest
a place to lay her young,
I, too, seek Your altars, my King and my God,
Commander of *heaven's* armies.
4How blessed are those who make Your house their home,
who live with You;
they are constantly praising You.

[pause]*

5Blessed are those who make You their strength,
for they treasure *every step of* the journey [to Zion].*
6On their way through the valley of Baca,
they *stop and* dig wells to collect *the refreshing* spring water,
and the early rains fill the pools.

* 82:6 John 10:34 * 83:8 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 84:title Hebrew, *gittith*, a winepress or a musical instrument from Gath * 84:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 84:5 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

7They journey from place to place,
gaining strength *along the way;*
until they meet God in Zion.

8O Eternal God, Commander of *heaven's*
armies, listen to my prayer.
O *please* listen, God of Jacob.

[pause]

9O True God, look at our shield, *our*
protector,
see the face of Your anointed *king,*
and defend our defender.

10Just one day in the courts of Your
temple is greater
than a thousand anywhere else.
I would rather serve as a porter at my
God's doorstep
than live *in luxury* in the house of
the wicked.
11For the Eternal God is a sun and a shield.
The Eternal grants favor and glory;
He doesn't deny any good thing
to those who live with integrity.
12O Eternal One, Commander of *heaven's*
armies,
how fortunate are those who trust
You.

Psalm 85

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah.

1O Eternal One, *there was a time when*
You were gracious to Your land;
You returned Jacob's descendants
from their captivity.
2You forgave the iniquity of Your people,
covered all of their sins.

[pause]*

3*There was a time when* You restrained
all of Your *fierce* wrath,
when You cooled Your hot anger.

4O God of our salvation, bring us back
again—*as You did before*—
and put away Your anger toward us.
5Will You be mad at us forever?
Will You continue to be angry with
our children and theirs?
6Will You not bring us back to life once
more
so that we, Your people, will find joy
and pleasure in You?
7O Eternal One, show us Your unfailing
love;
give us *what we truly need*: Your
salvation.

8I will hear what the True God—the
Eternal—will say,
for He will speak peace over His
people,
peace over those who faithfully
follow Him, [but do not let them
abuse His gift and return to
foolish ways].*
9Without a doubt, His salvation is near
for those who revere Him
so that *He will be with us again and*
all His glory will fill this land.

10Unfailing love and truth have met *on*
their way;
righteousness and peace have
kissed one another.
11Truth will spring from the earth *like a*
plant,
and justice will look down from
the sky.
12Yes, the Eternal will plant goodness *in*
the earth,
and our land will yield great
abundance.
13Justice will come before Him,
marking out a path, setting a way
for His feet.

Psalm 86

A prayer of David.

1O Eternal One, lend an ear *to my prayer*
and answer me,
for I am weak and wanting.
2Safeguard my soul, for I remain loyal
to You.
Save me, Your servant, who trusts
in You, my God.
3O Lord, please be merciful to me,
as all day long I cry out to You.
4Bring joy into the life of Your servant,
for it's *only* to You, O Lord, that
I offer my soul.
5O Lord, You are good and ready to
forgive;
Your loyal love flows generously
over all who cry out to You.
6O Eternal One, lend an ear and hear my
prayer;
listen to my pleading voice.
7When times of trouble come, I will call
to You
because *I know* You will respond
to me.

* 85:2 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 85:8 Greek manuscripts read, "to those who turn to Him in their hearts."

8O Lord, You stand alone among the other gods;
nothing *they have done* compares to Your wonderful works.
9O Lord, *all the peoples of earth*—every nation You established—
will come to You, bowing low to worship,
and rightly honor Your *great* name.
10For You are great, and Your works are wondrous;
You are the one True God.
11O Eternal One, guide me along Your path so that I will live in Your truth.
Unite my *divided* heart so that I will fear Your *great* name.
12O Lord, my God! I praise You with all that I am.
I will rightly honor Your *great* name forever.
13For Your loyal love for me is so great *it is beyond comparison.*
You have rescued my soul from the depths of the grave.

14O True God, arrogant people are after me.
A violent gang wants to kill me;
they have no interest in You *or Your ways.*
15But Lord, You are a God full of compassion, generous in grace,
slow to anger, and boundless in loyal love and truth.
16Look at me, and grant me Your favor.
Invest Your strength in *me,* Your servant,
and rescue *me,* Your handmaiden's child.
17Give me a sign so I may know Your goodness *rests on me*
and so those who hate me will be *red with* shame at the sight of it.
For You, O Eternal One, have come to my aid and offered me relief.

Psalm 87

A song of the sons of Korah.

1He laid His foundation on the sacred mountains.
2The Eternal loves Zion's gates;
He prefers it over any other place where Jacob's *descendants* make their homes.
3Spectacular things are said about you,
O *Jerusalem,* city of the True God.
[pause]*

4*God says,* "I tell of some who know Me in Egypt* and Babylon;
behold, *My people are in* Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia* too:
'This person was born there.'"

5It is said of Zion,
"This person and that person were born in her."
The Most High *God* has established that city *and makes her strong.*
6When keeping track of His people, the Eternal surely notices,
"This one was born in Zion."

[pause]

7Those who sing and those who dance will say *together,*
"All my fountains *of joy* are in You."

Psalm 88

For the worship leader. A song of the sons of Korah *accompanied* by dance.* A contemplative song* of Heman the Ezrahite.

This individual lament was composed by someone afflicted with a grave illness, feeling lonely and abandoned by God. This song is reminiscent of Job's sufferings.

1O Eternal One! O True God my Savior!
I cry out to You all the time, *under the sun and the moon.*
2Let my voice reach You!
Please listen to my prayers!

3My soul is deeply troubled,
and *my heart can't bear the weight of this sorrow.* I feel so close to death.
4I'm like the *poor and* helpless *who die alone,*
left for dead, as good as the *unknowable sea of* souls lying under our feet,
5-6Forsaken *by Him* and cut off from His hand,
abandoned among the dead who rest in their graves.
And You have sent me to be forgotten with them,
in the lowest pits *of the earth,*
in the darkest canyons *of the ocean.*

* 87:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 87:4 Hebrew, *Rahab,* a poetic reference to Egypt * 87:4 Hebrew, *Cush* * 88:title Hebrew, *mahalath leanoth,* meaning is uncertain. Only use of this phrase in the Old Testament. * 88:title Hebrew, *maskil*

7You crush me with Your anger.
You crash against me like the
relentless, angry sea.

[pause]*

8Those whom I have known, *who have
been with me,*
You have gathered *like sheaves* and
cast *to the four winds.*
*They can't bear to look me in the eye,
and* they are horrified when
they think of me.
I am in a trap and cannot be free.
9My eyes grow dim, weakened by this
sickness;
it is taking my strength from me.
Like a worn cloth, my hands are
unfolded before You daily,
O Eternal One.
10Are You the miracle-worker for the
dead?
Will they rise *from the dark shadows*
to worship You again?

[pause]

11Will Your great love be proclaimed in
the grave
or Your faithfulness *be remembered
in whispers like mists* throughout
the place of ruin?*
12Are Your wonders known in the
dominion of darkness,
or *is* Your righteousness *recognized*
in a land where all is forgotten?

13But I am calling out to You, Eternal
One.
My prayers rise before You with
every new sun!
14Why do You turn Your head
and brush me aside, O Eternal One?
Why are You avoiding me?
15Since the days of my youth, I have been
sick and close to death.
My *helpless* soul has suffered Your
silent horrors;
now I am desperate.
16Your rage spills over me *like rivers of
fire*;
Your assaults have *all but*
destroyed me.
17They surround me like a flood, *rising*
throughout the day,
closing in from every direction.
18You have taken from me the one I love
and my friend;
even *the light of* my acquaintances
are darkness.

Psalm 89

A contemplative song* of Ethan the Ezrahite.

► Psalm 89 begins on a note of praise and ends with a lament. The heart of this psalm recalls God's choice of David as king and God's covenant with him to establish an eternal dynasty (2 Samuel 7).

1I will sing of Your unfailing love, Eternal
One, forever.
I will speak of Your faithfulness to
all generations.
2I will tell how Your unfailing love will
always stand strong;
and how Your faithfulness is
established in the heavens
above.
3*You said,* "I have made a covenant with
My chosen one.
I made My servant, David, this
promise:
4'I will establish your dynasty
so that you and your descendants
will always be secure.
Your rule will continue for
generations to come.'"

[pause]*

5Let the heavens *join in* praising the
wonderful works of the Eternal.
The holy ones have gathered,
singing of Your faithfulness.
6For there is no one above who
compares to the Eternal,
not one of heaven's creatures is like
Him *in the least.*
7In the council of holy ones, God is *lifted
high and* feared;
His presence overwhelms all who
are near Him.
8O Eternal God, Commander of *heaven's*
armies,
who is mighty like You?
You are completely faithful; *that's
why we trust You.*
9The ocean waters are at Your
command.

* 88:7 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up" * 88:11 Hebrew, *Abaddon* * 89:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 89:4 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

When *violent* waves rise up, You still them.
10You defeated Rahab, *that ancient monster of chaos,*
and left it lifeless.
You routed Your enemies and scattered them by Your great arm of power.
11Everything in the sky above and the earth below are Yours.
The world and all it contains are Yours, for You created them all.
12Everything was created by You—the north, the south—
the mountains of Tabor and Hermon echo joyously the song of Your name.
13Your arm is strong.
Your grip is powerful.
Your right hand is raised up high.
14Your rule is rooted deeply in justice and righteousness—
unfailing love and truth lead *from the way* ahead of You.
15How happy are those who have learned how to praise You;
those who journey *through life* by the light of Your face.
16Every hour of the day, they rejoice at *the sound of* Your name.
They are lifted up *and encouraged* by Your righteousness.
17For You are the beauty of their strength.
On account of Your favor, *our strength,* our horn, is increased.
18For our shield *of protection* comes from the Eternal,
and the Holy One of Israel *has given us* our king.

19Long ago You spoke through a vision to Your faithful followers, saying,
"I have given help to a warrior;
I have chosen *a hero* from among My people.
20I have found David, My servant.
With My holy oil, I have anointed him *king.*
21My *strong* hand will stay with him *and sustain him, regardless of trial or foe.*
My *mighty* arm will be his strength *and shield.*
22The *deceit of his* enemies will not outwit him.
The wicked will not defeat him.
23I will pound his enemies right in front of him.
I will strike down all those who hate him.
24My faithfulness and unfailing love will never leave him;
through My name, strength and power will be his.
25I will extend his rule over the oceans,
his right hand will control the rivers.
26He will cry out to Me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'
27I will make him My firstborn;
no earthly king shall be greater.
28My unfailing love will always be with him, *protecting him;*
My covenant with him will never be broken.
29I will ensure his family's future forever;
his dynasty will last as long as the heavens.
30If his children *turn away from Me and* forsake My law,
if they refuse to walk according to My judgments,
31If they disobey My instructions and ignore My commandments,
32Then I will use the rod to punish their sins
and stripes to deal with their iniquity.
33And yet My unfailing love of him will remain steadfast *and strong.*
I will not be unfaithful to My promise.
34I will not violate My covenant,
nor will I alter *even one word of* what My lips have spoken.
35*These words* I have pledged in My holiness once *and for all,*
and I will not lie to David.
36*As long* as the sun *lights the day* before Me, his descendants will continue *to rule.*
His kingdom will last forever.
37His dynasty will stand firm for all time like the moon,
the faithful witness *that stands watch* in the night sky."

[pause]

38But *what now?* You have turned Your back and walked away!
Your full fury burns against Your anointed *king.*
39You made a covenant with Your servant, then renounced it,
casting his *sacred* crown into the dust.

There are endless reasons to praise God, and many of them are included in the Book of Psalms. Book Four (Psalms 90–106) is made up of songs that praise and celebrate God for His creation, strength, work in history, and kingship. Although these songs are written to honor God, many require something from us. Throughout these psalms is the Hebrew word *hallelujah,* translated "Praise the Eternal!" That's not just a passive verb, as in, "Praise be to the Eternal"; it's an active imperative! We are commanded to praise Him. We are commanded to join angels above, people below, and all creatures in praising Him!

40You have broken down the walls that
protected Your servant;
his defenses are reduced to *a pile of*
rubble.
41Strangers now plunder all that he has
left;
he has become a laughingstock
among his neighbors.
42You have made his adversaries strong.
His enemies celebrate *their victory*.
43You have dulled the blade of his sword,
and You have not helped him stand
strong in the battle.
44You have brought his *days of* splendor
to an *abrupt* end;
You have toppled his throne;
it sits in the dust.
45You have cut short the days of his youth
and have covered him with shame
and despair.

[pause]

46How long *must we endure,* O Eternal
One?
Will You hide Yourself forever?
How long will Your wrath burn like
fire?
47Remember my days are numbered.
Have You created the children of
Adam to live futile lives?
48Death waits *at the gate;* who can escape
and live?
*Does the grave hold exceptions for
any of us?*
Who can deliver us from the power
of the grave?

[pause]

49O Lord, where is the unfailing love You
showed in times past?
And where is *the proof of* Your
faithfulness to David?
50Remember how Your servants are
ridiculed, O Lord;
how I carry within me the insults of
so many peoples.
51Your enemies are mocking me,
O Eternal One,
mocking every step Your anointed
one made.

52Praise the Eternal always. Amen.
Amen.

BOOK FOUR

Psalm 90

A prayer of Moses, a man of God.

1Lord, You have always been our refuge.
Our ancestors made You their
home *long ago*.
2Before mountains were born,
before You fashioned the earth and
filled it with life,
from ages past to distant futures,
You are *truly* God.

3You turn people back to dust,
saying, "Go back *to the dust,*
children of Adam."
4For You a thousand years is like a day
when it is over,
a watch during the night;
there is no difference to You.

5-6You release the waters *of death* to
sweep mankind away in his
slumber.
In the morning, we are blades of
grass,
Growing rapidly under the sun but
withering quickly;
yet in the evening, we fade and die,
soon to be cut down.

7For Your anger has consumed us.
Your wrath *has shaken us to the core
and* left us deeply troubled.
8You have written our offenses before
You—
the light of Your presence shines
brightly on our secret sins,
and we can't run or hide.

9For all our days are spent beneath Your wrath;
our youth gives way to old age, and then
one day our years come to an end with a sigh.
10We may journey through life for 70 years;
some *may live and breathe* 80 years—if we are strong.
Yet our time here is only toil and trouble;
soon our days are gone, and we fly away.
11Who can *truly* comprehend the power unleashed by Your anger?
Your wrath matches the fear that is due to You.
12Teach us to number our days
so that we may *truly live and* achieve wisdom.

13How long *will we wait here alone*?
Return, O Eternal One, *with mercy*.
Rescue Your servants with compassion.
14With every sun's rising, *surprise us* with Your love,
satisfy us with Your kindness.
Then we will sing with joy and celebrate every day we are alive.
15You have spent many days afflicting us with pain and sorrow;
now match those with years of *unspent* joy.
16Let Your work *of love* be on display for all Your servants;
let Your children see Your majesty.
17And then let the *beauty and* grace of the Lord—our God—rest upon us
and bring success to all we do;
yes, bring success to all we do!

Psalm 91

1He who takes refuge in the shelter of the Most High
will be *safe* in the shadow of the Almighty.
2He will say to the Eternal, "My shelter, my *mighty* fortress,
my God, I place *all* my trust in You."
3For He will rescue you from the snares set by your enemies *who entrap you*
and from deadly plagues.
4*Like a bird protecting its young,* God will cover you with His feathers,
will protect you under His *great* wings;
His faithfulness will form a shield around you, a rock-solid wall *to protect you.*

► Psalm 91 is a beautiful psalm of trust in God. But how does God take care of all His people, all at the same time? Well, keep reading because Psalm 91 is one of just a few places in Scripture that describe what we might call "guardian angels" (Exodus 23:20; Psalm 43:3). Though rare, these passages teach that God is not alone in maintaining and protecting His creation and His people. He has made a host of heavenly messengers ready to do His bidding, and His bidding is often to guard His people throughout their lives and protect them—sometimes from dangers they are not even aware of.

5You will not dread the terrors that haunt the night
or *enemy* arrows that fly in the day
6Or the plagues that lurk in darkness
or the disasters that wreak havoc at noon.

7A thousand may fall on your left,
ten thousand *may die* on your right,
but these horrors won't come near you.
8Only your eyes will witness
the punishment that awaits the evil,
but you will not suffer because of it.

9For you made the Eternal [your]* refuge,
the Most High your only home.
10No evil will come to you;
plagues will be turned away at your door.

11He will command His heavenly messengers to guard you,
to keep you safe in every way.
12They will hold you up in their hands
so that you will not *crash, or fall, or even* graze your foot on a stone.*

* 91:9 Hebrew manuscripts read, "who is my." * 91:11-12 Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11

13You will walk on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the lion and the
serpent underfoot.

14"Because he clings to Me in love,
I will rescue him *from harm*;
I will set him above danger.
Because he has known Me by name,
15He will call on Me, and I will answer.
I'll be with him through hard times;
I'll rescue him and grant him honor.
16I'll reward him with many *good* years
on this earth
and let him witness My salvation."

Psalm 92

A song for the Sabbath Day.

Psalm 92 gives thanks to God for His salvation. The superscription provides the only reference to the Sabbath in the Book of Psalms.

1How good it is to give thanks to the
Eternal
and to praise Your name with song,
O Most High;
2To speak of Your unfailing love in the
morning
and *rehearse* Your faithfulness as
night *begins to fall.*
3*How good it is to praise* to the sound of
strings—lute and harp—
the stirring melodies of the lyre.
4Because You, O Eternal One, thrill me
with the things You have done,
I will sing with joy in light of Your
deeds.

5Your works are marvelous, O Eternal
One!
Your thoughts are unfathomable.
6But a weak-minded man can't
understand this;
foolish people are unable to see
7That evil men sprout like grass
and wicked men flourish,
only so that they will be doomed
forever.
8But You, O Eternal One, are above all,
forever.
9As for Your enemies, O Eternal One,
their fate is obvious:
those who hate You will not survive;
those who practice evil will be
broken *in pieces.*

10But You have made me strong as a
wild ox,
anointed me with the refreshing oil
of Your blessing.
11And I have seen with my own eyes my
enemies defeated;
I have heard with my own ears my
attackers cut down.

12Those who are devoted to God will
flourish like *budding* date-palm
trees;
they will grow *strong and tall* like
cedars in Lebanon.
13Those planted in the house of the
Eternal
will thrive in the courts of our God.
14They will bear fruit into old age;
even in winter, they will be green
and full of sap
15To display that the Eternal is righteous.
He is my rock, and there is no
shadow of evil in Him.

Psalm 93

1The Eternal reigns, clothed in majesty;
He is dressed *in power*;
He has surrounded Himself with
strength.
He has established the world, and it
will never be toppled.
2Your throne was established from the
beginning of the world, *O God,*
and You are everlasting.

3The waters have risen, O Eternal One;
the sound of pounding waves *is*
deafening.
The waters have roared *with power.*
4More powerful than the thunder of
mighty rivers,
more powerful than the mighty
waves in the ocean
is the Eternal on high!

5*Your teachings are true;*
Your decrees sure.
Sacredness adorns Your house,
O Eternal One, forevermore.

Psalm 94

1O Eternal God of vengeance,
O God who sets things right, shine
upon us.
2Rise, O Judge *who presides* over the earth,
and *pronounce Your sentence* upon
the proud.
Give them what they deserve!
3How long, O Eternal One, how long
will the guilty revel *in their*
prosperity?

4Arrogance pours from their mouths;
all these troublemakers brag *of their exploits*.
5They have broken Your people to pieces, O Eternal One,
and brought ruin to Your future generations.
6They slay a widow, kill a newcomer, and murder an orphan.
7Then they say, "The Eternal can't see *what we're up to*;
the God of Jacob's people pays no attention *to us*."

8Think, brainless people;
stupid people, when will you get it?
9Does the God who set the ear *in its place* not hear?
Does the God who made the eye not see?
10Does the God who teaches the nations and guides humanity to knowledge, not exercise *just* correction?
11The Eternal knows the *highest* thoughts of the wise,
and they are worthless.*

12How fortunate are those You discipline, O Eternal One,
those You train by Your *divine* law;
13You relieve them in times of distress, until a grave is dug for evildoers.
14The Eternal will not abandon His people;
He will not turn away from those He redeemed
15Because justice is coming for those who do what is right
and all the good-hearted will pursue it.

16Who will back me up when evildoers come against me?
Who is willing to take my side against the wicked?
17If the Eternal had not come to my rescue,
my soul would have descended to the land where *death* silences *every voice*.
18When I said, "My foot is slipping!"
Your unfailing love, O Eternal One, held me up.
19When anxiety overtakes me *and worries are many,*
Your comfort lightens my soul.
20Can wicked tyrants be Your allies?
Will You align with rulers who create havoc with *unjust* decrees?
21They have joined forces against the life of the just-living, *the right-seeking,*
and have sentenced the innocent to death.
22But the Eternal has been my citadel;
my God, a sure safe haven.
23He will fold their wickedness back upon them,
and because they are malicious, He will silence them.
The Eternal, our True God, will scatter them.

* 94:11 1 Corinthians 3:20

Psalm 95

1Come, let us worship in song, *a joyful offering* to the Eternal.
Shout! Shout with joy to the rock of our liberation.
2Come face-to-face with God, and give thanks;
with loud and joyful voices, praise Him in songs.
3For the Eternal is a great God,
and a great King, *supreme* over all gods.
4Within His control are the very depths of the earth;
the mountaintops too—they all belong to Him.
5The sea belongs to Him, for He created it—*scooped and filled* it—
with His hands He made the dry land—*every valley and mountain*.

6Come, let us worship Him. *Everyone* bow down;
kneel before the Eternal who made us.
7For He is our God
and we are His people, *the flock* of His pasture,
His sheep *protected and nurtured* by His hand.

Today, if He speaks, hear His voice.
8"Don't harden your hearts the way they did in the bitter uprising *at Meribah*
or like that day they complained in the wilderness *of Massah*.
9Your ancestors tested Me,
wanted Me to prove Myself though they had seen *that nothing was too great for Me*.
10For 40 years I despised that *grumbling* generation
and said, 'Their hearts are unfaithful;

they no longer walk in My ways;
though I call, they do not listen to My voice.'
11That is why in My anger I swore,
'They will never enter into My rest.'"

Psalm 96

1Sing a new song to the Eternal;
sing *in one voice* to the Eternal, all the earth.
2Sing to the Eternal *of all the good things He's done.*
Bless His name;
broadcast the good news of His salvation each and every day.
3Enlighten the nations to His splendor;
describe His wondrous acts to all people.
4For the Eternal is great *indeed* and praiseworthy;
feared *and reverenced* above all gods, the True God shall be.
5For all human-made, *lifeless* gods are *worthless* idols,
but the Eternal plotted the *vast* heavens, *shaped every last detail.*
6Honor and majesty precede Him;
strength and beauty infuse His *holy* sanctuary.

► One of the great themes of Scripture and Psalms is the kingship of God. While lesser kings come and go, God is the One who ultimately rules and reigns over His people, and by extension over the rest of creation. Psalm 96 and others in the collection are often referred to as "enthronement" psalms because they declare boldly and unequivocally that the Eternal is King. There is evidence to suggest that an annual festival at the beginning of the year provided an opportunity to reaffirm the people's loyalty to the one True God. Psalm 96 calls for new songs to be composed and sung to God and about God as a witness. The enthronement psalms call the world and all its inhabitants to come and recognize His beauty and majesty.

7Give all credit to the Eternal, families of the world!
Credit Him with glory, *honor,* and strength!
8Credit Him with the glory *worthy* of His *magnificent* name;
gather your sacrifice, and present it at His temple.
9Bow down to the Eternal, adorned in holiness;
lay awestruck before Him,
trembling, all *people of* the earth.

10Shout out to the nations, "The Eternal reigns!
Yes, indeed, the world is anchored and will not shake loose.
He governs all people with a fair hand."
11And so, let the heavens resound in gladness!
Let joy be the earth's rhythm as the sea and all its creatures roar.
12Let the fields *grow in* triumph, *a grand jubilee* for all that live there.
Let all the trees of the forest *dig in and* reach high with songs of joy before the Eternal,
13For the Eternal is on His way:
yes, He is coming to judge the earth.
He will set the world right by His standards,
and by His faithfulness, *He will examine* the people.

Psalm 97

1The Eternal reigns *powerful over all*;
let the earth sing with joy;
let the *distant* islands celebrate.
2Clouds and deep darkness encircle Him;
righteousness and justice are the bedrock of His rule.
3Fire precedes Him;
it burns away His opponents on all sides.
4With His lightning *flashing about,* He illuminates the world;
the earth watches and trembles.
5Like wax *before the flame,* mountains melt when the Eternal appears,
the Master of the whole earth.

6The heavens display His *order and perfect* justice;
all peoples witness His magnificence.
7Those who worship idols,
who boast in the impotent creations of human hands, will be shamed.
Worship Him, all you gods.

8Zion heard and was glad,
and the daughters of Judah celebrated
because they saw Your justice, O Eternal One.
9For You are the Eternal, the Most High, over the entire world;
You far exceed all gods.

10Hate evil, you lovers of the Eternal.
He protects the souls of those who follow Him;
He rescues them from the devices of the wicked.
11Light is sown in the just;
as it grows, it brings joy to the pure of heart.
12Celebrate the Eternal God, *all you who are* faithful;
offer thanks to His holy name.

Psalm 98

A song.

1*Compose* a new song, and sing it to the Eternal
because of the unbelievable things He has done;
He has won the victory
with *the skill of* His right hand and *strength of* His holy arm.
2The Eternal has made it clear that He saves,
and He has shown the nations that He does what is right.
3He has been true to His promises;
fresh in His mind is His unfailing love
for all of Israel.
Even the ends of the earth have witnessed how our God saves.

This hymn invites all the people on earth and creation itself to join in singing a new song of "beautiful noise" celebrating God's justice and victories.

4Raise your voices; make a beautiful noise to the Eternal, all the earth.
Let your joy explode into song and praise;
5Make music to the Eternal with the harp;
sing a *beautiful* melody with the harp *and chorus.*
6With trumpets and horns,
fill the air with joyful sounds to the King, the Eternal.

7Let the sea *rumble and* roar, and all *the creatures* it holds *shout praise*;
let the *whole* world and all those who live in it *join the celebration.*
8Let the rivers applaud
and the mountains join in joyful song
9In the presence of the Eternal because He is coming
to judge the earth.
He is coming,
and His judgment will be what is right for the world
and just to all people.

Psalm 99

1The Eternal is the king *ruling over all;*
let all people shake *in fear.*
He sits on His throne, settled between winged guardians;*
let the planet tremble.
2The Eternal is great in *the hearts of His people*;
He has made Zion *His sacred mountain,*
and He reigns *majestic* over all people.
3Let them express praise *and gratitude* to Your amazing and awesome name—
because He is holy, *perfect and exalted in His power.*
4The King who rules with strength also treasures justice.
You *created order and* established what is right.
You have carried out justice
and done what is right to *the people of* Jacob.
5Lift up the Eternal our God *in your heart;*
bow down *to the earth* where He rests His feet.
He is holy, *perfect and exalted in His power.*

6Moses and Aaron were two of His priests;
Samuel was among those who called out to Him.
They asked the Eternal *for help,* and He answered them.
7He answered them from a column of cloud;

* 99:1 Literally, cherubim

Psalm 100 is one of the best known and most loved psalms. This hymn of thanksgiving invites the whole world to come to God's temple in Jerusalem and enter its sacred spaces with unbridled joy and hearts filled with gratitude. And why should we? The psalm provides the answer. Not only has God created us—a gracious act of love in and of itself—but He has made us His own people. He has chosen us and loved us. As with Psalm 23, God's people are cast in the role as sheep living well in His pasture.

The psalm ends on a high note of confidence and hope. At all times—but perhaps more in times of difficulty—we need to be reminded of what is true. Regardless of what seems to be happening around us, the Eternal is good; His love and faithfulness will endure forever.

they heeded His testimonies
and *lived by* the laws He gave them.

8You answered them, Eternal our God;
You were, to them, a God who forgives,
yet You *did not ignore* what they did wrong
and punished them *fairly as well.*
9Lift up the Eternal our God *in your hearts,*
and celebrate His goodness at His holy mountain,
for the Eternal our God is holy,
perfect and exalted in His power.

Psalm 100

A song of thanks.

1Raise your voices;
make a beautiful noise to the Eternal, all the earth.
2Serve the Eternal gladly;
enter into His presence singing songs of joy!

3Know this: the Eternal One Himself is the True God.
He is the One who made us;
we have not made ourselves;
we are His people, like sheep *grazing* in His fields.

4Go through His gates, giving thanks;
walk through His courts, giving praise.
Offer Him your gratitude and praise His *holy* name.

5Because the Eternal is good,
His loyal love *and mercy* will never end,
and His truth will last throughout all generations.

Psalm 101

A song of David.

1I will sing of *God's unsparing* love and justice;
to You, O Eternal One, I will sing praises.
2I will seek to live a life of integrity;
when will You come to me?

I will walk in my house
with an honest and true heart.
3I will refuse to look
on any sordid thing;

I detest the *worthless* deeds of those who stray;
evil will not get a hold on me.
4I will rid my heart of all perversion;
I will not flirt with any evil.

5Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor,
I will silence;
I will not tolerate
a condescending smirk, an arrogant heart.
6I will look for those who are loyal in the land
so that they may live with me *and know my pleasure.*
Whoever walks with integrity
will enter my service.

7The one who makes a habit of deceit
will not be welcome in my house;
The one who lies
will not remain in my presence for long.

8Every morning I will purge
all the wicked from the land
So as to rid the city of the Eternal
of those who practice evil.

Psalm 102

A prayer of the weak and oppressed, when he turns his complaints to the Eternal.

1 *Hear me,* O Eternal One, hear my prayer!
Hear my *lonely desperate* cry for help.
2 Do not hide from me
when my days *are filled* with anguish;
Lend Your ear to my wailing,
and answer me quickly when I call.

3 For my days *come and go,* vanishing like smoke,
and my bones are charred like *bricks of* a hearth.
4 My heart is beaten down like grass withered *and scorched in the summer heat*;
I can't even remember to eat.
5 *My body is shaken* by my groans;
my bones cling to my skin, *holding on for dear life.*
6 I am like a *solitary* owl in the wilderness;
I am a *lost and lonely screech* owl *at home* in the rubble.
7 *I stare at the ceiling,* awake in my bed;
I am alone, a *defenseless* sparrow perched on a roof.
8 All day long my enemies chide me;
those who mock me spit out my name as a curse.
9 For ashes have become my bread;
my tears fall into my drink
10 Because of the depth of Your wrath.
You have brought me up
and then hurled me aside.
11 My days go by like a long shadow—
stretched thin and disappearing—
I shrivel up like grass *baked in the hot sun.*

12 But You, O Eternal One, remain forever,
and Your name endures to all generations.
13 You will rise up *once again* and remember Your love for Zion;
it is time to have mercy on Your city;
yes, it is the *divinely* appointed time.
14 Your *faithful* servants take pleasure in her *every* stone;
they *even* delight in the dust *of her streets.*
15 *Days are coming when* nations will tremble at the name of the Eternal;
all the rulers of the earth *will bow down to* Your glory.
16 For He will *return to* rebuild *His city,* Zion;
He will be seen in His splendor.
17 He will listen to the prayer of the impoverished
and welcome their prayers.

18 Let this record be kept for posterity
so that people not yet born may praise the Eternal.
19 *Tell them that* He looked down from holy heights, *His heavenly sanctuary;*
the Eternal looked down from heaven and closely watched the earth,
20 Hearing the prisoners' groans—
releasing those awaiting execution—
21 That the name of the Eternal would resound in Zion,
and His praise would be proclaimed in Jerusalem
22 When the peoples gather
and the nations' *leaders assemble* to worship the Eternal.

23 Along my way He has sapped my strength;
He has shortened my days *here on earth.*
24 I said, "O my True God, don't take me away
in the middle of my life;
Unlike me, Your years continually unfold
throughout all generations."

25 In the beginning, You laid the foundation of the earth
and set the skies above us with Your own hands.
26 *But while* they will someday pass away,
You remain *forever*;
when they wear out like old clothes,
You will *roll them up and* change them into something new, and they will pass away.
27 But You are the same, *You will never change;*
Your years will never *come to an* end.*
28 The children of those who serve You will enjoy a *good,* long life;
their offspring will stand strong before You.

* 102:25-27 Hebrews 1:10-12

Psalm 103

A song of David.

1 O my soul, *come,* praise the Eternal
with all that is in me—*body,*
emotions, mind, and will—every
part of who I am—
praise His holy name.
2 O my soul, *come,* praise the Eternal;
sing a song from a grateful heart;
sing and never forget all the good
He has done.
3 Despite all your *many* offenses, He
forgives *and releases you.*
More than any doctor, He heals your
diseases.
4 He reaches *deep* into the pit to deliver
you from death.
He crowns you with unfailing love
and compassion *like a king.*
5 *When your soul is famished and withering,*
He fills you with good *and beautiful*
things, satisfying you as long as
you live.
He makes you *strong* like an eagle,
restoring your youth.

6 When people are crushed, *wronged,*
enslaved, raped, murdered,
the Eternal is just;
He makes the wrongs right.
7 He showed Moses His ways;
He allowed His people Israel to see
His *wonders and* acts *of power.*
8 The Eternal is compassionate and
merciful.
When we cross all the lines, He is
patient *with us.*
When we struggle against Him, He
lovingly stays with us—*changing,*
convicting, prodding;
9 He will not constantly criticize,
nor will He hold a grudge forever.
10 *Thankfully,* God does not punish us for
our sins and depravity as we
deserve.
In His mercy, He tempers justice with
peace.
11 *Measure* how high heaven is above the
earth;
God's *wide,* loving, kind heart is
greater for those who revere
Him.
12 *You see,* God takes *all* our crimes—*our*
seemingly inexhaustible sins—
and removes them.
As far as east is from the west, *He*
removes them from us.
13 An *earthly* father expresses love for his
children;
it is no different *with our heavenly*
Father;
The Eternal shows His love for those
who revere Him.
14 For He knows what we are made of;
He knows our frame is frail, and He
remembers we came from dust.

15 The children of Adam are like grass;
their days *are few*;
they flourish for a time like flowers
in a meadow.
16 As the wind blows over the field and
the bloom is gone,
it doesn't take much to blow us out of
the memory of that place.
17 But the unfailing love of the Eternal is
always and eternal
for those who reverently run after
Him.
He extends His justice *on and on* to
future generations,
18 To those who will keep His bond of love
and remember to walk in the
guidance of His commands.

19 The Eternal has established His throne
up in the heavens.
He rules over every seen and
unseen realm and creature.
20 Adore Him! *Give Him praise,* you
heavenly messengers,
you powerful *creatures who listen to*
and act on His every word.
21 Give praise to the Eternal, all armies *of*
heaven—
you servants who stand ready to do
His will.
22 Give praise to the Eternal, all that He
has made
in all corners of His creation.
O my soul, *come,* praise the Eternal!

Psalm 104

1 Call Him good, my soul, *and praise* the
Eternal.
I am here to declare my affection for
You, Eternal One, my God.
You are indeed great—
You who are wrapped in glory and
dressed in greatness.
2 For covering, You choose light—Your
clothes, *sunset and moonrise.*
For a tent, You stretch out the
heavens; *for Your roof, You pitch*
the sky.
3 Your upper chamber is built on beams
that lie in the waters overhead,
and the clouds, Your chariot;
You are held aloft by the wind.

4You make Your messengers like the winds;
the breeze whispers Your words,
Your servants are like the fire and flame.

5You made the earth,
and You made its frame stable forever.
Never will it be shaken.
6You wrapped it in a gown of waters—
ancient mountains under layers of sky.
7But when You reprimanded those waters, they fled;
the thunder of Your voice sent them running away.
8-9They hammered out new depths, heaved up new heights,
and swallowed up whatever You commanded.
At first, they covered the earth,
but now You have bound them,
and they know their appointed place.

10You send *fresh* streams that spring up in the valleys,
in the cracks between hills.
11Every animal of the *open* field makes its journey there for drink:
wild donkeys lap *at the brooks' edges.*
12Birds build their nests by the streams,
singing among the branches.
13*And the clouds, too, drink up their share,*
raining it back down on the mountains from the upper reaches of Your home,
Sustaining the whole earth with what comes from You.
And the earth is satisfied.

14-15Thus You grow grain for bread, *grapes for wine,* grass for cattle—
all of this for us.
And so we have bread to make our bodies strong,
wine to make our hearts happy,
oil to make our faces shine.
Every good thing we need, Your earth provides;
our faces grow flush with Your life in them.
16The forests are Yours, Eternal One—
stout hardwoods watered deeply, *swollen with sap—*
like the *great* cedars of Lebanon You planted,
17Where *many* birds nest.
There are fir trees for storks,

18High hills for wild goats,
stony cliffs for rock badgers.
For each place, a resident,
and for each resident, a home.
19The moon *strides through her phases,*
marking seasons as she goes.
The sun hides at his appointed time,
20And with the darkness You bring, so comes night—
when the prowling animals of the forest move about.
21*It is then that* lions seek the food You, the True God, give them,
roaring after their prey.
22At sunrise, they disappear
and sleep *away the day* in their dens.
23*Meanwhile,* the people take *to the fields and to the shops and to the roads,*
to all the places that people work, until evening *when they rest.*

24There is so much here, O Eternal One, so much You have made.
By the wise way in which You create, *riches and* creatures fill the earth.
25*Of course,* the sea is vast and stretches *like the heavens beyond view,*
and numberless creatures inhabit her.
From the tiny to the great, they swarm beneath her waves.
26Our ships skim her surface
while the monsters of the sea play beneath.

27And all of these look to You
to give them food when the time is right.
28When You feed, they gather what You supply.
When You open Your hand, they are filled with good *food.*
29When You withdraw Your presence, they are dismayed.
When You revoke their breath, the life goes out of them,
and they become, again, the dust *of the earth from which You formed them at the start.*
30When You send out Your breath, life is created,
and the face of the earth *is made beautiful* and is renewed.

31May the glorious presence of the Eternal linger *among us* forever.
And may He rejoice in *the greatness of* His own works—

The last phrase of Psalm 104, "Praise the Eternal," gives us a clear picture of the use of these songs in Israel. This phrase, which not only ends Psalm 104 but often opens and closes other psalms (for example, Psalms 146–150), is not part of the song itself. It is a direction for worship.

The Bible indicates that praise is the natural response to God's gifts to His people. When David brought the covenant chest to Jerusalem, he appointed Asaph and his relatives to lead in praise. After the Levites chanted a marvelous psalm, the people responded in praise to the Eternal (1 Chronicles 16:36). In John's vision of the final destruction of Babylon—a symbol for God's enemies throughout all the ages—a vast number of creatures in heaven, the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures offer praise and adoration to the Lord (Revelation 18 and 19). Praise is simply the inevitable response of God's people to all He is and all He has done.

32He, who rattles the earth with a glance;
He, who sets mountains to smoking with a touch.
33I will sing to the Eternal all of my life;
I will call my God good as long as I live.
34May the thoughts of my mind be pleasing to Him,
for the Eternal has become my happiness.
35But may those who hate Him, who act against Him,
disappear from *the face of* this *beautiful* planet.
As for the Eternal, call Him good, my soul.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 105

1*Come,* offer thanks to the Eternal;
invoke His *holy* name.
Tell other people about the things He has done.
2Sing songs of praise to Him;
tell *stories* of all His miracles.
3Revel in His holy name.
May the hearts of the people who seek the Eternal celebrate and experience *great* joy.
4Seek the Eternal and His power;
look to His face constantly.
5Remember the wonderful things He has done,
His miracles and the wise decisions He has made,
6O children of Abraham, His servant;
O children of Jacob, His chosen people!

7He is the Eternal, our True God;
His justice extends to every corner of the earth.
8He keeps His covenant *promises* forever
and remembers the word He spoke to a thousand generations—
9The covenant He made with Abraham and His *sworn* oath to Isaac, *his son.*
10Then God confirmed it to Jacob—decreed it so—
to Israel He promised a never-ending covenant,
11Saying, "I will give you the land of Canaan
as your part; it will be your inheritance."

12When *God's* people were only a few in number—
indeed, very few—they were strangers in a foreign land.
13They roamed from place to place,
from one kingdom to another.
14God didn't allow anyone to tyrannize them;
He rebuked kings in order to protect His people:
15"Do not lay a hand on My anointed people;
do not do any harm to My prophets."

16He ordered famine to grip the land and cut them off from their supply of bread.
17*But long before,* He had sent a man ahead of them:
Joseph, who had been sold into slavery.*
18*At first,* his masters shackled his feet with chains,
placed his neck into a collar of iron.
19That was until the Eternal's promises came to pass;
His word tested Joseph *and proved him worthy.*

* 105:17 Genesis 37; 39-50

20The king sent *out the order* to release
him *from prison*;
the ruler *of Egypt* liberated him
from the chains.
21Then he put Joseph in charge of the
royal household,
made him ruler of all the royal
possessions,
22*Allowed him* to imprison the royal
officials whenever he saw fit
and impart wisdom to the elders *in
the land*.

23Then, *when the time was right,* Israel
also went to Egypt;
Jacob resided as an alien in the land
of Ham.
24And *while they were there,* the Eternal
made His people prosperous;
He made them stronger than their
enemies.
25He turned the Egyptians' hearts against
His people*
to cheat and scheme against His
servants.

26Then, He sent His servant Moses
and Aaron, the men He had
chosen.
27They did all the signs He planned
for them to do among the
Egyptians,
and they performed miracles in the
land of Ham.
28He sent darkness to cover the land;
they did not stray from His word.
29At His command, their waters turned
to blood;
their fish began to die.
30Throngs of frogs covered the land,
invading even in the chambers of
their kings.
31At His command, a swarm of flies
arrived,
and gnats came over all their land.
32He caused hail to fall instead of rain;
lightning flashed over all their land.
33He struck their vines and their fig trees;
He destroyed the trees over all their
land.
34At His command, locusts came;
young locusts *marched* beyond
number,
35And they ate up all the plants that grew
and all the fruits over their land.
36He also brought death to the firstborn
in all their land,
the first offspring of each man.

37Then He brought His people out *of
slavery, weighed down* with silver
and gold;
and of all His tribes,
not one of them stumbled, *not one
was left behind*.
38Egypt was glad to see them go,
for Pharaoh's people had been
overcome with fear of them.
39He spread out a cloud to cover *His
people*
and sent a fire to light *their way* at
night.
40They asked, and He sent them *coveys
of* quail,
satisfying their hunger with the food
of heaven.
41He split the rock and water poured out;
it flowed like a river through the
desert.
42For He remembered His holy covenant
with Abraham, His servant.

43That's why He rescued His people
joyously
and why His chosen ones celebrated
with shouts and singing.
44*When the time was right,* He gave them
land from other nations
so that they might possess the
works of their hands,
45So that they would be able to keep His
commands
and obey His laws.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 106

1Praise the Eternal!
Thank Him because He is good
and His loyal love will never end.
2Who could *find words to* tell of the
Eternal's mighty deeds
or give Him all the praise *He
deserves*?
3Blessed are those who work for justice,
who always do *what they know to
be* right!

4Remember me, O Eternal One, when You
show kindness to Your people;
don't forget me when You are
saving them.
5That way I can know how good it is to
be Your chosen people;
that way I can celebrate the joy of
Your nation;
that way I can join those who belong
to You in *unending* praise.

* 105:25 Exodus 1–15

► Psalm 106 was composed during the exile offering a historical review of the ways God's people rebelled against Him. It is a fitting closure to Book Four of Psalms. After this liturgy of failure on the part of the people, the psalmist cries out in thanksgiving for God's faithfulness and in the final verse proclaims praise "from everlasting to everlasting."

6 Like our ancestors, we have sinned;
we have done wicked things.
7 When our ancestors were leaving Egypt,
they did not consider Your marvelous acts.
They forgot Your overwhelming kindness to them
and instead rebelled at the Red Sea.*
8 Nevertheless, God saved them for the honor of His name
so He could show His power *to the world.*
9 He gave the order, and *the waters of* the Red Sea dried up,
and He led the people across the sea floor as though it were the wilderness.
10 That's how He liberated them from their enemies
and rescued them from the hand of their oppressors.
11 *After that* the sea *surged and* covered their foes,
and every one of them drowned *in its waters.*
12 When God's people *saw what He did,* they believed what He said
and they sang praises to Him.

13 But it didn't take long for them to forget what He had done.
They moved on without waiting for His instructions,
14 So our ancestors became very hungry in the wilderness
and the rabble grumbled and complained, testing God's patience in the desert.
15 Although He granted their request,
He *also* sent a disease that caused them to waste away.
16 While they were camped *in the desert,* some began to be jealous of Moses
and Aaron, the holy priest of the Eternal.
17 The earth opened up, and *a deep fissure* swallowed Dathan
and buried Abiram's group.
18 A blaze ignited where they were gathered;
the fire consumed the wicked *mob.*

19 The people made a *golden* calf in Horeb
and bowed to worship an image they had made.
20 They traded the glory *of God*
for the likeness of an ox that eats grass.
21 They forgot about God, their True Savior,
who had done great things *for them* in Egypt—
22 Miracles in the land of Ham
and amazing deeds at the Red Sea.
23 Therefore, He declared *in His anger* that He would wipe them away.
If Moses, His chosen one,
Had not pleaded *for the people,*
His anger would have destroyed them.

24 At the *edge of the* beautiful land *God had promised them,*
they didn't trust His words, so they refused to enter.
25 They complained *when they were gathered* in their tents;
they ignored the voice of the Eternal.
26 Because of their attitude, He swore,
"I'll leave you where you fall in the desert.
27 I'll scatter your children—*whoever is left*—
throughout the nations all over the earth."

28 Then they aligned themselves with the god of Peor,
and they ate sacrifices that had been made to lifeless *gods.*
29 Through their actions, they stirred up His anger,
and a plague broke out in their midst.
30 Then Phinehas took a stand and intervened,
so the plague was stopped.
31 And God *saw what he did and* considered him righteous,
a man to *be honored by* all generations forever.

* 106:7 Literally, Sea of Reeds

Book Five (Psalms 107–150) succinctly presents many of the major themes of the previous psalms. It tracks along Israel's history as God's nation, from the united monarchy, through the exile, to the restoration. Psalm 107 is a song of thanksgiving composed by those who survived exile and made their way home. As in Isaiah, the return from exile is described as a new exodus. Three Davidic psalms toward the beginning of Book Five represent the monarchy and recall Israel's golden age. The Songs for the Journey to Worship (Psalm 120–134) are composed for use by God's people as they traveled from their homes up to Zion to worship God at the temple. Representing their time in exile are songs of lament, heartbreaking testimonies to individuals' pain when they are crushed by their enemies and separated from God's blessings. Finally, Book Five concludes the collection by offering praise and thanks to God, for the story of Israel does not end with its exile and separation; rather, it ends in restoration and hope. Those who edited and compiled the Book of Psalms were relieved to be back in the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—rebuilding their temple and reestablishing their connection with God.

32Again they stirred up His anger at the
waters of Meribah,
and serious trouble came to Moses
because of them;
33Because they stood against the Spirit,
Moses spoke rashly with them.

34*Later, after they entered the promised
land,* they did not eradicate the
peoples,
as the Eternal had ordered them
to do,
35But they mixed *and married* with the
outsider nations,
adopted their practices,
36And worshiped their idols,
which entrapped them.
37They even offered their sons
and daughters as sacrifices to the
demons.
38The *promised* land was corrupted by
the innocent blood
they offered to the idols of
Canaan,
The blood of their *very own* sons and
daughters.
39They became impure because of their
unfaithful works;
by their actions, they prostituted
themselves *to other gods.*

40Therefore the Eternal's anger was
ignited against His people;
He came to despise *the people of*
His inheritance.
41So He handed them over to the control
of foreign nations,
to be ruled by people who hated
them.
42Their enemies *exploited them,*
victimized them,
and restrained them by *abusive*
power.
43He delivered them over and over again;
however, they *were slow to learn
and* deliberately rebelled.
Their sins humbled them *and
nearly destroyed them.*
44Nevertheless, He saw their great
struggle, *took pity on them,*
and heard their prayers;
45He did not forget His covenant
promises to them
but reversed *their fortune and
released them* from their
punishment
because of His loyal love.
46He changed the hearts of all who held
them captive
so that they would show
compassion on them.

47Save us, O Eternal One our God,
and gather us who are scattered
among all the nations,
That we may give thanks to Your holy
name
and celebrate Your *amazing*
greatness with praise.

48Blessed be the Eternal, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
And let everyone say, "Amen!"
Praise the Eternal!

BOOK FIVE

Psalm 107

1Erupt with thanks to the Eternal, for
He is good
and His loyal love lasts forever.

2Let all those redeemed by the Eternal—
those rescued from *times of deep*
trouble—join in *giving thanks.*
3He has gathered them across the earth,
from east and west,
from [north and south].*

4Some drifted around in the desert
and found no place where they
could live.
5Their bellies growled with hunger; their
mouths were dry with thirst;
their souls grew weak and weary.
6In their distress, they called out to the
Eternal,
and He saved them from their
misery.
7*He showed them the best path; then* He
led them down the right road
until they arrived at an inhabited
town.
8May they *erupt with praise and* give
thanks to the Eternal
in honor of His loyal love
And all the wonders He has performed
for humankind!
9He has quenched their thirst,
and He has satisfied their hunger
with what is good.

10Some people were *locked up* in dark
prisons, confined in gloom *as*
bleak as death.
They were captives bound by *iron*
chains and misery,
11All because they had rebelled against
the directives of the True God
and had rejected the wisdom of the
Most High.
12So they suffered the heaviness of *slave*
labor;
when they stumbled *and fell,* there
was no one to help *them up.*
13In their distress, they called out to the
Eternal;
He saved them from their misery.
14He rescued them from the darkness,
delivered them from the deepest
gloom *of death*;
He shattered their *iron* chains.
15May they *erupt with praise and* give
thanks to the Eternal
in honor of His loyal love
And all the wonders He has performed
for humankind!
16He has broken down the bronze gates
and severed the iron bars *that*
imprisoned them.
17Some people became fools infected by
their rebellious ways,
and sickness followed because of
their sins.
18*Afflicted and weak,* they refused any
sort of food
as they approached the gates of
death.
19In their distress, they called out to the
Eternal,
and He saved them from their
misery.
20He gave the order and healed them
and rescued them from *certain*
death.
21May they *erupt with praise and* give
thanks to the Eternal
in honor of His loyal love
And all the wonders He has performed
for humankind!
22Let them present to Him thanksgiving
sacrifices
and tell *stories* of His *great* deeds
through songs of joy.

23Some set out to sea in ships,
traveling across mighty seas in
order to trade *in foreign lands.*
24They witnessed the *powerful* acts of the
Eternal,
marveled at the great wonders He
revealed over the deep *waters.*
25For He spoke and summoned a violent
wind
that whipped up the waves of the
sea.
26*Relentless* waves lifted *the ships* high in
the sky, then drove them down
to the depths;
the sailors' courage dissolved into
misery.
27They staggered and stumbled around
like drunkards,
and they had no idea what to do.
28In their distress, they called out to the
Eternal,
and He saved them from their
misery.
29He commanded the storm to calm
down, *and it became still.*
A hush came over the waves of the
sea,
30The sailors were delighted at the
quiet,
and He guided them to their port.
31May they *erupt with praise and* give
thanks to the Eternal
in honor of His loyal love

* 107:3 Hebrew manuscripts read, "and the sea."

And all the wonders He has performed
for humankind!
32Let them glorify Him in the assembly of
His people
and worship Him in the presence of
the elders.

33God transforms *wild, flowing* rivers into
dry, lonely deserts,
lively springs of water into thirsty
ground.
34He turns lush gardens into lifeless
wastelands,
all because of the wickedness of
those who reside there.
35Yet He transforms a *dry, lonely* desert
into pools of *living* water,
parched ground into lively springs.
36And He allows those who are hungry to
live there
so that they might build a livable
city.
37There they sow fields and plant
vineyards
and gather up an abundant harvest.
38*He anoints them* with His blessings, and
they greatly increase in number.
He does not allow their herds to
dwindle.

39When His people lessen *in number* and
are humbled
through persecution, suffering, and
brokenheartedness,
40He pours out contempt on *those
responsible* leaders
and then makes them drift around
in an uncharted wasteland.
41But He raises the poor away from their
suffering
and multiplies their families like a
flock.
42The righteous see God's actions, and
they take delight *in what He
does,*
but the unrighteous don't dare to
speak.
43*Is there anyone wise? If so,* may the wise
take notice of these things
and reflect upon the loyal love of
the Eternal.

Psalm 108

A song of David.

1My heart is committed, O God:
I will sing;
I will sing praises *with great affection*
and pledge my whole soul to the
singing.
2Wake up the harp and lyre, *and strum
the strings;*
I will stir the sleepy dawn *from
slumber*!
3I will *stand and* offer You my thanks,
Eternal One, in the presence of
others;
I will sing of Your greatness among
the nations *no matter where
I am.*
4For Your amazing love soars *overhead*
far into the heavens;
Your truth rises up to the clouds
where passing light bends.

5O God, that You would be lifted up
above the heavens *in the hearts
of Your people*
until the whole earth knows Your
glory.
6*Reach down and* rescue those whom
You love;
pull us to safety by Your *mighty*
right hand, and answer me.
7God's voice has been heard in His holy
sanctuary:
"I will celebrate.
I will allocate Shechem and the
Succoth Valley *to My people.*
8Gilead belongs to Me, and so does
Manasseh;
Ephraim is the helmet that protects
My head;
Judah is the scepter through which
I rule;
9Moab is the washpot in which I clean
Myself;
I will throw My shoe over Edom *in
conquest*;
Philistia will soon hear My *victory*
shout."

10But who will take me into the fortified
city?
Who will lead me into Edom?
11Have You not turned Your back on us,
O God?
Will You *stay away and* not
accompany our armies,
O God?
12Help us against our enemy; *we need
Your help!*
It's useless to trust in the hand of
man *for liberation.*
13Only through God can we be
successful.
It is God *alone* who will defeat
our enemies *and bring us
victory*!

Psalm 109

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1 O True God of my *every* praise, do not
keep silent!
2 My enemies have opened their wicked,
deceit-filled mouths *and blown
their foul breath* on me.
They have slandered me with their
twisted tongues
3 And unleashed loathsome words that
swirl around me.
Though I have done nothing, they
attack me.
4 Though I offer them love and keep them
in my prayers, they accuse me;
5 Though I treat them well, they answer
me with evil;
though I give them love, they reply
with *a gesture of* hatred.

6 *Here's what they say:* Find some evil
scoundrel to go after him.
Let's get some accuser *to level
charges* against him.
7 At his trial, let's make sure he is found
guilty
so that even his prayers become
evidence *that convicts him.*
8 Let his days be few, *his life cut short;*
let another take over his position.
9 *Lay waste to his family—*
let his children become orphans
and his wife a widow.
10 Let his children wander *the streets—his
legacy, homeless* beggars
scavenging for food,
[driven out of]* the rubble *and
slums* where they live.
11 Let the bankers take what is his;
strangers help themselves to *what
little is left of* all he's earned.
12 Let there be no one around to offer him
compassion,
nor anyone to give his fatherless
children *warmth or* kindness.
13 Let his family line come to an end—
no future generations to carry on
his name!
14 Let the sins of his fathers be
remembered before the Eternal,
and the sins of his mother never be
erased.
15 Let their offenses always be before the
Eternal
so that the memory of this family is
long forgotten by *all the people
of* the earth,
16 Because it never occurred to him to
show compassion;
instead, he oppressed the poor,
afflicted,
and brokenhearted and sent them
to their death.
17 He loved to invoke a curse—so let his
curses come back to him.
He preferred not to speak a
blessing—so let all blessings be
far from him.
18 He wrapped himself with cursing,
draped around him like a cape;
may it flood his body like water
and *seep* into his bones like oil.
19 Let those curses wrap around him like
a cloak *on a cold night,*
like a belt tightly knotted around
him every day.
20 Let the Eternal so reward my accusers,
all those who speak and plot evil
against me.
21 But You, my Master, the Eternal,
treat me with kindness for the sake
of Your name, *the good of Your
reputation;*
because Your unfailing love is so
good, O deliver me!
22 *You see,* I am poor and needy,
and my heart is broken inside me.
23 My life is fading away like a shadow
that vanishes in the evening;
I am like a locust easily brushed off
the shoulder.
24 *I can barely stand;* my knees are weak
from not eating;
I am *haggard and drawn,* just skin
and bones.
25 I have become a person of contempt to
my accusers;
whenever they see me, they *taunt
me,* shaking their heads *in
disapproval.*

26 Help me, Eternal One my God; *come to
my rescue!*
Save me through Your unfailing
love.
27 Let everyone know that You are the
source *of my salvation*
that You, Eternal One, have done
this *mighty work.*
28 Let them utter a curse, *if they will,* but
You will speak a blessing;
[when they come to attack,]* let
them know *utter* shame.
Then Your servant will celebrate
and praise You!

* 109:10 Hebrew manuscripts read, "sought among." * 109:28 Greek manuscripts omit this portion.

Psalm 110 may have been written to celebrate the coronation of one of David's sons as king. The Eternal invites the royal son of David to take his rightful place at His right hand, the place of power and authority—not just over Jerusalem but over his enemies as well. But the royal son is to be more than a king, he is to be a priest according the order of that mysterious and enigmatic figure, Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-24). God promises to give this royal priest-king victory over his enemies as he marches out to war.

This psalm is the psalm most quoted by early Christian writers in the New Testament. As they considered the significance of Jesus, they found that this psalm, more than any, expressed their conviction that the risen Jesus now occupies a unique place at God's right hand and will be victorious over His enemies.

29 Let my enemies be clothed with
disgrace *and humiliation*;
let them be dressed in a robe of
their own shame.
30 I will continually give thanks to the
Eternal
with *the praises of* my mouth;
I will praise Him in the company
of many.
31 For He *always* stands in support of the
afflicted and needy
to rescue their souls from those
who judge *and condemn* them.

Psalm 110

A song of David.

1 The Eternal said to my lord,
"Sit here at My right hand,
in the place of honor and power,
And I will gather your enemies
together,
lead them in on hands and knees;
you will rest your feet on their
backs."

2 The Eternal will extend your reach as
you rule
from *your throne on* Zion.
You will be out in enemy lands,
ruling.
3 Your people will come as volunteers
that day; *they will be a sight to
see:*
on that day, you will lead your army,
noble in their holiness.
As the new day dawns and dew settles
on the grass,
your young *volunteers* will make
their way to you.
4 The Eternal has sworn an oath
and cannot change His mind:
"You are a priest forever—
in the *honored* order of Melchizedek."

5 The lord is at Your right hand;
on the day that his fury comes *to its
peak,* he will crush kings.
6 *You will see* the dead *in heaps at the
roadside,*
corpses spread far and wide *in
valleys and on hillsides.*
Rulers and military leaders will lie
among them *without distinction.*
This will be his judgment on the
nations.
7 There is a brook along the way.
He will *stop there and* drink;
And when he is finished,
he will raise his head.

Psalm 111*

1 Praise the Eternal.
I will thank Him with all my heart
in the presence of the
right-standing and with the
assembly.
2 The works of the Eternal are *many and*
wondrous!
They are examined by all who
delight in them.
3 His work is *marked with* beauty and
majesty;
His justice has no end.
4 His wonders are reminders that
the Eternal is gracious and
compassionate *to all.*
5 He provides food to those who revere
Him.
He will always remember His
covenant.
6 He has shown the mighty strength of
His works to His people
by giving the land of *foreign* nations
to them.
7 *All* His accomplishments are truth and
justice;
all His instructions are certain.

* Psalm 111 A Hebrew acrostic poem

8His precepts will continue year in and
year out,
performed *by His people* with
honesty and truth.
9He has redeemed His people,
guaranteeing His covenant forever.
His name is holy and awe-inspiring.
10Reverence for the Eternal is the first
step toward wisdom.
All those who worship Him have a
good understanding.
His praise will echo through eternity!

Psalm 112*

1Praise the Eternal!
How blessed are those who revere
the Eternal,
who *turn from evil and* take great
pleasure in His commandments.
2Their children will be a *powerful* force
upon the earth;
this generation that does what
is right *in God's eyes* will be
blessed.
3His house will be stocked with wealth
and riches,
and His *love for* justice will endure
for all time.
4When *life is* dark, a light will shine for
those who live rightly—
those who are merciful,
compassionate, and strive for
justice.
5Good comes to all who are gracious
and share freely;
they conduct their affairs with
sound judgment.
6Nothing will ever rattle them;
the just will always be remembered.
7They will not be afraid when the news
is bad
because they have resolved to trust
in the Eternal.
8Their hearts are confident, and they are
fearless,
for they *expect to* see their enemies
defeated.
9They give freely to the poor;
their righteousness endures for all
time;*
their *strength and* power is
established in honor.
10The wicked will be infuriated when
they see *the good man honored*!
They will clench their teeth and
dissolve to nothing;
and when they go, their wicked
desires will follow.

* Psalm 112 A Hebrew acrostic poem * 112:9 2 Corinthians 9:9

► Psalms 113–118 comprise an important unit called the *Hallel,* which in Hebrew means "praise." Composed after the exile, these six psalms are recited together by observant Jews during some of the major holidays on the Jewish calendar. The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus and His disciples sang a song following their last meal together, which was the Passover (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). That may have been the *Hallel*.

Psalm 113

1Praise the Eternal!
All of you who call yourselves the
children of the Eternal, *come
and* praise His name.
*Lift Him high to the high place in
your hearts.*

2At this moment, and for all the
moments yet to come,
may the Eternal's name ascend *in
the hearts of His people.*
3*At every time and in every place*—
from *the moment* the sun rises to
the moment the sun sets—
may the name of the Eternal be
high *in the hearts of His people.*

4The Eternal is seated high above every
nation.
His glory fills the skies.

5To whom should we compare the
Eternal, our God?
No one.
From His seat, high above,
6He deigns to observe the earth and her
thin skies,
*stooping even to see her goings on,
far beneath His feet.*
7He gathers up the poor from their dirt
floors,
pulls the needy from the trash heaps,
8And places them among heads of state,
seated next to the rulers of His people
where they cannot be ignored.
9Into the home of the childless bride,
He sends children who are, for her,
a cause of happiness *beyond
measure.*
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 114

1When the time came for Israel to leave
Egypt—
for Jacob's family *to be free* of those
who spoke another language—
2God chose to make Judah His sacred
place,
and Israel became His realm.

3*And the waters of* the sea witnessed
God's actions and ran away;
the Jordan, too, turned around and
ran back *to where it came from.*
4*All of* the mountains leapt with *the
strength of mighty* rams,
and all of the hills *danced* with *the
joy of little* lambs.

5Why do you retreat, O sea?
Why do you roll back *your waters,*
O Jordan?
6Why, O mountains, do you leap with
the strength of rams?
Why, O hills, *do you dance with joy*
like *little* lambs?

7Shudder and quake, O you earth, at the
sight of the Lord.
The God of Jacob comes,
8Who turns rock into pools of *refreshing*
water
and flint into fountains of *life-giving*
streams!

Psalm 115

1Not for us, O Eternal One; this glory is
not for us—but for Your name
because of Your loyal love and truth.
2Why should the nations ask,
"Where is their God *now*?"

3Our God is in heaven
doing whatever He chooses.
4Those nations worship idols of silver
and gold,
crafted by human hands:
5They have *given their gods* mouths, but
they cannot speak;
eyes, but they cannot see.
6They have *provided their idols with* ears,
but they cannot hear;
noses, but they cannot smell.
7They have *fashioned* hands, but the
idols cannot *reach out and*
touch;
feet, but they cannot walk.
Their idols cannot make a sound in
their *finely crafted* throats.

8The people who make idols will
become *useless* like them,
like all who trust in idols.

9O Israel, put your trust in the Eternal.
He is their helper and defender.
10O family of Aaron, put your trust in the
Eternal.
He is their helper and defender.
11All who fear *and know* the Eternal, put
your trust in Him.
He is their helper and defender.

12The Eternal has remembered us, and
He will bless us.
He will bless the people of Israel.
He will bless the *priestly* family of
Aaron.
13The Eternal will bless those who *worship
and* stand in awe of Him,
from the least to the greatest.

14May the Eternal prosper your family,
growing both you and your
descendants.
15May the blessings of the Eternal,
maker of heaven and earth, be on
you.

16The heavens above belong to the
Eternal,
and yet earth *in all of its beauty* has
been given to humanity by Him.
17The dead do not praise the Eternal,
nor do any who descend into the
silent *grave*.
18But we will *praise and* bless You—our
Eternal One—
today and forever.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 116

1I love the Eternal; for not only does He
hear
my voice, my pleas for mercy,
2But He leaned *down when I was in
trouble and brought* His ear close
to me.
So as long as I have breath, I will
call on Him.
3*Once* I was wound in the wrappings of
death;
the terror of *dying and* the grave
had a grip on me;
I could not get away, for I was
entombed in distress and sorrow.
4Then I called on the name of the
Eternal:
"O Eternal One—I am begging
You—save me!"

5The Eternal is full of grace and
naturally just;
our God is compassionate *and*
merciful.
6And the Eternal watches over the naive.
Whenever I was knocked down, He
reached down and saved me.
7O my soul! Return *and relax. Come* to
your *true* rest,
for the Eternal has showered you
with His favor.

8*God,* You *alone* rescued my soul from
the grips of death,
my eyes from weeping,
and my feet from slipping.
9I will come before the Eternal
as long as I journey in the land of
the living.
10I believed *Your promise*; therefore I spoke,
"I am in deep trouble."
11In my confusion I blurted out,
"All people are liars!"

12How will I pay back the Eternal
for all His graciousness toward me?
13I will raise the cup of deliverance
and call out the name of the Eternal.
14I will fulfill the promises I made to Him
here *as a witness* to all His people.

15Precious in the eyes of the Eternal
are the deaths of those who follow
after Him.
16O Eternal One, *You know* I am Your
servant.
I am Your servant, a child of Your
maidservant, *devoted to You;*
You have cut me loose from the
chains *of death* that bind me.
17And I *come, eager to* offer a sacrifice of
gratitude
and call on the name of the Eternal.
18I will fulfill the promises I made to Him
here as a witness to all His people
19In the courts of the Eternal's temple,
among the people *of God's city,*
O Jerusalem.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 117

1Praise the Eternal, all nations.
Raise your voices, all people.*
2For His unfailing love is great, and it is
intended for us,
and His faithfulness *to His promises*
knows no end.
Praise the Eternal!

* 117:1 Romans 15:11

Psalm 118

1Give thanks to the Eternal because He
is *always* good.
He never ceases to be loving and
kind.

2Let *the people of* Israel proclaim:
"He never ceases to be loving and
kind."
3Let *the priests of* Aaron's line proclaim:
"He never ceases to be loving and
kind."
4Let the people who fear the Eternal
proclaim:
"He never ceases to be loving and
kind."

5When trouble surrounded me, I cried
out to the Eternal;
He answered me and brought me to
a wide, open space.
6The Eternal is with me,
so I will not be afraid of anything.
If God is on my side, how can
anyone hurt me?
7The Eternal is on my side, a champion
for my cause;
so when I look at those who hate
me, victory will be in sight.
8It is better to put your faith in the
Eternal *for your security*
than to trust in people.
9It is better to put your faith in Him *for*
your security
than to trust in princes.

10All *these* nations surround me,
squeezing me from all sides;
with the name of the Eternal, I will
destroy them.
11They *rose up against me,* squeezed
me from all sides, yes, from all
sides;
with the name of the Eternal, I will
destroy them.
12They surrounded me like *a swarm of*
bees;
they were destroyed *quickly and*
thoroughly—
Flaring up like a pile of thorns—
with the name of the Eternal, I will
destroy them.
13I was pushed *back,* attacked so that
I was about to fall,
but the Eternal was there to help
me *keep my balance.*
14He is my strength, and He is the reason
I sing;

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the collection. It is a hymn in praise of and appreciation for God's instructions to His people. You see, God not only called Israel to be His people and gave them a wonderful land, but He gave them a blueprint for living. The Hebrew word for that is *torah,* sometimes translated "law" or "teachings." In *torah* God tells them how to structure their lives and communities so that they will live long, prosperous lives in the land He has given them. As you read through the psalm, you will notice words like law, teachings, precepts, word, decrees, and commands. Each of these words is a synonym highlighting some attribute of God's instructions to His people.

Another memorable feature of this psalm is its form. The psalmist constructs this hymn as an elaborate acrostic poem that moves artfully through each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Essentially, all the elements of this psalm combine to emphasize the importance of God's Word to His people, to the praise and glory of the one True God.

He has been there to save me *in every situation.*

15 In the tents of the righteous *soldiers of God,*
there are shouts of joy and victory.
They sing:
"The right hand of the Eternal has shown His power.
16 The mighty arm of the Eternal is raised *in victory*;
the right hand of His has shown His power."
17 I will not die. I will live.
I will live to tell about all the Eternal has done.
18 The Eternal *has taught me many lessons;*
He has been strict and severe,
but even in His discipline, He has not allowed me to die.

► Early Christians found in the words of this psalm a wonderful way of describing the significance of Jesus. He was the rejected stone whom God made the cornerstone of a brand-new temple (verses 22-24).

19 Open *wide* to me the gates of justice
so that I may walk through them
and offer praise *and worship* to the Eternal.

20 This is the gate of the Eternal;
the righteous *children of God* will go through it.

21 I will praise You because You answered me *when I was in trouble.*
You have become my salvation.
22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very stone that holds together the entire foundation.
23 This is the work of the Eternal,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*
24 This is the day the Eternal God has made;
let us celebrate and be happy today.
25 O Eternal One, save us, we beg You.
O Eternal One, we beg You, bring us success!

26 He who comes in the name of the Eternal will be blessed;*
we have blessed You from the house of the Eternal.
27 The Eternal is the True God;
He shines His light on us.
Let the feast begin.
Bring the sacrifice, and tie it to the horns of the altar.
28 You are my God, and I give You thanks;
You are my God, and I praise You.
29 Give thanks to our Eternal Lord; He is always good.
He never ceases to be loving and kind.

Psalm 119*

Aleph

1 Happy are the people who walk with integrity,
who live according to the teachings of the Eternal.
2 Happy are the people who keep His decrees,
who pursue Him wholeheartedly.

* 118:22-23 Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11 * 118:26 Matthew 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13
* Psalm 119 A Hebrew acrostic poem

3These are people who do nothing
wrong;
they *do what it takes to* follow His
ways.
4You have given *us* Your precepts
so we would be careful about
keeping them.
5Oh, that *every part of* my life would
remain in line
with what You require!
6Then I would feel no shame
when I fix my eyes upon Your
commands.
7With a pure heart, I will give thanks
to You
when I hear about Your just *and*
fair rulings.
8I will live within Your limits;
do not abandon me completely!

Beth

9How can a young person remain pure?
Only by living according to Your
word.
10I have pursued You with my whole
heart;
do not let me stray from Your
commands.
11Deep within me I have hidden Your
word
so that I will never sin against You.
12You are blessed, O Eternal One;
instruct me in what You require.
13My lips have told how
You have delivered all Your *wise*
rulings.
14I have celebrated Your testimonies
as though rejoicing over an
immeasurable fortune.
15I will fix my mind on Your instructions
and my eyes on Your path.
16I will find joy in Your ordinances;
I will remember Your word *forever*.

Gimel

17Treat Your servant well, Lord,
so that I may live and remain
faithful to Your word.
18Let me see *clearly* so that I may take in
the amazing things coming from
Your law.
19I am a sojourner in the world;
do not keep Your commands
hidden from me.
20My soul aches from craving
Your wise rulings day and night.
21You rebuke those who are proud,
and those who stray from Your
commands are cursed.
22Free me from the contempt and
disdain *of others*
because I keep Your decrees.
23Even though *powerful* princes conspire
against me,
I fix my mind on what You require.
24Yes, Your testimonies are my joy;
they are like the friends I seek for
counsel.

Daleth

25My very being clings to the dust;
preserve my life, in keeping with
Your word.
26I have admitted my ways *are wrong,*
and You responded;
now help me learn what You
require.
27Compel me to grasp the way of Your
statutes
so I will fix my mind on Your
wonderful works.
28My soul weeps, and trouble weighs me
down;
give me strength *so I can stand*
according to Your word.
29Eliminate faithlessness You find in my
step,
be gracious, and give me Your
guidance.
30I have decided to take the path of
faith;
I have focused my eyes on Your
regulations.
31I cling to Your decrees; O Eternal One,
do not let me face disgrace!
32I will chase after Your commandments
because You will expand my
understanding.

He

33O Eternal One, show me how to live
according to Your statutes,
and I will keep them always.
34Grant me understanding so that I can
keep Your law
and keep it wholeheartedly.
35Guide me to walk in the way You
commanded
because I take joy in it.
36Turn *my head and* my heart to Your
decrees
and not to sinful gain.
37Keep my eyes from gazing upon
worthless things,
and give me *true* life according to
Your plans.
38Verify Your word to Your servant,
which will lead me to worship You.

39Take away the scorn that I dread
because Your actions are *just and* good.
40Look and see—I long for Your guidance;
restore me in Your righteousness.

Vav

41May Your unfailing love find me, O Eternal One.
Keep Your promise, and save me;
42When that happens, I will have a *good* response for anyone who taunts me
because I have faith in Your word.
43Do not take Your message of truth from my mouth
because I wait *and rely* on Your just decisions.
44Therefore I will follow Your teachings, forever and ever.
45And I will live a life of freedom
because I pursue Your precepts.
46I will even testify of Your decrees before royalty
and will not be humiliated.
47I will find my joy in Your commands, which I love,
48And I will raise my hands to Your commands, which I love,
and I will fix my mind on what You require.

Zayin

49Do not forget Your promise to Your servant;
through it You have given me hope.
50This brings me solace in the midst of my troubles:
that Your word has revived me.
51Those who are proud cruelly ridicule me,
but I keep to the steady path of Your teachings.
52I have considered Your ancient rulings, O Eternal One,
and their memory brings me comfort.
53Burning anger *rises in me,* has me in its grip
because the unrighteous abandon Your teachings.
54As I journey *through this life,* Your statutes are my song.
55O Eternal One, through the night, I *stop to* recall Your name.
That's how I live according to Your teachings.
56This has become my practice:
to keep Your ordinances.

Heth

57The Eternal One is mine. *He's all I need.*
I have *promised to* keep Your words.
58I sought Your blessing wholeheartedly.
Show grace to me as You promised.
59I carefully charted out my paths
to align my steps with Your decrees.
60I did not procrastinate and hurried
to follow Your commands.
61The wicked have entangled me in their nets,
but I have not forgotten Your teaching.
62In the middle of the night, I wake to thank You
because Your rulings are *just and* right.
63I am a friend of anyone who fears You
and of those who follow Your precepts.
64The earth is filled with Your unfailing love, O Eternal One;
teach me to observe what You require.

Teth

65You have handled Your servant well, O Eternal One, as You promised.
66Help me to learn good judgment and knowledge
because I believe Your commandments.
67Before I had trouble, I strayed *from the true path, the path of righteousness,*
but now I live according to Your word.
68You are *truly* good, and Your acts are too;
teach me what You require.
69The proud smear me with their lies;
I will keep Your instructions wholeheartedly.
70Their hearts are dull and callous;
I am delighted to study Your teaching.
71It is a good thing that I was humbled
because it helped me learn Your limits.
72Your teachings are more valuable to me than a fortune in gold and silver.

Yodh

73Your *strong* hands formed me and established me;
give me understanding so I can learn Your commands.

74Let those who fear You see me and rejoice
because I hope in Your word.
75I know, O Eternal One, Your rulings are right,
and when You humbled me, You did so out of faithfulness.
76Now let Your unfailing love be my comfort,
in keeping with Your promise to Your servant.
77Shower me with Your compassion so that I may live
because I find great joy in Your law.
78Let the proud be humiliated,
for they sabotage me with a lie;
still I will fix my mind on Your directives.
79Let those who fear You and know Your testimonies
come back *and find* me.
80Let my heart be *whole, my record* according to what You require
so that I will not be humiliated.

Kaph

81My soul is exhausted awaiting Your rescue
yet I keep hoping in Your word.
82My eyes are strained as I look for what You promised,
saying, "When will You *come to* comfort me?"
83Even though I *have shriveled up* like a wineskin *left* in the smoke,
I still remember what You require.
84How long must Your servant wait?
When will You carry out justice *and punish* those who persecute me?
85Those proud souls do not live according to Your commands,
and they have dug pits to entrap me.
86*Indeed,* all Your commands are trustworthy,
but my enemies have harassed me with their lies; help me!
87They have nearly ended my life on earth,
but as for me, I never abandoned Your statutes.
88According to Your unfailing love, spare my life
so that I can live according to the decrees of Your mouth.

Lamedh

89Forever, O Eternal One,
Your word stands in heaven, firm *and resolute.*
90Your faithfulness endures to every generation;
You founded the earth, and it remains.
91Everything remains today in keeping with Your laws,
for all things exist to serve You.
92If I had not found joy in Your guidance,
then I would have died from my misery.
93I will never forget Your precepts,
for through them You have given me life.
94I belong to You, *Lord;* save me
because I have taken care to live by Your principles.
95The wicked lie in wait, *anxious* to kill me;
I will set my mind on Your statutes.
96I have seen the limit of all perfection,
but Your commands are all-encompassing.

Mem

97Oh, how I love Your law!
I fix my mind on it all day long.
98Your commands make me wiser than my enemies
because they are always with me.
99I have more discernment than all my teachers
because I *study and* meditate on Your testimonies.
100I comprehend more than those who are my elders
because I have kept Your precepts.
101I have kept my feet from walking the paths of evil
so that I may live according to Your word.
102I have not neglected Your lessons,
for You, *God,* have been my teacher.
103Your words are sweet to my taste!
Yes, they are sweeter than honey in my mouth!
104I gain understanding from Your instructions;
that's why I hate every deceitful path.

Nun

105Your word is a lamp for my steps;
it lights the path before me.
106I have taken an oath and confirmed it:
I pledge to do what You say is right and just.
107I have suffered terribly, O Eternal One;
give me the life You promised.

108Please accept the words I offer
willingly, O Eternal One,
and instruct me in *the ways of* Your
justice.
109My soul is continually in danger,
but I do not forget Your teachings.
110The wicked have laid a trap for me,
but I have not drifted away from
Your instructions.
111Your decrees are forever mine,
for they bring joy to my life.
112I have committed myself to do what
You require
forever and ever, to the very end.

Samekh

113I despise those who waver back and
forth,
but I love Your teachings.
114You are my hiding place and my shield
of protection;
I hope in Your word.
115Away from me, reprobates!
I am committed to observing the
commands of my God.
116Support me in keeping with Your
promise, *O God,* so that I may
live;
do not let my hope turn into shame.
117Help me so that I will be safe,
and I will respect Your laws
continually.
118You have rejected all those who stray
from Your commands
because their fraudulent lifestyles
are *cunning and* empty.
119You have discarded all the wicked from
the land, *skimmed them off* like
dross;
that's why I love Your testimonies.
120My body shakes because of my fear of
You,
and I am in awe of Your *wise*
rulings.

Ayin

121I have lived with fairness and integrity;
do not leave me at the mercy of my
tormenters.
122Provide security *and protection* for Your
servant's welfare;
do not let the proud oppress me.
123My eyes are strained as I look for Your
salvation
and for Your righteous promise *to
be fulfilled*.
124Treat Your servant in a manner that
shows Your unfailing love,
and help me to learn Your decrees.
125I am Your servant; impart to me
understanding
so that I may fully grasp *the depths
of* Your statutes.
126It is time for the Eternal to *step in and*
do something
because some have broken Your
law.
127Indeed, I love Your commands
more than gold, even more than the
highest quality gold.
128It's true that I regard all Your guidance
to be correct *and good*;
I despise every deceptive path.

Pe

129Your decrees inspire wonder;
because of that, my soul *desires to*
keep them.
130When Your words are unveiled, light
shines forth;
they bring understanding to the
simple.
131My desire for Your commands
left me *waiting,* open-mouthed and
panting.
132Acknowledge me and show me Your
grace
as is Your habit toward all those
who love Your name.
133Guide my steps in *the ways of* Your
word,
and do not let any sin control me.
134Rescue me from *the torment of* my
human oppressors
so that I may live according Your
decrees.
135Let Your face shine upon Your servant,
and help me to learn what You
require.
136My eyes shed rivers of tears
whenever people fail to keep Your
teaching.

Tsadhe

137You are *good and* just, O Eternal One,
and Your rulings are right.
138You have set out Your decrees in
justice,
and they can be trusted.
139I am overwhelmed by my passion
because my enemies have forgotten
Your words.
140Your promise is tested *and true*;
that's why Your servant loves it.
141I may be insignificant *to some* and
hated *by others,*
but *at least* I do not forget Your
precepts.

142Your righteousness will last forever,
and Your law is truth.
143Trouble and distress have
overtaken me,
but Your commandments bring me
great joy.
144Your decrees are right *and true*
forever;
grant me understanding so that
I may live.

Qoph

145I called to You wholeheartedly: "Answer
me, O Eternal One!"
I will respect, I will follow Your
statutes.
146I cried out to You: "Rescue me,
and I will live according to Your
decrees."
147I wake before the dawn and call for
help;
I hope in Your words.
148My eyes do not shut before each watch
of the night
so that I can fix my mind on Your
word.
149Listen to my voice, in keeping with
Your unfailing love.
Preserve my life, O Eternal One,
according to Your just rulings.
150Those who wish me harm are moving
closer *to me*;
they are far away from Your
teaching.
151But You are near me, O Eternal One,
and all You have commanded is
true.
152I learned a long time ago
that You established Your decrees
to last forever.

Resh

153Give attention to my misery and
rescue me
because I have not forgotten Your
teaching.
154Fight for me, and set me free;
give me life in keeping with Your
promise.
155Salvation is far from the wicked
because they do not live in pursuit
of Your precepts.
156Your mercies are *tender and* great,
O Eternal One;
grant me life in keeping with Your
ordinances.
157I have many oppressors and foes;
still I do not swerve from Your
decrees.
158I observe the faithless and detest them
because they turn away from Your
word.
159Reflect, *O God,* on how I love Your
precepts;
give me life, O Eternal One, in
keeping with Your unfailing love.
160The entirety of Your word is truth,
and every one of Your right rulings
will surely last forever.

Shin

161Princes persecute me without reason,
but my heart remains *true and is*
awed by Your words.
162I celebrate because of Your promise,
like someone who discovers great
treasure.
163I despise and abhor lies,
but I love Your law.
164Seven times every day I praise You
because of Your right rulings.
165Those who love Your law have an
abundance of peace,
and nothing *along their paths* can
cause them to stumble.
166I wait for Your salvation, O Eternal One,
and I live out Your commands.
167My soul is faithful to Your decrees,
and my love for them is
extraordinary.
168I live according to Your precepts and
decrees
because everything I do is right
before Your eyes.

Tav

169Let my cry come before You, O Eternal
One.
Grant me understanding in keeping
with Your word.
170Let my plea come before You;
liberate me in keeping with Your
word.
171Praise will pour from my lips
because You help me learn what
You require.
172My tongue will sing of Your word
because every command of Yours
is right.
173Let Your hand be poised to help me
because I have chosen *to live by*
Your precepts.
174I long for Your salvation, O Eternal One.
Meanwhile, Your teaching brings me
great joy.
175Let my soul live on so that I may praise
You,
and let Your precepts guide me.

The Songs for the Journey to Worship (Psalms 120–134) celebrate the journey to Jerusalem to worship in God's temple. Centuries before these psalms were composed, the Lord chose to make His earthly home on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and directed David's son to build His house. King Solomon built the first temple and dedicated it to God in an elaborate ceremony that brought Israel together on the holy mountain (1 Kings 8). Now, clearly, the wise king believed that the one True God was present everywhere in the world, but he knew that Jerusalem was a special place, a sacred space picked by God. Solomon understood what we seem to have forgotten: those created in God's image long to encounter God in His holiness. And if we try to make every place holy, then no place is holy because holy means "set apart," "distinct," "special." So we need sacredness in our lives: sacred times, places, and people in our search for wholeness, for *shalom*. For centuries God's faithful people of the first and second covenants have gone on pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Often these songs have gone with them, for they desire to draw close to God and to walk in the steps of those who have passed the faith along.

176 I have wandered *down the wrong path*
like a lost sheep; come find *me,*
Your servant,
because I do not forget Your
commands.

Psalm 120

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1 When I was in *deep* trouble, I called out
to the Eternal,
and He answered my call.
2 *I prayed:* "Protect me, Eternal,
from lips that lie
and tongues poisoned with deceit."

3 *Liars,* what will be your prize?
And what will come your way,
O you tongues *poisoned* with deceit?
4 *Here's what you can expect:* the archers'
arrows honed sharp
as well as the red-hot coals of the
broom wood.

5 Sorrow is mine, for I am *a foreigner*
wandering in Meshech;
I am *a stranger* drifting among the
tents of Kedar!
6 My soul has roamed much too long
among people who despise peace.
7 I am for peace; *I ask for peace,*
but even as I open my mouth,
they are ready to fight.

Psalm 121

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1 I look up at the *vast size of the*
mountains—
from where will my help come *in*
times of trouble?
2 The Eternal Creator of heaven and
earth *and these mountains*
will send the help I need.

3 *He holds you firmly in place;*
He will not let you fall.
He who keeps you will *never take*
His eyes off you and never drift
off to sleep.
4 *What a relief!* The One who watches
over Israel
never leaves for rest or sleep.

5 The Eternal keeps you safe,
so close to Him that His shadow is a
cooling shade to you.
6 Neither bright light of sun
nor dim light of moon will harm
you.

7 The Eternal will keep you safe
from all of life's evils,
8 From your first breath to the last
breath you breathe,
from this day and forever.

Psalm 122

A song [of David]* for those journeying
to worship.

► This is a Davidic psalm celebrating the grandeur and significance of Jerusalem and its temple. It is ironic that Jerusalem means "city of peace" since

* 122:title Some manuscripts omit this portion.

more battles have been fought over it than over any other city.

[1]I was so happy when my fellow
pilgrims said,
"Let's go to the house of the
Eternal!"
[2]*We have made the journey, and now* we
are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

[3]Jerusalem! *What a magnificent* city!
Buildings so close together, so
compact.
[4]*God's people belong here.* Every tribe of
the Eternal
makes its way *to Jerusalem—*
Just as God decreed for Israel
to *come together and* give thanks to
the Eternal.
[5]*In Jerusalem, justice is the order of the
day* because there sit the judges
and kings, the descendants of
David.

[6]Ask heaven to grant peace to
Jerusalem:
"May those who love you prosper.
[7]*O Jerusalem,* may *His* peace fill this
entire city!
May this citadel be *quiet and* at
ease!"
[8]It's because of *people*—my family,
friends, *and acquaintances—*
that I say, "May peace permeate
you."
[9]And because the house of Eternal One,
our God, is here, *know this:*
I will *always* seek your good!

Psalm 123

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

[1]I raise my eyes to *fix my gaze on* You,
for Your throne resides in the
heavens.
[2]Just as the eyes of servants
closely watch the hand of their
masters,
Just as a maid carefully observes
the slightest gesture of her mistress,
In the same way we look to *You,* Eternal
One,
waiting for our God to pour out His
mercy upon us.

[3]O Eternal One, show us Your mercy. We
beg You.
We are not strangers to contempt
and pain.
[4]We have suffered more than our share
of ridicule and contempt from
self-appointed critics who live
easy lives
and pompously display their own
importance.

Psalm 124

A song of David for those journeying *to worship*.

[1]If the Eternal had not been with us—
sing, Israel, sing—
[2]If He had not been with us
when the villains came for us,
[3]When their anger flamed around us,
they would have swallowed us up
alive!
[4]*Their hatred was like a flood:*
the waters *were rising and* would have
engulfed us;
the streams *were rushing past and*
would have overcome us.
[5]The furious waters would have broken
over us.
*Battered and overwhelmed, we surely
would have drowned!*

[6]Blessed be the Eternal
who did not leave us
to be torn by their fangs!
[7]*Our souls cry out:* "We escaped *with our
lives* like a bird
from the fowler's snare!
The snare was broken,
and we escaped *with our lives*!"

[8]Our help has come in the name of the
Eternal,
the Maker of heaven and earth!

Psalm 125

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

[1]All who have faith in the Eternal stand
as Mount Zion:
unmoved, enduring, eternal.
[2]Just as the mountains around
Jerusalem *embrace her,*
the Eternal, too, wraps around
those who belong to Him—
for this moment and for every
moment to come.
[3]For wickedness will not *get the upper
hand*;
it shall not rule the land where
righteous people live
Lest good people go bad
and do what is wrong.

4Be good, Eternal One, to those who are good,
to those who are filled with integrity.
5The Eternal will send all the wicked away
along with those who *pervert what's good and* twist it in their own crooked way.
May peace be with Israel.

Psalm 126

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1*Remember* when the Eternal brought back the exiles to Zion?
It was as if we were dreaming—
2Our mouths were filled with laughter;
our tongues were spilling over into song.
The word went out *across the prairies and deserts,*
across the hills, over the oceans wide, from nation to nation:
"The Eternal has done remarkable things for them."
3*We shook our heads. All of us were stunned*—the Eternal has done remarkable things for us.
We were beyond happy, *beyond joyful.*

4And now, Eternal One, *some are held captive and poor.*
Release them, and restore our fortunes
as the dry riverbeds of the South *spring to life when the rains come at last.*
5Those who walk the fields to sow, *casting their seed* in tears,
will one day tread those same long rows, amazed by what's appeared.
6Those who weep as they walk
and plant *with sighs*
Will return singing with joy,
when they bring home the harvest.

Psalm 127

A song of Solomon for those journeying *to worship*.

Psalm 127 is attributed to Solomon, underscoring the futility of human endeavor apart from God. It is similar in tone and theme to other wisdom literature.

1Unless the Eternal builds the house,
those who labor *to raise it* will have worked for nothing.
Unless the Eternal stands watch over the city,
those who guard it have wasted their time.
2*God provides for His own.*
It is pointless to get up early,
work hard, and go to bed late
Anxiously laboring for food to eat;
for God provides for those He loves, even while they are sleeping.

3Know this: children are a gift from the Eternal;
the fruit of the womb is His reward.
4Your sons born in your youth are *a protection,*
like arrows in the hand of a warrior.
5Happy is the man who has
his quiver full, *for they will help and protect him when he is old.*
He will not be humiliated when he is accused at the gate,
for his sons will stand with him against his enemies.

Psalm 128

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1Those who stand in awe of the Eternal—
who follow wherever He leads,
committed in their hearts—
experience His blessings!
2*God will use* your hard work to provide you food.
You will prosper *in your labor,* and it will go well for you.

3Your wife will be like a *healthy* vine producing plenty of fruit,
a spring of life in your home.
Your children will be like *young* olive shoots;
you will watch them bud and bloom around your table.
4Such are the blessings the Eternal lavishes
on those who stand in awe of Him!

5May the Eternal *continue to* pour out *His love* on you,
showering down blessings from *His holy mountain*, Zion.
May you see Jerusalem prosper all your days.
6May you have the privilege of seeing your grandchildren *as they grow.*
May peace flourish in Israel!

Psalm 129

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1"*This is not the first time* my enemies
assaulted me;
they have often attacked me since
I was young."
So let Israel now proclaim,
2"*This is not the first time* my enemies
assaulted me;
they have attacked me since I was
young,
and yet they have not been able to
overpower me.
3The plowers plowed over me;
they plowed their furrows *deep and*
long down my back."
4The Eternal is just.
He's severed the bindings of the
wicked *so they can't hurt me*
anymore.
5May all who despise Zion
hang their heads in shame.
May all who despise Zion recoil and
run away.
6Let them grow like grass upon
rooftops
that withers *and dies in the sun* long
before it has time to grow,
7Unfit to be harvested by the worker,
not worthy of the effort to carry off
to the binder.
8*Unwanted, uncared for*—no passersby
to greet them, no one to say,
"May the favor of the Eternal be
upon you;
We bless you in His name."

Psalm 130

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1From the depths *of disaster* I appeal to
You, O Eternal One:
2Lord, hear my cry!
Attune Your ears to my humble
prayer!

3If You, Eternal One, recorded each
offense,
Lord, who *on earth* could stand
innocent?
4But with You forgiveness exists;
that's why *true* respect of You might
flow.

5So I wait for the Eternal—my soul
awaits *rescue*—
and I put my hope in His
transforming word.

6My soul waits for the Lord *to break into*
the world
more than *night* watchmen *expect*
the break of day,
even more than night watchmen
expect the break of day.

7O Israel, *ground your* hope in the
Eternal.
For in the Eternal lives *the most*
loyal love,
and with Him comes *the most*
abundant redemption.
8He will ransom Israel
from all the sinful acts *that stole you*
away.

Psalm 131

A song of David for those journeying
to worship.

1O Eternal One, my heart is not
occupied with proud thoughts;
my eyes do not look down *on others*;
I don't *even begin to* get involved in
matters too big, *matters of faith,*
state, business,
or the many things that defy my
ability *to understand them.*
2*Of one thing I am certain:* my soul
has become calm, quiet, *and*
contented in You.
Like a weaned child resting upon
his mother, *I am quiet.*
My soul is like this weaned child.

3O Israel, stake your trust *completely* in
the Eternal—
from this very moment and into the
vast future.

Psalm 132

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1Eternal One, *don't let* the suffering of
our father David *be forgotten*—
for his sake, remember!
2Remember the pledge he made, *how*
he poured out his heart to the
Eternal,
the promise he made to the Mighty
One of Jacob:
3*He said,* "I will not go inside my house
or lie down in my bed;
4I will not even rest my eyes—
I will not *take comfort in* sleep—
5Until I find a *dwelling* place for You, the
Eternal,
a *holy* residence dedicated to the
Mighty One of Jacob."

6We heard rumors of the holy ark in
Ephrathah,*
and *later* we found it in the field of
Jaar.*

7Let us journey to His dwelling place;
let us worship at His footstool.

8Eternal One, arise and go to Your new
home—
You and the ark of Your strength.
9Let every priest *join the march* wearing
righteousness,
and let songs of joy erupt from *the
hearts and mouths of* Your godly
ones.
10For the well-being of Your anointed
servant,
do not turn Your back on David.

11The Eternal made His own promise,
sworn in truth to David,
an oath which He *cannot,* will not
break:
"I will continue your dynasty, *David;*
one of your descendants will sit on
your throne.
12If your children obey My covenant
and follow the statutes which
I shall teach them,
And if they remain faithful, their
children will also
sit upon your throne—forever."

13For the Eternal selected Zion;
He desired it as His *holy place of*
residence.
14"This is *My sanctuary,* My resting place,
forever *and ever;*
I will remain here, for this is what
I have desired.
15I will bless Zion with an endless supply
of all she needs;
I will satisfy *the bellies of* her hungry
with bread.
16I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and songs of joy will erupt from *the
hearts and mouths of* her godly
people.

17"From there I will make the strength of
David's *kingdom* grow
and prepare a lamp for My anointed
one.
18I will clothe his enemies with *a
garment of* shame;
but as for David's son, his crown
will shine *brightly like the sun.*"

Psalm 133

A song of David for those journeying
to worship.

1How good and pleasant it is
when brothers *and sisters* live
together in peace!
2It is like the finest oils poured on the
head,
sweet-smelling oils flowing down to
cover the beard,
Flowing down the beard of Aaron,
flowing down the collar of his robe.
3It is like the gentle rain of *Mount*
Hermon
that falls on the hills of Zion.
Yes, from this place, the Eternal spoke
the command,
from there He gave His blessing—life
forever.

Psalm 134

A song for those journeying *to worship*.

1Praise the Eternal, all you who serve
Him—
who *stand ready to* serve in the
house of the Eternal through the
night.
2Lift up your hands toward His
sanctuary,
and praise the Eternal.

3May the Eternal grant you His blessing
from Zion,
God, the weaver of heaven and
earth.

Psalm 135

1Praise the Eternal!
Praise *and glorify* the name of the
One who always has been and
always will be;
praise Him, servants of the Eternal!
2*Join in the chorus,* all you who minister
in the Eternal's temple;
in the courts of our God's temple,
3Glorify the Eternal, for He is good!
Sing praises, and honor His name
for it is delightful.
4For the Eternal made His choice; He
selected Jacob as His own;
He claimed Israel as His possession.

5Now I know this: the Eternal is great;
His power is unmatched.
Our Master is above any *so-called*
god.

* 132:6 Ephrathah is the region where Bethlehem is located, Micah 5:2. * 132:6 Jaar is a shortened form of Kiriath-jearim, 1 Samuel 7:1.

6He does whatever He pleases,
in heaven, on earth,
in the seas, and in all the *ocean* depths.
7He draws up the clouds that rise over the whole earth,
He causes rain and the lightning *to strike,*
and He summons the wind from His storehouses.

8He took the lives of Egypt's firstborn,
human and beast alike.
9O Egypt, He worked wonders and signs before your eyes,
signs against Pharaoh and Pharaoh's servants.
10He destroyed nation after nation
and killed mighty kings:
11Sihon, the Amorite king;
Og, the king of Bashan;
and even all the kingdoms of Canaan.
12He *conquered* their land *and* gave it as an inheritance—
an inheritance for His people, Israel.

13Eternal One, Your name is everlasting.
Your legacy, Eternal One, will be known through all the ages.
14For the Eternal will judge His people,
He will show compassion to those who serve Him.

15The nations have idols of silver and gold,
crafted by human hands!
16They shaped mouths for them, but they cannot speak;
they carved eyes into them, but they cannot see;
17They placed ears on them, but they cannot hear;
they cannot breathe, *not even a puff of air* from their mouths!
18The artisans who made them
are just like them,
and so are all who *mistakenly* trust in them, *no exceptions.*

19House of Israel, praise the Eternal;
house of Aaron, praise the Eternal;
20House of Levi, praise the Eternal;
all those who revere the Eternal, praise Him!
21Blessed be the Eternal from Zion,
the One who has made Jerusalem His home.
Praise the Eternal!

* 136:13 Literally, Sea of Reeds * 136:15 Literally, Sea of Reeds

Psalm 136

This hymn of praise recounts God's actions in the past: creation, exodus, and the giving of the land to Israel. A repeated refrain indicates this psalm was chanted responsively.

1*Let your heart overflow with* praise to the Eternal, for He is good,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
2Praise the True God *who reigns* over all other gods,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
3Praise the Lord *who reigns* over all other lords,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

4To Him who alone does marvelous wonders,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
5Who created the heavens with skill *and artistry,*
for His faithful love lasts forever.
6Who laid out dry land over the waters,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
7Who made the great *heavenly* lights,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
8The sun to reign by day,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
9The moon and stars to reign by night,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

10To Him who struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
11Who set Israel free from Egyptian masters,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
12With *fierce strength,* a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
13To Him who split the Red Sea* in two *and made a path between the divided waters,*
for His faithful love lasts forever.
14Then allowed Israel to pass *safely* through *on dry ground,*
for His faithful love lasts forever.
15*To Him* who crushed Pharaoh and his army in *the waters of* the Red Sea,*
for His faithful love lasts forever.
16Who guided His people through the desert,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

17Who struck down mighty kings,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
18Who slaughtered famous kings,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
19Sihon, the king of the Amorites,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
20And Og, the king of Bashan,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
21*To Him* who gave the conquered land
as an inheritance,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
22*Who made the land* a heritage to Israel,
His servant,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

23*To Him* who remembered us when we
were nearly defeated,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
24Who rescued us from our enemies,
for His faithful love lasts forever.
25Who provides food for every living thing,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

26*Let your heart overflow with* praise to
the True God of heaven,
for His faithful love lasts forever.

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is a lament written either during or shortly after the exile. It provides a vivid image of what life in exile must have been like.

1By the rivers of Babylon,
we sat and wept
when we thought of Zion, *our home,
so far away*.
2On *the branches of* the willow trees,
we hung our harps *and hid our
hearts from the enemy*.
3And the men that surrounded us
made demands that we *clap our
hands and* sing—
Songs of joy *from days gone by,*
songs from Zion, *our home*.
Such cruel men taunted us—*haunted
our memories.*

4How could we sing a song about the
Eternal
in a land so foreign, *while still
tormented, brokenhearted,
homesick?*
Please don't make us sing this song.
5-6O Jerusalem, even still, don't escape
my memory.
*I treasure you and your songs, even as
I hide my harp from the enemy.*
And if I can't remember,
may I never sing *a song* again—
may my hands never play well
again—
For what use would it be if I don't
remember Jerusalem
as my source of joy?

7Remember, Eternal One, how the
Edomites, *our brothers, the
descendants of Esau,*
stood by and watched as Jerusalem
fell.
Gloating, they said, "Destroy it;
tear it down to the ground," *when
Jerusalem was being demolished.*
8O daughter of Babylon, you are
destined for destruction!
Happy are those who pay you back
for how you treated us
so you will no longer walk so proud.
9Happy are those who dash your
children against the rocks
so you will know how it feels.

Psalm 138

A song of David.

1To You, *Lord,* I give my whole heart, *a
heart filled* with praise, *for I am
grateful;*
before the gods, my heart sings
praises to You *and You alone.*
2I bow *before You,* looking to Your holy
temple,
and praise Your name, for Your
unfailing love and Your truth;
for You have placed Your name and
Your word over all things *and
all times.*
3On the day *I needed You,* I called, and
You responded
and infused my soul with strength.

4May all the kings of the earth praise
You, O Eternal One,
because they have heard the words
You have spoken.
5*They will marvel* at the Eternal's ways,
and they will sing,
for great is the glory of the Eternal.
6Although He is greatest of all, He is
attentive to the needy
and keeps His distance from the
proud *and pompous.*

7Whenever I walk into trouble,
You are there to bring me out.
You hold out Your hand
to protect me against the wrath of
my enemies,

and hold me safely in Your right hand.
[8]The Eternal will finish what He started in me.
Your faithful love, O Eternal One, lasts forever;
do not give up on what Your hands have made.

Psalm 139

For the worship leader. A song of David.

[1]O Eternal One, You have explored my *heart* and know *exactly* who I am;
[2]You even know *the small details like* when I take a seat and when I stand up again.
Even when I am far away, You know what I'm thinking.
[3]You observe my wanderings and my sleeping, *my waking and my dreaming,*
and You know everything I do in more detail *than even I know.*
[4]You know what I'm going to say *long before I say it.*
It is true, Eternal One, that You know everything *and everyone.*
[5]You have surrounded me *on every side,* behind me and before me,
and You have placed Your hand *gently* on my *shoulder.*
[6]It is the most amazing feeling to know *how deeply* You know me, *inside and out;*
the realization of it is so great that I cannot comprehend it.

[7]Can I go anywhere apart from Your Spirit?
Is there anywhere I can go to escape Your *watchful* presence?

[8]If I go up into heaven, You are there.
If I make my bed in the realm of the dead, You are there.
[9]If I ride on the wings of morning,
if I make my home in the most isolated part of the ocean,
[10]Even then You will be there to guide me;
Your right hand will embrace me, *for You are always there.*
[11]Even if I *am afraid and* think *to myself,*
"There is no doubt that the darkness will swallow me,
the light around me will soon be turned to night,"
[12]*You can see* in the dark, for it is not dark to Your eyes.
For You the night is just as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are the same to Your eyes.

[13]For You shaped me, inside *and out.*
You knitted me together in my mother's womb *long before I took my first breath.*
[14]I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your *unique* creation, filled with wonder and awe.
You have approached even the smallest details with excellence;
Your works are wonderful;
I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.
[15]*You see all things;* nothing about me was hidden from You
As I took shape in secret,
carefully crafted in the heart of the earth *before I was born from its womb.*
[16]*You see all things;*
You saw me growing, changing *in my mother's womb;*
Every detail *of my life* was already written in Your book;
You established the length of my life before I ever tasted *the sweetness* of it.
[17]Your thoughts *and plans* are treasures to me, O God! *I cherish each and every one of them!*
How grand in scope! How many in number!
[18]If I could count each one of them, they would be more than all the grains of sand *on earth. Their number is inconceivable!*
Even when I wake up, I am still near to You.

[19]I wish You would destroy all the wicked, O God.
So keep away from me, those who are thirsty for blood!
[20]For they say such horrible things about You,
and those who are against You abuse Your good name.
[21]Is it not true that I hate all who hate You, Eternal One?
Is it not true that I despise all who come against You?
[22]Deep hatred boils within me toward them;

I am Your friend, and they are my enemies.
23Explore me, O God, and know the real me. *Dig deeply and discover who I am.*
Put me to the test and watch how I handle the strain.
24*Examine me to* see if there is an evil bone in me,
and guide me down Your path forever.

Psalm 140

For the worship leader. A song of David.

1Save me, O Eternal One, from the evil men *who seek my life.*
Shield me from *this band of* violent men.
2Their hearts devise evil! *They conspire against me;*
they are constantly causing a storm of war.
3These snakes have sharpened their tongues;
viper venom hides beneath their lips.*

[pause]*

4Keep me from the grip of these cruel *men,* O Eternal One.
Shield me from *this band of* violent men
whose *only* intention is to trip me up *and undermine all I do.*
5Those arrogant people are trying to catch me;
they've laid their trap, hiding a net along my path;
their traps are set, *and I am the prey.*

[pause]

6"Eternal One," I said, "You are my *one and only* God.
Hear me, O Eternal, hear my humble cry *for rescue.*
7O Lord, Eternal One, power of my deliverance,
You are my helmet in the day of battle.
8So do not fulfill the desires of these evildoers, Eternal One;
do not advance their evil schemes, lest they brag *about their successes.*

[pause]

9"As for the gang leader of those who surround me,
let their mischievous words cover them; *smother them in trouble.*
10Let hot coals fall *from heaven* upon them
and cast them into the *roaring* fires.
May they sink into the muddy marsh from which there is no return.
11Let no liar find a home anywhere in the land;
let evil hunt down the violent man *and do him in* quickly."

12I am certain the Eternal supports the cause of the distressed;
the poor will receive the justice *they deserve.*
13Indeed, the just-living will glorify Your name,
and honorable people will be at home in Your presence.

Psalm 141

A song of David.

1O Eternal One, I call upon You.
Come quickly!
Listen to my voice as I call upon You!
2Consider my prayer as *an offering of* incense *that rises* before You;
when I stand with my hands outstretched *pleading toward the heavens,*
consider it as an evening offering.

3Guard my mouth, O Eternal One;
control what I say.
Keep a careful watch on every word I speak.
4Don't allow my deepest desires to steer me toward doing what is wrong
or associating with wicked people
Or joining in their wicked works
or tasting any of their pleasures.

5Let those who do right strike me down in kindness
and correct me *in love.*
Their kind correction washes over my head like *pure* oil;
do not let me *be foolish and* refuse *such compassion.*
Still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked:

* 140:3 Romans 3:13 * 140:3 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

6Their judges will be thrown from the
edges of cliffs *and crushed upon*
the rocks below,
and the wicked will hear my words
and realize that what I said was
pleasing.
7Just as when a farmer plows and
breaks open the earth, *leaving*
clumps of dirt scattered along the
rows,
our bones are scattered at the
mouth of the grave.

8My gaze is fixed upon You, Eternal One,
my Lord;
in You I find *safety and* protection.
Do not *abandon me and* leave me
defenseless.
9Protect me from the jaws of the trap
my enemies have set for me
and from the snares of those who
work evil.
10May the wicked be caught in their own
nets
while I *alone* escape unharmed.

Psalm 142

A contemplative prayer* of David while he hid in a cave.

1I call out loudly to the Eternal One;
I lift my voice to the Eternal
begging for His favor.
2I let everything that's going wrong spill
out of my mouth;
I spell out all my troubles to Him.
3When my spirit buckled under the
burdens I bear,
You knew my way.
They conspired to *trip me up and*
trap me
on the path where I was walking.
4Take a look *around* and see—to the
right, *to the left*—
no one is there who cares for me.
There's no way out of here;
no one cares about *the state of* my
soul.

5You are the One I called to, O Eternal
One.
I said, "You're the *only* safe place
I know;
You're all I've got in this world.
6Oh, *let me know that You* hear my cry
because I'm languishing and
desperate;
Rescue me from those who torment me
because *there's no way I can stand*
up to them;
they are much too strong for me.
7Lift my *captive* soul from this *dark*
prison
so I may render to You my gratitude;
Then Your righteous *people* will gather
around me
because You will treat me with
astounding goodness."

Psalm 143

A song of David.

1Eternal One, *I come to You* in prayer.
Hear me out; *I plead with You.*
Lend an ear to my requests.
In Your faithfulness and justice,
respond to my pleas.
2Be kind *and slow* to judge Your *faithful*
servant,
for compared to You, no one is truly
just.

3My adversary has pressed in, *drawn*
closer, threatened my life;
he's crushed me, driven me
underground.
He's forced me to live in the dark;
it's as *if I joined* those who died a
long time ago.
4That's why my spirit is growing faint
inside me; *I have nothing left;*
my heart is *completely empty and*
desolate.

5*And yet* I can't forget the days of old, *the*
days I've heard so much about;
I fix my mind on all You have done;
I ponder the work of Your hands;
6I reach out my hands to You.
All that I am *aches and* yearns for
You, like a dry land *thirsting for*
rain.

[pause]*

7Hurry and answer me, O Eternal One,
for my spirit is weak, *my courage*
is gone.
Do not turn away; let me see Your face;
otherwise, I'll *die and* be like all
those who have gone to the
grave.
8Make me hear of Your faithful love in
the morning,
for I trust in You.

* 142:title Hebrew, *maskil* * 143:6 Literally, selah, likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up"

Teach me how I should walk,
for I offer my soul up to You.

9Rescue me from my enemies, Eternal One,
for You are my shelter *from them.*
10Teach me how to do Your will,
for You are my God.
Allow Your good Spirit to guide me
on level ground, *to guide me along Your path.*

11For the sake of Your name *and the good of Your reputation,*
preserve me, O Eternal One.
In Your righteousness, save my life from *burden and* misery.
12In Your loyal love, silence my enemies *for good*;
destroy all those who take pleasure in my suffering,
for I am Your *faithful* servant!

Psalm 144

A song of David.

1Blessed be the Eternal, my rock.
He trains my hands for war, gives me the skills *I need* for battle.
2*He is* my unfailing love and my citadel.
He is my tower of strength and my deliverer.
He is my shield of protection and my shelter;
He holds my people in check under me.

3O Eternal One, what is man, that You even care to know him?
or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?
4Humans are like a *passing* breath;
their time *on earth* is like a shadow that passes *over us during the day and soon is gone.*

5Eternal One, stretch out an opening in the heavens, and descend.
Touch the mountains, and make them smoke.
6Send forth *bolts of* lightning, and scatter my enemies.
Shoot Your *fiery* arrows, and rout the enemy.
7Reach down from Your high place;
save me out of the great waters;
rescue me from the grasp of these foreigners
8Who speak only lies
and don't have truth in their deeds.

9To You, my God, I will sing a new song;
I will sing Your *sweet* praises to *the sound of* a ten-stringed harp,
10For You deliver kings *from their enemies*
and You rescue Your servant, David, from the sword of evil.
11Rescue me,
and save me from the grasp of these foreigners
Who speak only lies
and don't have truth in their deeds.

12May our sons be like healthy plants as they grow and mature,
And may our daughters be like the corner pillars
that decorate a palace.
13May our storehouses be full
with abundant supplies of every crop,
And may the flocks of our fields
multiply into thousands and tens of thousands!
14May our cattle be *strong and* productive,
without miscarriage, without loss,
and may there be no riots or protests in our streets!

15Happy are the people for whom all this is true;
happy are the people whose God is the Eternal!

Psalm 145*

A song of praise by David.

1I will lift my praise *above everything* to You, my God and King!
I will *continually* bless Your name forever and always.
2*My praise will never cease—*
I will praise You every day;
I will lift up Your name forever.
3The Eternal is great and deserves endless praise;
His greatness knows no limit, recognizes no boundary.
No one can measure or comprehend His magnificence.

4One generation *after another* will celebrate Your great works;
they will pass on the story of Your powerful acts to their children.

* Psalm 145 A Hebrew acrostic poem

5Your majesty and glorious splendor
have captivated me;
I will meditate on Your wonders,
sing songs of Your worth.
6We confess—there is *nothing greater*
than You, God, nothing mightier
than Your awesome works.
I will tell of Your greatness *as long*
as I have breath.
7*The news of* Your rich goodness *is no*
secret—
Your people love to recall it
and sing songs of *joy to celebrate*
Your righteousness.

8The Eternal is gracious.
He shows mercy *to His people*.
For Him anger does not come easily,
but faithful love does—and it is
rich and abundant.
9But the Eternal's goodness *is not*
exclusive—it is offered *freely*
to all.
His mercy extends to all His
creation.

10*All creation will stand in awe of You,*
O Eternal One.
Thanks will pour from *the mouths*
of every one of Your creatures;
Your holy people will bless You.
11*They will not be silent;* they will talk of
the grandeur of Your kingdom
and celebrate *the wonder of* Your
power
12Until everyone on earth *who has ears*
to hear knows Your valiant
acts
and the splendor of Your kingdom.
13Your kingdom will never end;
Your rule will endure forever.

[You are faithful to Your promise,
and Your acts are marked with
grace.]*
14The Eternal sustains all who stumble
on their way.
For those who are broken down,
God is near. He raises them up
in hope.
15All eyes have turned toward You,
waiting in expectation;
when they are hungry, You feed
them right on time.
16The desires of every living thing
are met by Your open hand.
17The Eternal is right in all His ways,
and He is kind in all His acts.
18The Eternal stays close to those who
call on Him,
those who pray sincerely.
19All *of you* who revere Him—
God will satisfy your desires.
He hears the cries *for help,* and He
brings salvation.
20All *of you* who love God—
He will watch out for you,
but *total* destruction is *around the*
corner for all the wicked.

21My lips will sing the praise of the
Eternal.
Let every creature *join me and*
praise the holy name of God—
forever and always!

* 145:13 Most Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion.

Psalm 146

1Praise the Eternal!
Praise the Eternal, O my soul;
2I will praise the Eternal for as long as
I live.
I will sing praises to my God as
long as breath fills my lungs and
blood flows through my veins.

3Do not put your trust in *the rulers of*
this world—kings and princes.
Do not expect any rescue from
mortal men.
4As soon as their breath leaves them,
they return to the earth;
on that day, all of them perish—
their dreams, their plans, *and*
their memories.

5Blessed are those whose help comes
from the God of Jacob,
whose hope is *centered* in the
Eternal their God—
6Who created the heavens, the earth,
the seas, and all that lives within
them;
Who *stays true and* remains faithful
forever;
7Who works justice for those who are
pressed down *by the world,*
providing food for those who are
hungry.

The Eternal frees those who are
imprisoned;
8He makes the blind see.
He lifts up those whose backs are
bent *in labor;*
He cherishes those who do what
is right.

9The Eternal looks after those who
journey in a land not their
own;
He takes care of the orphan and
the widow,
but He frustrates the wicked along
their way.

10The Eternal will reign *today, tomorrow,*
and forever.
People of Zion, your God *will rule*
forever over all generations.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 147

1Praise the Eternal!
It is good to sing praises to our God,
for praise is beautiful and
pleasant.
2The Eternal, *Architect of earth,* is
building Jerusalem,
finding the lost, gathering Israel's
outcasts.
3He binds their wounds,
heals the sorrows of their hearts.
4He counts all the stars *within His*
hands,
carefully fixing their number
and giving them names.
5Our Lord is great. *Nothing is*
impossible with His
overwhelming power.
He is *loving, compassionate, and*
wise beyond all measure.
6The Eternal will lift up the lowly
but throw down the wicked to the
earth.

► Psalm 147 is a postexilic hymn of praise to God as Creator and Sustainer. It celebrates the rebuilding of the walls and gates that protect Jerusalem. God secures the city, grants peace to the border towns, and controls the elements.

7*Open your mouths* with thanks!
Sing praises to the Eternal!
Strum the harp *in unending praise*
to our God
8Who blankets the heavens with
clouds,
sends rain to water the *thirsty*
earth,
and pulls up each blade of grass
upon the mountainside.
9He opens His hands to feed all the
animals
and *scatters seed* to nestlings when
they cry.
10He takes no pleasure in the *raw*
strength of horses;
He finds no joy in the speed of the
sprinter.
11But the Eternal does take pleasure in
those who worship Him,
those who invest hope in His
unfailing love.

12O Jerusalem, praise the Eternal!
O Zion, praise your God!
13For His *divine* power reinforces your
city gates,
blesses your children in the
womb.
14He establishes peace within your
borders,
fills your *markets* with hearty
golden wheat.
15His command ripples across the
earth;
His word runs out on swift feet.
16He blankets *the earth* in wooly snow,
scattering frost like ashes *over the*
land.
17He throws down hail like stones *falling*
from a mountain.
Can any withstand His wintry
blast?
18But He dispatches His word, and the
thaw begins;
at His command, the spring winds
blow, *gently* stirring the waters
back to life.
19He brings Jacob in on His plan,
declaring His word—
His statutes and His teachings to
Israel.
20He has not treated any other nation in
such a way;
they live unaware of His
commands.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 148

1Praise the Eternal!
All you in the heavens, praise the
Eternal;
praise Him from the highest
places!
2All you, His messengers and His armies
in heaven:
praise Him!

3Sun, moon, and all you brilliant stars
above:
praise Him!
4Highest heavens and *all* you waters
above the heavens:
praise Him!

5Let all things *join together in a concert of* praise to the name of the
Eternal,
for He gave the command and they
were created.
6He put them in their places *to stay*
forever—
He declared it so, and it is final.

7Everything on earth, *join in and* praise
the Eternal;
sea monsters and *creatures of* the
deep,
8Lightning and hail, snow and foggy
mists,
violent winds all respond to His
command.

9Mountains and hills,
fruit trees and cedar forests,
10All you animals both wild and tame,
reptiles and birds who take flight:
praise the Lord.

11All kings and all nations,
princes and all judges of the earth,
12*All people,* young men and women,
old men and children alike,
praise the Lord.

13Let them *all* praise the name of the
Eternal!
For His name stands alone above
all others.
His glory shines greater than
anything above or below.
14He has made His people strong;
He is the praise of all who are godly,
the praise of the children of Israel,
those whom He holds close.
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 149

1Praise the Eternal!
Write new songs; sing them to Him *with all your might*!
Gather with His faithful followers in
joyful praise;
2Let *all of* Israel celebrate their Maker,
their God, their friend;
let the children of Zion find great
joy in their *true* King.

3So *let the music begin*; praise His
name—dance and sing
to *the rhythm of* the tambourine,
and *to the tune of* the harp.
4For the Eternal *is listening,* and nothing
pleases Him more than His
people;
He raises up the poor and endows
them with His salvation.
5Let His faithful followers erupt in
praise,
singing triumphantly *wherever they are,* even as they lie down *for sleep in the evening.*
6With the name of God and praise in
their mouths,
with a two-edged sword in their
hands,
7Let them take revenge on all nations
who deny God.
Let them punish the peoples.
8Kings and nobles will be locked up,
and their freedom will be bound in
iron shackles.
9This judgment against them, decreed
by a holy God, will be carried
out.
It's an honor for all His faithful
followers *to serve Him.*
Praise the Eternal!

Psalm 150

► If Psalm 150 is any indication, then the worship of the one True God ought to be full of life and energy. Consider what it must have looked and sounded like in those days: voices lifted, shouting for joy, trumpets blaring, stringed instruments playing, people dancing, pipes humming, tambourines keeping rhythm, cymbals crashing. There are times when worship ought to break out in joy. Is it possible that our worship is too quiet, too reserved, too structured?

1Praise the Eternal!
Praise the True God inside His
temple.
Praise Him beneath massive skies,
under moonlit stars and rising sun.
2Praise Him for His powerful acts,
redeeming His people.

Praise Him for His greatness
that surpasses *our time and understanding.*

3-4Praise Him with the blast of trumpets
high into the heavens,
and praise Him with harps and lyres
and *the rhythm of the* tambourines
skillfully played by those who love and fear the Eternal.
Praise Him with singing and dancing;
praise Him with flutes and strings
of all kinds!
5Praise Him with crashing cymbals,
loud clashing cymbals!
6*No one should be left out;*
Let every man and every beast—
every creature that has the breath
of the Lord—praise the Eternal!
Praise the Eternal!

► This doxology not only closes Book Five, but it also closes the entire Book of Psalms. Up until now, the songs in this book have reminded us of all the reasons we should praise God. Some songs have even commanded us to praise Him. But this closing remark takes the command to praise one step further: everything alive—humans, animals, and heaven's creatures—must praise Him. Praise is what God created us to do; it is one of our highest purposes in life. So it is no wonder that the longest book of the Bible is purely devoted to helping us do just that.

PROVERBS

Collected practical wisdom for everyday guidance

By Solomon and other gifted sages

01 02 03 04 05 06

Every culture has its wisdom. Ancient Egypt's scribe Amenemope collected and passed on wisdom sayings over a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. The 30 chapters in the *Instruction of Amenemope* told Egyptians to be humble and contented with few material things instead of seeking gain through aggressive actions. Colonial America had some of its wisdom collected and printed by Benjamin Franklin each year in *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1732–58). Franklin wrote under the pseudonym "Poor" Richard Saunders and gave us memorable proverbs, such as "A penny saved is a penny earned." Ancient Israel also recorded words of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, a tradition linked with King Solomon as a composer of some sayings and a compiler of the book itself (1 Kings 4:29-34).

Proverbs is a book of practical wisdom. For the sages of Israel, wisdom is the ability to live life well and make good decisions. This is a gift from God; it is not something you can gain on your own. You cannot earn wisdom in the school of hard knocks or on the streets or by education or age. Wisdom begins with knowing who God is and then responding to Him in worship and adoration (Proverbs 1:7). The Books of Ecclesiastes and Job offer a different kind of wisdom that results from contemplating questions, such as "Why do good people suffer?" and "What is the meaning of life?" Proverbs is less philosophical and more practical; it offers advice for daily living.

The Book of Proverbs expands the theme introduced in the Book of Deuteronomy: obedience to God's instruction brings prosperity; disobedience brings adversity. The sages adopted this idea and expressed it in terms of wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom is following God's instruction and doing what is right. Foolishness is rejecting God's teaching and doing what is wrong. Rather than allowing us to decide for ourselves, God decides what is right and wrong; and out of grace, He has revealed it to His people in Scripture. Certain things are to be avoided—lazy lifestyles, violent men, seductive women, dishonest gain, alcohol abuse—because they lead to trouble. Other things are to be pursued—hard work, good friends, a strong wife, discipline, good conversation—because they lead to life.

One of the most unforgettable aspects of this book is how wisdom is personified. Lady Wisdom, as she is called, exists before creation and works alongside God as He fashions the hills and sets the limits of the sea (Proverbs 8:22-31). Lady Wisdom now stands in the streets, calling to the young and naive and inviting them to take the path that leads to true life. In many ways, Lady Wisdom stands in contrast to the seductive woman who wants nothing less than to entice and destroy young men.

1 *I,* Solomon, David's son and Israel's
king, *pass on to you* these proverbs—
a treasury of wisdom—

2So that you would recognize wisdom
and *value* discipline;
that you would understand insightful
teaching
3And receive wise guidance to live a
disciplined life;
that you would seek justice and *have
the ability to choose* what is right
and fair.
4*These proverbs* teach the naive how to
become clever;
they instruct the young in *how to
grow in* knowledge and *live with*
discretion.
5The wise will pay attention *to these
words* and will grow in learning,
and the discerning will receive *divine*
guidance,
6*And they will be able* to interpret the
meaning of a proverb and a puzzle,
the twists and turns in the words of
the wise and their riddles.

► A strategic translation decision has been made to respect the historical situation of this book. In its original context, Proverbs is practical wisdom passed down from parents (especially fathers, see chapters 1–9) to young men who are preparing to enter a life of adult responsibilities: family, business, community leadership, and so on. Because of this relational aspect, we have retained masculine references when appropriate and have used more inclusive language when that was the intention of the original author. It is our greatest hope that God will use this work to remind fathers of the profound place they have in nurturing, instructing, and guiding the next generation.

7*Let us begin.* The worship of the Eternal
One, *the one True God,* is the first
step toward knowledge.
Fools, *however, do not fear God and*
cannot stand wisdom or guidance.

8So, my son, pay attention to your father's
guidance,
and do not ignore what your mother
taught you—
9Wear their wisdom as a badge *of honor
and maturity,*
as *fine* jewelry around your neck.
10My son, should your less honorable
peers pressure you *to do what is
wrong,*
you should be strong enough not to
go along.
11If they should say,

Evildoers: Come on! *Everyone,* hide and
let's wait to see whom we can
beat to a pulp.
We're going to jump some
unsuspecting *chumps* for no
reason at all.
12We'll have our way with them, *and
when we're through, there will be
nothing left,*
as if their bodies were swallowed
whole by the grave's *dark* pit.
13We'll take whatever we want—all
their wealth *and their fancy
clothes—*
and *when we're through,* we'll have
piles of their treasure for our
own.
14You have to join us; *forget about God.
We're going to rake in the goods,
and* we'll share all we take!

15My son, do not join them;
keep well away from their *violent,
destructive* paths.
16For they run *right away, every time,* to do
wrong,
and they are thirsty for blood.
17You see, it makes no sense to bait the net
and set the trap
while the bird is watching,
18But these hiding *in the shadows* and
waiting *to spill innocent blood*
are really just hastening their own
destruction!
By giving in to their sinful desires,
they set themselves up to be
ambushed.
19This is what happens to everyone who
tries to profit by violence;
violence will *eventually* rob them of
their very lives.

► Each generation faces strong peer pressure to follow the world's ways, especially during adolescence. That

pressure can twist an innocent young man inside out until he is nearly unrecognizable to those close to him. Once gang mentality takes over, that young man could easily find himself in unexpected and troublesome situations. Wisdom calls, and her voice is clear: Remember your parents' instruction. Avoid violence and violent people. If you don't, violence will find you.

20 *There's another voice in town.*
It belongs to Lady Wisdom, who calls
out in the street.
She cries out in the town square,
21 At the city gates, in the noisy city streets,
you can hear her speaking over the
racket.

Lady Wisdom: 22 You *simple,* naive
people, how long will you love
your feeble ways?
You simpletons, *how long will you*
enjoy making fun *of what you*
don't understand?
You fools, how long will you hate
learning *what truly matters?*
23 Turn to me and receive my *gentle*
correction;
Watch and I will pour out my spirit
on you;
I will share with you my *wise*
words *in order to redirect your*
lives.
24 *You hear,* but you have refused to
answer my call.
My hands reached out, but no one
noticed.
25 All my advice, all my correction, all
have been neglected—
you wanted nothing of them.
26 So I will be the laughter you hear
when misfortune comes, *and it*
will come.
I will be the mocking sound when
panic grips you—
27 When panic comes like a stormy
blast,
when misfortune sweeps in like a
whirlwind,
when sorrow and anguish weigh
you down.

28 This is when they will call on me, but
I will not respond;
they will be frantic to find me, but
they won't be able.
29 Because they despised knowledge *of my*
ways,
and they also refused to respect *and*
honor the Eternal,
30 Because they rejected my advice
and turned down my correction,
31 *They will surely get what's coming to them:*
they'll *be forced to* eat the fruit of
their *wicked* ways;
they'll gorge themselves on *the*
consequences of their choices.
32 You see, it's turning away *from me* that
brings death to the simple,
and it's self-satisfaction that destroys
the fools.
33 But those who listen to me *now* will live
under *divine* protection;
they can rest knowing they are out of
harm's way.

2 My son, if you accept what I am
telling you
and store my *counsel and*
directives *deep* within you,
2 If you listen for Lady Wisdom, *attune*
your ears to her,
and engage your mind to understand
what she is telling you,
3 If you cry out *to her* for insight
and beg for understanding,
4 *If you sift through the clamor of everything*
around you
to seek her like some precious prize,
to search for her like buried treasure;
5 Then you will grasp what it means to
truly respect the Eternal,
and you will have discovered the
knowledge of *the one True* God.
6 The Eternal *is ready to* share His wisdom
with us,
for His words bring true knowledge
and insight;
7 He has stored up *the essentials of* sound
wisdom for those who do right;
He acts as a shield for those who
value integrity.
8 God protects the paths of *those who*
pursue justice,
watching over the lives of those who
keep faith with Him.
9 *With this wisdom* you will be able to
choose the right road,
seek justice, and decide what is good
and fair
10 Because wisdom will penetrate deep
within
and knowledge will become a good
friend to your soul.
11 Sound judgment will stand guard over
you,

and understanding will watch over
you *as the Lord promised.*
12Wisdom will keep you from following
the way of evildoers,
of those who twist words to pervert
the truth,
13Of those who reject the right road
for a darker, *more sinister* way of
life,
14Of those who enjoy evil
and pursue perverse *pleasures,*
15Of those who journey down a crooked
path,
constantly figuring out new ways to
trick and deceive others.

16*Wisdom* will pluck you from *the trap of* a
seductive woman,
from the enticing propositions of the
adulteress
17Who chose to leave the husband of her
youth,
to forget her sacred promises to her
God;
18For her house is on the road that leads
to death,
and her path goes down to the
shadowy pit.
19Those who go to her will never return;
they will never again find their way
back to *true* life.

20As for you, you should walk like those
who are good
and keep to the paths of those who
love justice,
21For those who live right will remain in
the land
and those with integrity will endure
here.
22But not the wicked; they will be *forced
out and* banned from this
promised land,
and those who deal in deceit will be
plucked up *like weeds.*

3 My son, always remember what
I have taught you;
keep my instructions dear to
your heart.
2*If you do,* they will be your guide to
a long, *healthy,* prosperous life.

3*Stay focused;* do not lose sight of mercy
and truth;
engrave them on a pendant, and hang
it around your neck;
meditate on them so they are written
upon your heart.

4In this way, you will win the favor of God
and others,
and they will think well of you.

5Place your trust in the Eternal; *rely on
Him* completely;
never depend upon your own ideas
and inventions.
6Give Him the credit for everything you
accomplish,
and He will *smooth out and*
straighten the road that lies
ahead.
7And don't think you can decide on your
own what is right and what is
wrong.
Respect the Eternal; turn *and run*
from evil.
8*If you depend on Him,* your body *and
mind will be free from the strain of
a sinful life,*
will experience healing *and health,*
and will be strengthened at their
core.

9Pay tribute to the Eternal in all of your
affairs.
Honor Him with the best of what you
make.
10That way you will prosper to the fullest
and have plenty of food *to eat* and
wine *to drink.*

11My son, do not ignore the Eternal's
instruction
or lose heart when He steps in to
correct you;
12Because the Eternal proves His love by
caring enough to discipline you,
just as a father does his child, his
pride and joy.*

► God knows well what He is doing. He has established rewards for living wisely: A happy, long life. A good reputation. Guidance when you need it most. Health. Success. Even, dare we say, fatherly discipline. These are just a few of the benefits accompanying God's wisdom.

13How fortunate are those who discover
Lady Wisdom
and those who understand *her ways*!

* 3:11-12 Hebrews 12:5-6

14For her worth is greater than the most
expensive prize *you could win.*
Her profit is greater than the finest
thing *you could buy*.
15No gem is more precious than she is—
your *most extravagant* desire doesn't
come close to her.
16She holds *the secret of a* long life in one
hand
and riches and fame in her other
hand.
17Her ways are pleasant;
all of her pathways are peaceful.
18She is like a tree that produces a
satisfied life for anyone who can
wrap their arms around her;
happiness waits for any who hold her
tightly.

19It was by wisdom that the Eternal
fashioned the earth
and by understanding that He
designed the heavens.
20Through His knowledge, the deep was
divided *into seas and sky,*
and the clouds *understood when to*
let down the morning dew.

21My son, never lose sight of God's wisdom
and knowledge:
make decisions out of true wisdom,
guard your good sense,
22And they will be life to your soul
and *fine* jewelry around your neck.
23Then each one of your steps will land
securely on your *life's* journey,
and you will not trip *or fall.*
24Your *mind* will be *clear,* free from fear;
when you lie down *to rest,* you will *be*
refreshed by sweet sleep.
25*Stay calm;* there is no need to be afraid
of a sudden disaster
or to worry when calamity strikes
the wicked,
26For the Eternal is always there to protect
you.
He will safeguard your each and
every step.

27Do not withhold what is good from
those who deserve it;
if it is within your power to give it,
do it.
28Do not send your neighbor away, saying,
"Get back with me tomorrow.
I can give it to you then,"
when what he needs is already in
your hand.

29Make no plans that could result in injury
to your neighbor;
after all, he should be more secure
because he lives near you.
30Avoid fighting with anyone without good
reason,
especially when no one has hurt you;
you have nothing to fight about.
31Do not envy someone who profits at the
expense of others
or copy any of his *tyrannical* ways,
32For crooked people are detestable to the
Eternal,
but those with integrity receive His
counsel.
33His curse lingers over the wicked and
their families,
but He *forever* favors residence of
those who do what is right.
34God *treats the arrogant as they treat others,*
mocking the mockers, *scorning the*
scornful,
but He pours out His grace on the
humble.*
35*In the end,* the wise will receive honor,
but fools will face humiliation.

► It's perfectly natural to envy those who are successful. It's even natural to want to imitate them. But what about those who've gotten ahead by doing the wrong thing? Sometimes it seems crime does pay, the good do die young, and the wicked do have more fun. But it only appears this way; it is not reality. In reality the success of wrongdoers is short-lived. God is against them, and their house is built on the sand. Even if it seems to be a grand house, it will soon come crashing down.

4 *Gather,* children, to hear your father's
instruction.
Pay close attention so you will
understand,
2For I am passing down to you important
precepts.
Do not abandon these *valuable life*
lessons.
3Back when I was young—*the very image*
of my father,
and yet from my mother's view, still
her only boy—

* 3:34 James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

4My father, *with his years of experience,*
became my teacher.

Father: *Son,* grab on to every word I say
to you—hold them close—
stay true to my instructions as you
live, *and they will serve you well.*
5*Whatever it takes to* gain Wisdom,
do it.
To gain understanding, *do it!* Never
forget this!
Never stray from what I am telling
you.
6If you don't forsake Lady Wisdom, she
will protect you.
Love her, and she will *faithfully*
take care of you.
7Gaining sound judgment *is key,* so
first things first: go after Lady
Wisdom!
Now, whatever else you do, follow
through to understanding.
8Cherish her, and she will help you rise
above the confusion of life—
your possibilities will open up before
you—
embrace her, and she will raise you
to a place of honor *in return.*
9She will provide the finishing touch to
your character—grace;
she will give you an elegant
confidence.

10Hear my words, my son, and take them in;
let them soak in so that you will live a
long, *full* life.
11I have pointed you in the way of wisdom;
I have steered you down the path to
integrity.
12*So get going.* And as you go, *know this:*
with integrity you will overcome
all obstacles;
even if you run, you will not stumble.
13Tighten your grip around *wise* advice;
don't let it slip away.
Protect Wisdom, for without her, life
isn't worth living.
14Do not start down the road of the
wicked—
the first step is easy, but it leads to
heartache—
do not go along the way of evildoers.
15Stay away from it; don't even go past it—
and if you find yourself anywhere
near it,
turn your back and run *as far as you*
can in the opposite direction.
16For evildoers *are so twisted* they cannot
sleep unless they have caused
harm;
they'll lie awake all night until they
figure out a way to cause someone
to stumble.
17For they feed on evil the way most eat
bread;
they drink violence the way most
guzzle wine.
18Yet the way of those who do right is like
the early morning sun
that shines brighter and brighter
until noon.
19Evildoers travel a dark road *because*
they love to hide their deeds in
darkness;
they can't see the perils ahead that
cause them to stumble.

► Fathers have a crucial role in instructing their sons. It's easy and natural to teach children about some things: how to take care of a car, how to hit a ball, or how to mow the lawn. But what about deeper things, the kinds of things that make life worth living? These are much harder. They must not be left for someone else to do. Paul wrote, "And, fathers, do not drive your children mad, but nurture them in the discipline and teaching *that come* from the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Instructing children in the ways of God is crucial work.

20My son, pay attention to all the words
I am telling you.
Lean in closer so you may hear all
I say.
21Keep them before you; *meditate on them;*
set them safely in your heart.
22For those who discover them, they are
life.
They bring wholeness and healing to
their bodies.
23*Above all else,* watch over your heart;
diligently guard it
because from a sincere and pure
heart come the good and noble
things of life.
24Do away with any talk that twists and
distorts *the truth;*
have nothing to do with any verbal
trickery.
25Keep *your head up,* your eyes straight
ahead,

and your focus fixed on what is in
front of you.
26Take care you don't stray from the
straight path, *the way of truth,*
and you will safely reach the end of
your road.
27Do not veer *off course* to the right or the
left;
step away from evil, *and leave it
behind.*

5 My son, stay focused; listen to the
wisdom I have gained;
give attention to what I have
learned *about life*
2So you may be able to make sensible
judgments
and speak with knowledge.
3You see, the lips of a seductive woman
speak honey-sweet words;
they are smooth like oil *and enticing.*
4But in the end, she is bitter,
turning the stomach and rotting *the
soul;*
she cuts as deep as a double-edged
sword.
5She leads you down a path that can only
end in death;
her steps lead eventually to the
grave.
6She does not travel the road to life *and
truth.*
She follows a wandering path—
*a rocky, pit-filled road that twists
and turns*—and she doesn't even
know it.

7So, my children, listen to me.
Do not stray from my advice.
8Stay *away from her,* far away from her
path;
don't even go near her door
9Unless you *are ready to* hand over your
reputation to someone else,
unless you want to spend *the rest of*
your years at the mercy of some
cruel person.
10If you do, strangers will help themselves
to your wealth,
and everything you have worked
hard to acquire will end up in
someone else's hands.
11Your life will end with groanings *of
remorse, of opportunities missed,*
and your flesh and bones will be
eaten up *with sorrow, regret for
worthless efforts.*
12Then you'll say, "Why did I hate being
taught?
Why did I turn my back on correction?
13I disregarded all that my teachers said
to me;
I turned my ear away from my
instructors!
14Now I am on the edge of *complete and*
utter ruin
in the midst of the community."

► People are easily seduced, especially men. Everyone is vulnerable to sexual sin at some point or another, and history is strewn with the wreckage that results when the path of adultery is followed: bitterness, death, instability, loss, ruin. Time and again, these are the consequences of violating God's instruction.

15*Here's what you should do to be satisfied:*
go home and drink in the pleasures of
your own cistern, *your wife;*
enjoy the sweet, fresh water *that has
been there all along,* flowing from
your own well.
16*Take care.* Should your own springs, *your
body,* be freely shared?
Should your streams of water *satisfy
anyone* in the streets? *Absolutely
not!*
17They should be *kept pure* for *you and* you
alone,
not for sharing with strangers.
18May your fountain, *your sex life,* be
blessed *by God;*
may you know true joy with the wife
of your youth.
19*She who is* lovely as a deer and graceful
as a doe—
as you drink in her love,
may her breasts satisfy you at all
times.
20My son, why get caught up in some
other woman
and embrace the breast of a
stranger?

► Wisdom recognizes the beauty of sexual intimacy. After all, God designed us as sexual beings. But for physical intimacy to retain the beauty of its design, it must be shared wisely. It is meant to be shared with someone

who is your own. In marriage two become one (Genesis 2:24), so they belong together and belong to each other. In that safe place of belonging, one finds fulfillment. So a husband or a wife must partake only of the partner's body and love. To seek intimacy elsewhere is foolish.

21 You see, the Eternal sees our ways before Him.
He watches *every move we make and knows* where those paths lead.
22 The wicked will be snared by their own wrongdoing.
Their flaws will tie their own hands, *and they will be dragged through life* by the cords of their sins.
23 Because they have no discipline, their spirits die *and their bodies will soon follow;*
because they are immensely foolish, they wander lost *and confused.*

6 My son, if you *will risk your family's future to* put up collateral for *the debts of* an acquaintance,
if you seal a commitment with a handshake to someone *without first knowing the value of his word,*
2 Then your words may well *be the trap that* snares you,
and your promise may seal your fate.
You can't be sure to whom you hitched your future.
3 So, my son—save yourself! Here's what you need to do:
go to that person who became your master *with a handshake,*
humble yourself, and plead your case.
4 Do not sleep;
don't even rest your eyes *until you deal with this.*
5 Get out *as quickly as possible,*
as a gazelle runs from the hand of the hunter,
as a bird *takes off* from the grip of the fowler.

6 Take a lesson from the ant, you who love leisure and ease.
Observe how it works, and *dare to* be *just as* wise.
7 It has no boss,
no one laying down the law or telling it what to do,
8 Yet it gathers its food through summer
and takes what it needs from the harvest.
9 How long do you plan to lounge *your life away,* you lazy fool?
Will you ever get out of bed?
10 *You say,* "A little sleep, a little rest,
a few more minutes, a nice little nap."
11 But soon poverty will be on top of you like a robber;
need *will assault you* like a well-armed warrior.

► Laziness is not just a bad habit; it's a threat—a clear and present danger. Since the beginning, God has made us in His image to create and tend His good creation. In other words, God has made us to work. It is in our spiritual DNA. We must do it in order to be who God made us and to fight off the threats of poverty and want. God has also created the Sabbath as a space for us to rest, of course, just as He rested on the seventh day.

12 Someone who struts around taking advantage *of unsuspecting souls*
and deceiving others *is to be avoided.*
13 With a wink of his eye, a quick shuffle of his feet,
and a slight gesture with his hand, *he signals his roguish treachery.*
14 With a *warped mind and* twisted heart,
he constantly looks for his own gain at others' expense,
causing friction *everywhere he goes.*
15 But *you watch:* his *actions will bring* sudden disaster!
In an instant, his life will be shattered,
and there will be nothing to save him.

16 *Take note,* there are six things the Eternal hates;
no, *make it* seven He abhors:
17 Eyes that look down on others, a tongue that can't be trusted,
hands that shed innocent blood,
18 A heart that conceives evil plans,
feet that sprint toward evil,
19 A false witness who breathes out lies,
and anyone who stirs up trouble among the faithful.

20 So, my son, follow your father's direction,
and don't forget what your mother taught you—

21 Keep their teachings close to your heart;
engrave them on a pendant, and hang
it around your neck.
22 Their instruction will guide you along
your journey,
guard you when you sleep,
and address you when you wake *in
the morning*.
23 For their direction is a lamp; their
instruction will light *your path*,
and their discipline will correct *your
missteps,*
sending you down the *right* path of
life.
24 They will keep you *far* from the
corrupted woman,
away from the smooth talk of a
seductive woman.
25 Do not lose yourself in desire for her
beauty
or let her win you over with her
painted eyes,
26 For you can buy a harlot with a loaf of
bread,
but sex with another man's wife will
cost you your life.
27 Can you carry fire right next to your
body
and keep your clothes from burning?
28 Can you walk over fiery coals
and keep your feet from blistering?
29 Take another man's wife, and you will
find out—
whoever touches her will be found
guilty.
30 People don't despise a thief
who only steals to fill his hunger;
31 Still if they catch him, he must repay
seven times over—
he could end up losing everything
he owns!
32 *By contrast* only a fool would commit
adultery
since by his action he loses *not only
his possessions but also* his own
life.
33 He will suffer injury and be disgraced;
dishonor will leave a permanent
mark *on his life*.
34 For jealousy sparks a husband's rage—
when he gets his revenge, he'll show
no mercy.
35 He will not be paid off or appeased;
no bribe *or gift* will set things right.

7 My son, live according to what I am
telling you;
guard my instructions as you
would a treasure *deep* within
you.
2 Stay true to my directives, and they will
serve you well;
make my teachings the lens through
which you see life.
3 Bind cords around your fingers *to remind
you of them;*
meditate on them, and you'll engrave
them upon your heart.
4 Say to Lady Wisdom, "My sister";
recognize that understanding is your
best friend,
5 And they will keep you from *the arms of*
another woman—
protect you from the enchantress
who entices men *into her bed*.

► People are forgetful, so we must be reminded constantly of Wisdom and her ways. We don't always need to hear something new; often we just need to be reminded of what is true. In these proverbs wisdom is found when one not only knows what is right, but acts on that knowledge. Foolishness, on the other hand, means a lack of understanding and wrongdoing.

6 *One day* I was at the window of my
house,
looking out through my lattice
shutters,
7 And there among the usual crowd of the
gullible people
I spotted a naive young man.
8 He was going down the street near the
corner where she lived—*that
mysterious and evil woman*—
taking the road that led directly to
her house.
9 At the end of the day, as night
approached
and darkness crept in,

10 I saw her! A woman came out to meet
him.
She was dressed for temptation and
devious with her affections.
11 *Here's what I know about her:* she is loud
and obnoxious, a rebel *against
what is proper and decent.*
She's *always on the move*—anxious to
get out of the house and
12 Down the street; at times in the open,
at others lurking around every
corner.

13 *As I am watching them,* she grabs him
and kisses him,
then shamelessly tells him:

The Immoral Woman: 14 It was my turn
to offer a peace offering,
and today I paid my vows,
15 So now I come to see you.
I really want to be with you, and
what luck! I have found you!
16 *You'll be impressed.* I have decorated
my couch,
laid colorful Egyptian linens over
where we will be together,
17 And perfumed the bed with *exotic oils
and herbs:*
myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
18 Come in, and we will feast on love
until sunrise;
we will delight ourselves in our
affections.
19 *You don't need to worry;* my husband
is *long gone by now,*
away from home on a distant
journey.
20 He took a bag of money with him,
so I don't expect him home until
next month.

21 *It worked!* She enticed him with
seductive words,
seduced him with her smooth talk.
22 Right away he followed her *home.*
He followed her like a bull being led to
the slaughter,
Like a fool* caught in a trap
23 (*that is,* until an arrow punctures
his liver),
Like a bird flying straight into a net.
He had no clue his life was at stake;
everything was about to change.

24 This is why *it is so important that* you
listen to me, my sons,
and pay attention to all I am telling
you.
25 Do not let your mind wonder about her
ways;
do not *lose yourself and* drift down
her path,
26 For she's claimed one life after another,
victim after victim, too many to count.
27 Her house is the gateway to the grave;
every step *toward her* is a step
toward death's *dark* chamber.

8 Isn't Lady Wisdom calling?
Listen; don't you hear the voice of
understanding crying out?
2 She's taken her stand at the highest
place in the city,
at the crossroads *where everyone can
see her.*
3 There, and at the gates, at the entrance
to the city,
right in front of the city doors she
cries out:

Lady Wisdom: 4 O people! I am calling
to you;
I have a message for all
humanity.
5 You gullible people, acquire insight.
You naive ones, cultivate a heart
that truly understands.
6 Listen, for I am about to tell you of
unparalleled excellence *and
beauty*;
what I am about to say will set
things right.
7 I will only speak the truth;
I despise evil, so it will not pass
through my lips.
8 Everything I say promotes justice;
not one word is crooked, and
nothing is distorted.
9 Each and every word is straight talk
to perceptive people,
upright *and honest* to knowledge-
seekers.
10 Accept my correction as being more
valuable than your prized
possession,
authentic knowledge more
valuable than pure gold.

11 You see, no gem is more precious than
Lady Wisdom—
your most extravagant desire doesn't
come close to her.

Lady Wisdom: 12 I make my home with
prudence;
I obtain knowledge and sound
judgment.
13 If you respect the Eternal, you will
grow to despise evil.
I despise wretched, vile talk
and ways of pride and arrogance.
14 *Good* counsel is mine, and also true
wisdom.
I am understanding, and strength
belongs to me.
15 It's because of me that kings wield
power
and authorities decree what is
right.

* 7:22 Some manuscripts read "deer."

16It's because of me that leaders and
their agents govern
and all judge according to what
is right.
17I love those who love me;
those who search hard for me will
find me.
18Riches and honor are *the benefit of*
following me;
so are lasting wealth and justice.
19My reward is better than gold, even
the purest gold;
and my profit is greater than the
highest quality silver.
20I follow the way of right living.
Follow me along the path to find
justice;
21I'm ready to meet those who love me,
bestow *true* riches upon them,
and fill up *their lives until* their
treasuries *overflow*.
22The Eternal created me; it happened
when His work was beginning,
one of His first acts long ago.
23Before time He established me,
before the earth *saw its first sunrise*.
24I was born before the deep existed,
before any springs poured out
their water,
25Before the mountains were placed *on
their foundations,*
before the hills *rolled across the
land—*
yes, before all this, I was brought
forth.
26When the earth was yet unformed
and the fields *were not yet
nestled beneath the wind—*
even before the first dust of the
earth—
27When He created the heavens, I was
there.
When He drew a circle in the
deep, *dividing the oceans and
the sky, I was there.*
28*I was there* when He established the
sky.
I was there when the springs in the
deep were fortified;
29I witnessed Him lay down the shore
as a boundary
and put limits on the water
And determine the foundations of the
earth.
30*All this time* I was *close* beside Him, a
master craftsman.
Every day I was His delightful
companion,
celebrating every minute in His
presence,
31Elated by the world He was making
and all its fine creatures;
I was *especially* pleased with
humanity.

32So now listen to me, my children:
those who live by my ways will
find *true* happiness.
33Pay attention to my guidance, *dare to*
be wise,
and don't disregard my teachings.
34The one who listens to me,
who carefully seeks me in
everyday things
and delays action until my way
is apparent, that one will find
true happiness.
35For when he recognizes *and follows*
me, he finds *a peaceful and
satisfying* life
and receives favor from the
Eternal.
36But *heed my warning:* the one who
goes against me will only hurt
himself,
for all who despise me are *playing
with fire and* courting death.

9 Lady Wisdom has built her house;
she has supported it with seven
pillars.
2*She's prepared a feast:*
She's slaughtered her animals,
poured a spiced wine,
and set her table.
3She has sent out her servants *with the
invitation to come to the party;*
she, too, calls out from the highest
point of the city:

Lady Wisdom: 4Whoever is young and
gullible, turn in here.
You are welcome in this place!

Then, turning to those who are naive,
she says:

Lady Wisdom: 5*Come in.* Come, eat my
bread,
and drink my spiced wine.
6Give up your gullible ways, *your naive
thoughts,* for *true* life.
Set your course for understanding.

7Whoever tries to discipline a scoffer
should expect *a hail of* insults in
return.
Whoever tries to correct an evildoer
is *likely to get* hurt in the process.

Lady Wisdom has built a house, prepared a feast, and now invites the young, the simple, and the naive to come to her party. She wants her house full of guests and spilling over with life, yet hers is not the only invitation. There is competition in the streets. Another woman vies for the attention of the young and impressionable. She, too, wants her house full, but of deceit and seduction; and when it is, death and misery join the revelry.

Wisdom addresses a broad audience. First, there are the wise who already know and worship the one True God, who do what is right in God's eyes, and who experience the resulting benefits. They need only to be reminded about God's ways. Second, there are the mockers and fools who reject God's teaching and consistently do what is wrong in spite of its consequences. They need to be confronted and called to change their ways. Finally, there are the naive who straddle the fence, one day going this way, another day going that way. Wisdom extends herself to reach them, to point clearly toward the decision they have to make.

8 So do not correct a scoffer unless you
are ready to be hated,
but correct the wise and you will be
loved.
9 Give instruction to the wise, and they
will become wiser.
Teach upstanding people, and they
will learn even more.
10 Reverence for the Eternal, *the one True*
God, is the beginning of wisdom;
true knowledge of the Holy One is *the*
start of understanding.

Lady Wisdom: 11 Through me your days
will be lengthened,
and years will be added to your life.

12 If you are wise, wisdom is its own reward.
If you mock *what you don't*
understand, you alone will suffer
the consequences.

13 *Compared to Wisdom,* the Lady Folly is
rowdy and loud,
naive and ignorant.
14 She sits by the door of her house,
on a bench at the highest place in
the city,
15 Crooning to passersby
who hurry straight on to their
destinations:

Lady Folly: 16 Whoever is *young and*
gullible, turn in here.
You are welcome in this place!

Then, she turns to the naive.

Lady Folly: 17 Stolen water tastes so
much sweeter!
Bread secreted away is *much more*
satisfying to eat!

18 But those *who pause to listen to Lady Folly*
do not know death is the next stop,
that her guests are walking cadavers.

10

The proverbs of Solomon:

A wise son makes his father
glad,
but a foolish one fills his mother
with sorrow.

► Solomon's proverbs were originally short, pithy, easily remembered sayings brought together around certain themes. They started as oral traditions and were eventually written in a Hebrew poetic form known as parallelism. Chapters 10–15 are dominated by antithetical parallelism, meaning a statement is made in line 1 and then contrasted in line 2. Chapters 16–22 contain both synonymous and synthetic parallelism. In synonymous parallelism, the ideas in line 1 are repeated in line 2 using different words. In synthetic parallelism, later lines serve to expand, define, and elaborate the first lines.

2 Riches gained through dishonest means
will *eventually* vanish,
but doing what is right avoids a
deadly consequence.
3 The Eternal does not allow the right-
living to go hungry,
but He will frustrate the plans of the
wicked.

4 A slack hand produces *nothing but* poverty,
but an industrious hand *soon* takes hold of riches.
5 A wise son stores up *for the winter months* while it is still summer,
but a shameful son lies around even during the harvest.
6 Blessings come to those who do what is right,
but words spoken by the wicked cover up violent schemes.
7 The memory of one who lived with integrity brings joy,
but the legacy of a wrongdoer will rot away.
8 The wise at heart will *gladly* obey direction,
but one who fills the air with meaningless talk will fall into ruin.
9 The path of integrity is always safe,
but a person who follows a crooked way will be exposed.
10 Whoever winks his eye signals trouble,
and whoever fills the air with meaningless talk will fall into ruin.
11 The mouth of the righteous is a spring of life,
but words spoken by the wicked cover up violent schemes.
12 Hatred fuels dissension,
but love calms all rebellions.
13 Wisdom lives where insightful words are spoken,
but harsh punishment awaits the senseless.
14 The wise store up knowledge *as a safeguard,*
but the *meaningless* chatter of fools means that chaos is near.
15 The wealth of the rich is their *powerful* fortress;
the poverty of the poor reduces them to rubble.
16 The reward of those who do right is *a satisfied* life,
but the profits gained by those who do wrong is used to sin.
17 Those who accept instruction are *travelers* on the road to *a meaningful* life,
but those who refuse correction wander off *and pave a path to ruin.*
18 Lips that lie cover *deep-seated* hatred,
and whoever spreads a libelous rumor is *acting as* a fool.
19 The more you talk, the more likely you will cross the line *and say the wrong thing;*
but if you are wise, you'll speak *less and* with restraint.
20 The speech of those who do right is of greater value than the finest silver,
but the thoughts of wrongdoers are worthless.
21 The right-living teach many,
but fools die with no clue how to live well.

► Perhaps the ancients knew the power of words better than we do. Words can conceal, reveal, destroy, and encourage. Words are extremely powerful, so Wisdom urges us to use a few carefully chosen words and to pick our conversations equally well.

22 The blessing of the Eternal is what makes someone rich,
and He doesn't add pain to it.
23 Mischief is the sport of fools,
but wise actions bring joy to a person with insight.
24 Whatever wrongdoers fear *the most* will happen to them,
but those who do right will receive what they long for.
25 After the storm passes, the wrongdoers are blown away,
but those who do right are *safe and sound* on their firm foundations forever.
26 As vinegar vexes the teeth, and as smoke irritates the eyes,
so a slacker annoys his boss.
27 Reverence for the Eternal makes for a long *and peaceful* life,
but a wrongdoer will have years taken away.
28 The hope of those who do right is joy *and celebration,*
but the *only* prospect for those who do wrong is futility.
29 The way of the Eternal offers safety to those who love justice,
but it destroys those who perpetrate evil.
30 The right-living will never have their land taken away,
but wrongdoers will be uprooted.
31 Wisdom flows from the mouths of those who do right,
but tongues that twist the truth will be cut out.
32 The lips of the right-living understand what is proper,

but the mouths of wrongdoers *twist and* pervert the truth.

11 Dishonesty in business disgusts the Eternal,
but fair dealing delights Him.

► Business may well be the most common human activity, so God cares deeply about how we conduct our business. Many proverbs address honesty in all forms of business—buying, selling, negotiating, transacting, and working. All of these depend on trust. Deceit in business causes many people to suffer. In fact, world economies and all our livelihoods depend in large measure on truthfulness, honesty, and fair dealings in the market.

2 When pride comes, shame is not far behind,
but wisdom accompanies those who are humble.
3 The right-living are guided by integrity,
but the crooked ways of the faithless will lead to ruin.
4 Riches won't matter on the day of wrath,
but right living will rescue from death.
5 The good deeds of the blameless pave a peaceful, *productive* path,
but wrongdoers trip over their own faults.
6 The good deeds of the upright will rescue them,
but the faithless will be conquered by their *shallow* desires.
7 When wrongdoers die, their hopes die *with them.*
Their great expectations vanish *into nothing more than a dream.*
8 Those who do right are pulled from trouble;
it falls on wrongdoers instead *who are left to sink in their own problems.*
9 The words of the godless ruin those close to them,
but through insight the right-living are spared.
10 When prosperity comes to those who do right, the *whole* city celebrates;
but when the wicked get their just punishment, there is joyous cheering.
11 A city thrives through the blessing of those living right,
but the words of a wrongdoer will bring it to ruin.
12 Whoever puts down another is not wise,
but one who knows better keeps quiet.
13 A gossip can't keep anything confidential,
but a reliable person protects a secret.
14 Without wise guidance, a nation falls;
but victory is certain when there are plenty of wise counselors.
15 Trouble compounds when you guarantee a stranger's debt,
but you'll be safe if you refuse the pledge.
16 A gracious woman acquires honor,
but cruel people are *only interested in* acquiring money.
17 Kindness is its own reward,
but cruelty is a self-inflicted wound.
18 The wicked earn a living by deception,
but the one who plants righteousness gathers a true harvest.
19 Indeed, those who do what is right will live a good life,
but those who pursue evil will die.
20 The Eternal detests a crooked heart *and a warped mind,*
but He takes great pleasure in those who follow the right way.
21 Certainly those who do wrong will not escape punishment,
but those who do right will go free.
22 Much like a gold ring in the snout of a pig,
so is a beautiful woman who lacks good judgment.
23 Those who live right crave what is good,
but the prospect of wrongdoers is wrath.
24 One shares liberally and yet gains even more,
while another hoards more than is right and still has need.
25 A giving person will receive much *in return,*
and someone who gives water will also receive the water *he needs.*

► Generosity places God's gifts and blessings into circulation. The principle is simply stated: by giving we receive. This may seem counterintuitive, but

it is how God's economy works. As Jesus said, "Don't hold back—give freely, and you'll have plenty poured back into your lap—a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, brimming over. You'll receive in the same measure you give" (Luke 6:38).

26 Curses fall upon those who hoard food,
but blessings come to those who sell food.
27 Those who seek good find the goodwill *of others,*
but those who look for evil are sure to find it.
28 Those who trust in their wealth are headed for great disappointment,
but those who do right will sprout like green leaves *in the spring*.
29 A person who stirs up trouble in his family will inherit *stormy* winds,
and foolish *troublers* will end up serving the wise.
30 The tree of life grows where the fruit of right-living falls,
and whoever wins souls is wise.
31 If the righteous can *expect to* be repaid on earth,
how much more can the ungodly and the sinners?

12 Those who love discipline love knowledge,
but fools hate *any kind of* correction.
2 The Eternal prefers those who do good,
but He condemns those who plot evil.
3 Doing what is wrong keeps everyone *off balance and* insecure,
but those who do right will never be uprooted.
4 A dignified wife brings honor to her husband,
but a shameful wife is like decay eating away at his bones.
5 The thoughts of the right-living tend toward justice,
but the guidance of the wicked is *trickery and* treachery.
6 The words of the wicked ambush from the shadows, seeking blood,
but the speech of the honest keeps them free.
7 The wrongdoers are overthrown—no one is left!
But the house of the right-living remains strong.
8 A person is commended for expressing insight,
but a perverted heart is despised.
9 It is better to be overlooked and have a servant
than to be pretentious and have nothing to eat.
10 Those who are righteous treat their animals humanely,
but the compassion of the wicked is really inhumane.

► A person in a positive relationship with God stands in a right relationship with His creation. How we treat animals may mirror our souls—not just the pets in our home, but the pets in our neighborhood and the animals in our food supply. One who is truly right with God considers the needs of His creatures.

11 Whoever works the land will have *more than* enough food,
but whoever follows empty pursuits lacks sense.
12 The wicked envy what the evil plunder,
but the root of the right-living produces fruit *for all*.
13 A wrongdoer is *soon* boxed in by his deceitful talk,
but the one who does right escapes from trouble *unharmed*.
14 Words spoken *wisely* result in much good,
and working with your hands pays a large reward.
15 Fools follow their own directions and think they are right,
but wise people listen *intently* to advice.
16 A fool's anger is quickly evident,
but a clever person knows how to hide his flaws.
17 A faithful witness speaks the truth,
but a false witness utters lies.
18 Thoughtless words cut deeply like a thrusting sword,
but the speech of the wise is a healing balm.
19 Truth spoken will stand forever,
but lies survive only briefly.
20 Deceit darkens the hearts of those who plot evil,
but advocates of peace have joy.

21The right-living are not overcome with calamity,
but wrongdoers have their fill of it.
22Lying lips disgust the Eternal,
but those who act faithfully delight Him.
23A clever man is careful in revealing what he knows,
but a fool betrays his incompetence.
24The hand of the hard workers will *one day* rule,
and slackers will be forced to labor.
25The weight of worry drags us down,
but a good word lightens our day.
26Those who live right are good guides to those who follow,*
but wrongdoers will steer their friends down the wrong path.
27Slackers don't *take time to* cook their food,*
but hard workers prize everything they have.
28Life springs up along the path of integrity,
and death has no place along its course.

13 A wise child is attentive to his parents' instruction,
but the mocker is deaf to correction.
2A person eats well when he speaks wisely,
but the treacherous crave violence.
3Those who guard their speech insure they will take another breath,
but those who talk without thinking guarantee their demise.
4Slackers crave but have their fill of nothing,
but the hardworking desire and are completely satisfied.
5The right-living will not tolerate any lie,
but wrongdoers come to shame and embarrassment.
6Doing right keeps the innocent on the path *of life,*
but doing wrong is the downfall of the wicked.
7One pretends he is wealthy but has nothing,
while another seems to be poor but has great wealth.
8The rich *are targeted and must* ransom their lives,
but no one bothers to threaten the poor.
9The light of the right-living brings joy *as it burns brightly;*
the lamp of a wrongdoer will be snuffed out.
10Arrogance only produces arguments,
but wisdom accompanies those well advised.
11Money earned hastily is easily lost,
but hard-earned money continues to grow.
12Hope postponed grieves the heart;
but when a dream comes true, life is full *and sweet.*
13The one who hates *good* counsel will reap *failure and* ruin,
but the one who reveres God's instruction will be rewarded.
14Wise instruction is a spring yielding a satisfied life;
those who follow it avoid the traps that lead to death.
15Good sense brings blessing,
but the road of the treacherous is *long and* rough.
16A clever person acquires knowledge and then acts on it;
but a fool advertises his folly *for all to see.*
17An untrustworthy messenger stirs up trouble,
but a faithful emissary is curative balm.
18A person who turns from correction faces poverty and shame,
but one who regards *constructive* criticism is well respected.
19A dream fulfilled is the sweetness of life,
but abandoning evil is repulsive to fools.
20One who walks with the wise becomes wise,
but whoever keeps company with fools only hurts himself.
21Trouble *eagerly* pursues the sinner,
but success rewards the right-living.
22A good person leaves an inheritance for his grandchildren,
but the wealth of the sinner is *eventually* passed on to the right-living.
23Though the fields of the poor yield a bumper crop
in a land without justice, it is stolen out from under them.
24Those who spare the rod *of discipline* hate their children,
but those who are quick to correct them show true love.
25Those who do right have plenty to eat,
while those who do wrong go hungry.

* 12:26 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 12:27 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

14 A wise woman builds her house,
but a foolish one picks it to
splinters with her own
hands.
2Whoever travels through life with
integrity respects the Eternal,
but whoever turns from it hates Him.
3A fool's words *betray his pride and* invite
punishment,
but the *humble* speech of the wise
will spare them.
4*A farm* without oxen has a manger
without grain;
there's a good return in the strength
of an ox.
5An honest witness can *always* be trusted,
but a false witness breathes out
nothing but lies.
6Wisdom eludes mockers, though they
seek it,
but insight comes quickly to those
with understanding.
7Walk away from the company of fools,
for you cannot find insight in their
words.
8It takes wisdom for the clever to
understand the path they are on,
but the fool is deceived by his own
foolishness.
9Fools make a mockery of guilt *and*
repentance,
but those who do what is right
receive special standing.*
10Only the heart can know its own
resentment;
likewise no stranger can experience
its joy.
11The house of the wicked will be
destroyed,
while the tent of the upright will
prosper.
12Before every person lies a road that
seems to be right,
but the end of that road is death *and*
destruction.
13Laughter can mask heartache,
and joy often gives way to grief.
14A disloyal heart has its fill of disloyal
ways,
but a good person will be satisfied
from above.
15The gullible believe anything *they are*
told,
but clever people know to question
every step.
16The wise are cautious and stay far from
evil,
but fools are hotheaded and careless.
17Quick-tempered people make fools of
themselves,
and evil schemers make many
enemies.
18The naive are heirs to foolishness,
but the clever are honored with
insight.
19Evil people will be humbled before the
good;
the wicked *will stoop* at the doorstep
of the righteous.
20The poor are hated even by their own
neighbors,
but the rich are loved by many
friends.
21Those who have contempt for their
neighbors are sinners,
but those who are kind to the poor
are happy.
22Don't those who work evil stray *from the*
truth?
Those who plan goodness experience
unfailing love and faithfulness.
23Prosperity comes from *hard* work,
but talking *too much* leads to great
scarcity.
24The wise are honored for their wealth;
the reward of fools is *more*
foolishness.
25A truthful witness protects lives *by not*
allowing evil to triumph,
but a deceitful witness speaks lies
and puts the innocent in jeopardy.
26Reverence for the Eternal brings bold
confidence,
and one's offspring will have *hope of*
protection.
27Respect and honor for Him is *the basis of*
a satisfied life,
which guards a person from being
trapped in the snares of death.
28A king's splendor is in his many people,
but a declining population will lead
to his ruin.
29Whoever is *patient and* slow to anger
shows great understanding,
but whoever has a quick temper
magnifies his foolishness.
30A serene heart can add years to one's life;
but jealous passion rots the bones.

* 14:9 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

► The wrong kind of passion can be a dangerous thing. Too often people are ruled by strong emotions, thoughts that cannot be checked, and actions that cannot be controlled. If that's the

case, then you are putting your life and well-being in jeopardy. Peace of mind, tranquility of soul, and serenity of heart become the recipe for a long, happy life.

31 Whoever oppresses the poor insults his
Maker,
but anyone who is gracious to the
needy honors Him.
32 The wicked are waylaid by their evil
actions,
but the right-living find *hope's*
sanctuary even in their death.*
33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one with
insight
and can even be experienced by fools.
34 Living according to *God's* instructions
makes a nation great,
but sin colors those who commit it
with disgrace.
35 The king shows kindness to a servant
who acts wisely,
but his anger burns toward one who
brings shame.

15 A tender answer turns away
rage,
but a prickly reply spikes
anger.
2 The words of the wise extend
knowledge,
but foolish people utter nonsense.
3 The Eternal can see all things;
His gaze is fixed on both the evil and
the good.
4 A word of encouragement heals the one
who receives it,
but a deceitful word breaks the spirit.
5 Fools refuse their parents' guidance,
but sensible children accept
correction.
6 Great treasure may be found where the
right-living make their home,
but trouble awaits the wicked *at
every turn.*
7 When the wise speak, knowledge
spreads *far and wide,*
but fools care nothing about such
matters.
8 When the wicked offer sacrifices, they
disgust the Eternal,
but the prayers of those who do right
are a pleasure to Him.
9 The lifestyle of the wicked is repulsive
to Him,
while those who do right delight Him.
10 Harsh punishment is waiting for those
who reject the path *of life,*
and those who hate correction will
die.
11 The grave and destruction are fully
exposed before the Eternal;
how much more *does He know* the
thoughts of Adam's children!
12 Those who mock others don't like being
corrected,
so they keep their distance from the
wise.
13 A *warm,* smiling face reveals a joy-filled
heart,
but heartache crushes the spirit *and
darkens the appearance.*
14 Those who have understanding hearts
hunger after knowledge,
but those with no understanding
feast on foolishness.
15 The poor and oppressed suffer hardship
day after day,
but those with kind hearts continually
feast.
16 It is better to live with less and honor the
Eternal
than to have riches and carry the
burdens that come with them.
17 Better to eat only vegetables served
lovingly
than a fattened ox served hatefully.
18 A hot-headed person stirs up trouble,
but one with patience settles a fight.
19 Lazy people walk a path overgrown with
thornbushes,
but those with integrity travel a *wide,*
level road.
20 A wise child makes his father happy,
but a foolish man despises his mother.
21 Foolishness brings sheer joy to those
who have no sense,
but people with insight steer a
straight course *through life.*
22 Plans fall apart without *proper* advice;
but with the right guidance, they
come together nicely.
23 There is great joy in having the right
answer,
and how sweet is the right word at
the right time!
24 For the wise the road of life climbs up
steep grades
in order to avoid the slide down to
the grave.
25 The Eternal splinters the house of the
haughty,
but He secures the property of
widows.

* 14:32 Greek manuscripts read "integrity."

► It is ironic that we may have more to fear from the proud and powerful than from the poor and needy. Those who have want more, and so they take it. Oh, maybe they won't pick your pocket or break into your home. Their ways are more subtle and more effective. As James, Jesus' brother, wrote, "Isn't it the rich who step on you while climbing the ladder of success? And isn't it the rich who *take advantage of you and* drag you into court?" (James 2:6b). James isn't describing all the rich, of course, but many have made their fortunes off the backs of others. God is the One who can protect the poor, the One who can reduce the grand houses of the haughty to splinters.

[26]The thoughts of the wrongdoers repulse the Eternal,
but kind words are pure *pleasure for Him.*
[27]Those who take illegal gains injure their families,
but those who refuse a bribe will live *in peace.*
[28]The right-living think before they speak,
but wrongdoers simply spew evil.
[29]The Eternal stays far from the wrongdoers,
but He listens to the prayer of the right-living.
[30]Bright eyes *and a cheerful expression* bring joy to the heart,
and good news *revives the spirit and* renews health.
[31]Those who learn from the lessons of life will join the others who are wise.
[32]Those who disregard discipline sabotage themselves,
but those who are open to correction gain understanding.
[33]Reverence for the Eternal is the *first* lesson of wisdom,
and humility *always* precedes honor.

16 People go about making their plans,
but the Eternal has the final word.
[2]Even when you think you have good intentions,
He knows your real motives.
[3]Whatever you do, do it as service to Him,
and *He* will guarantee your success.
[4]The Eternal made everything for a reason.
Even wrongdoers *fit in His plans;*
troubled times await them.
[5]He abhors arrogant people.
Make no mistake about it! They will be punished!
[6]*The penalty of* sin is removed by love and loyalty;
and by devotion to the Eternal, evil is avoided.
[7]When people make good choices, He is pleased;
He even causes their enemies to live peacefully near them.
[8]Better to have little and stand for what is right
than to become rich by doing what is wrong.
[9]People *do their best* making plans for their lives,
but the Eternal guides each step.
[10]The king makes a decision under divine inspiration,
but he must never render an unfair judgment.
[11]The Eternal requires that business be conducted honestly;
He wants fairness in all your dealings.
[12]When kings commit evil, it is despicable,
because their thrones should be built on justice.
[13]Kings admire those who tell the truth;
they adore those who set the record straight.
[14]A king's rage signals that people will die,
but whoever is wise will pacify him.
[15]If a king is smiling brightly, life will be granted;
his favor is like a cloud swelled with the *first* spring rain.
[16]How much better it is to receive wisdom than *the riches of* gold
and to gain understanding over some silver prize!
[17]The highway of the just bypasses evil;
those who watch where they're going protect their lives *from sin.*
[18]Pride precedes destruction;
an arrogant spirit gives way to a *nasty* fall.
[19]It is better to be humble *and live* among the poor,
than to divide up stolen property with the proud.

20 Those devoted to instruction will
prosper *in goodness*;
those who trust in the Eternal will
experience His favor.
21 The wise at heart have a reputation for
understanding;
pleasant words make the lips more
persuasive.
22 Understanding for those who have it is a
spring of life,
but it is pointless to try and instruct
a fool.
23 From a wise heart flow careful words;
wise words make the lips more
persuasive.
24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb:
they drip sweet *food* for life and bring
health to the body.
25 Before every person lies a road that
seems to be right,
but at the end *of that road* death *and
destruction* wait.
26 People work to stay alive,
pressed *daily* by their need to eat.
27 Good-for-nothings conjure up evil *ideas*;
their conversations fuel destructive
fires.
28 Perverse people stir up contention;
gossip makes best friends into
enemies.
29 Violent people try to recruit their
neighbors,
wanting to lead them down the *vile*
path of evil *they have chosen*.
30 *Body language can expose a person's
intentions:*
whoever winks the eye is planning
perversity;
whoever purses his lips is intent on
evil.
31 Gray hair is a crown of honor,
earned by living the right kind of life.
32 It is better to be a patient man than a
mighty warrior,
better to be someone who controls
his temper than someone who
conquers a city.
33 We may try to control the roll of the
dice,
but *actually,* the Eternal decides *what
they will determine*.

17 Better *to gnaw on* a bit of dry
crust in peace
than to feast in a house full
of stress.
2 A wise servant will be put in charge of a
child who behaves badly
and will take a share of the
inheritance like one of the family.
3 Silver is *purified* in the crucible, gold in
the furnace,
but *motives of* the heart are judged by
the Eternal.
4 Wrongdoers *perk up when* listening to
gossip,
and liars lean in close to hear talk of
mischief.
5 Anyone who makes fun of the poor
disparages his Maker,
and those who celebrate another's
misfortune will not escape
certain punishment.
6 Grandchildren are the crowning glory
and ultimate delight of old age,
and parents are the pride of their
children.
7 Elegant speech sounds odd when it
comes from a fool,
and a lie on the lips of a leader is
even more *out of place*!
8 A bribe is like an *enchanting* charm to
one who counts on it—
everywhere he looks he sees the
illusion of success.
9 Those who forgive faults foster love,
but those who repeatedly recall them
ruin relationships.
10 A *single* correction makes a more lasting
impression on one who is wise
than a hundred lashes do on a fool.
11 Evil people are determined to rebel,
and so a merciless messenger will
chase them down.
12 Better to face a *mother* bear stripped of
her cubs
than to encounter a fool caught up in
his foolishness.
13 Those who repay good with evil
bring unrelenting trouble upon their
families.
14 Picking a fight is like leaking water *from
a crack in a dam,*
so walk away from an argument
before the outburst.
15 Both of these deeply offend the
Eternal:
one who acquits the guilty and one
who condemns the innocent.
16 Even if fools had the means to obtain
wisdom,
they would not be able to benefit
from it.
17 A *true* friend loves regardless of the
situation,
and a *real* brother exists to share the
tough times.
18 Only a fool shakes hands on a deal
and guarantees repayment of
someone else's loan.

19 A person who loves sin loves a fight,
and one who builds a grand entrance
dares others to tear it down.
20 Crooked-hearted people never recognize
anything good,
and those who distort the truth
court disaster.
21 Having a fool for a child is misery;
there is no joy in parenting a fool.
22 A joy-filled heart is curative balm,
but a broken spirit hurts all the way
to the bone.
23 A wicked person accepts a bribe under
the table
to derail the course of justice.
24 Those who understand look to wisdom
for guidance,
but fools fasten their eyes on some
distant horizon.
25 Foolish children irritate their fathers
and embitter their mothers.
26 Also *know this:* It is wrong to penalize
those who do what is right
or to lash the noble because of their
integrity.
27 Those with knowledge know when to
be quiet,
and those with understanding know
how to remain calm.
28 Even a fool who keeps quiet is considered
wise,
for when he keeps his mouth shut,
he appears clever.

18 Whoever pulls away *from
others* to focus *solely* on
his own desires
disregards any sense of sound
judgment.
2 A fool never delights in *true* knowledge
but only wants to express what's on
his mind.
3 When wrongdoers arrive, disgrace is
right there with them,
for shame is the companion of
dishonor.
4 Words bubble up from waters deep
within a person;
a stream gushes from the fountain of
wisdom.
5 It is wrong *for a judge* to show partiality
to the guilty
or to rob the innocent of justice.
6 When a fool's lips move, a fight breaks
out;
it's as if his mouth is begging for a
beating.
7 The mouths of fools are their destruction,
and their lips entrap their very souls.
8 Whispered gossip is like a delicious first
course:
it is devoured *with pleasure* and
penetrates deeply.
9 Those who slack off at work
are no different from vandals.
10 The Eternal is known to be *like* a sturdy
watchtower;
those who do right flee to Him for
protection.
11 The rich *think their* wealth is their sturdy
fortress;
they imagine it to be an invincible
wall *of security*.
12 A proud heart precedes destruction,
and before honor is humility.
13 To respond to a matter before you hear
about it
shows foolishness and brings shame.
14 The human spirit can endure *a long*
illness,
but who can survive a crushed spirit?
15 Clever people go after knowledge to
obtain it,
and wise people attune their ears to
hear it.
16 The *right* gift *at the right time* can open
up new opportunities
and gains access to influential
people.
17 The first ones to tell their side of a story
seem right
until cross-examined by their peers.
18 Casting lots can settle conflicts
and decide between powerful
opponents.
19 Winning over an offended brother is
harder than breaching a strong
city's defenses;
such fights are *as tough* as the iron
gates of a castle.
20 Good words satisfy like a fine meal;
yes, good conversations are sure to
satisfy.
21 Words have power in matters of life and
death,
and those who love them will savor
their fruit.
22 The man who finds a wife finds
something good,
and the favor of the Eternal is indeed
his.
23 The poor plead for help,
but the rich respond harshly.
24 Someone with many *so-called* friends
may end up friendless,
but a true friend is closer than a
brother.

19 Better to be poor and live with
integrity
than a fool with a foul
mouth.

2 Surely there's no advantage for a person
without knowledge,
and whoever moves too quickly
misses the turn.
3 Foolishness diverts the course of life,
yet the heart rebels against the
Eternal.
4 Wealth attracts many friends,
but the poor are *soon* separated from
theirs.
5 A false witness will not escape
punishment,
and one who breathes lies will not
go free.
6 Many try to win the favor of a generous
person,
and everyone is a friend to someone
who gives gifts.
7 If a poor man is hated by his relatives,
it is even more likely his friends will
avoid him too!
Anyone who is calling after them
[is not to be found].*
8 Whoever gains a wise heart loves his
own soul,
and whoever preserves understanding
experiences *true* goodness.
9 A false witness will not escape
punishment,
and whoever breathes lies will not
survive.
10 Something is wrong when a fool lives a
pampered life,
but it is much worse when a slave
takes charge of princes.
11 A person with discretion is not easily
angered;
he gains respect by overlooking an
offense.
12 A king's rage is like the *thunderous* roar
of a lion,
but his favor is like a *cooling* mist
upon the grass.
13 Foolish children bring misery to their
fathers,
and a wife's bickering is a constant
dripping *as from a leaky roof.*
14 Houses and riches may be inherited
from parents,
but a sensible wife is *a gift* from the
Eternal.
15 Laziness lulls people into a deep sleep;
a slacker will have nothing to eat.
16 Whoever keeps *God's* commands
lengthens his life,
but a careless lifestyle ends in death.
17 Whoever cares for the poor makes a loan
to the Eternal;
such kindness will be repaid in full
and with interest.
18 Discipline your children while there is still
hope *of influencing their future,*
so as not to play a part in their
destruction.
19 A hot-tempered man will pay a penalty;
if you bail him out, it will not be the
last time; *the cycle will repeat.*
20 Heed counsel, act on instruction,
and you will become wise later in life.
21 The impulses of the human heart may
run wild,
but the Eternal's plan will prevail.
22 Loyalty is a trait admired in others,
and being destitute is better than
being a liar.
23 Reverence for the Eternal leads to *a
fulfilled* life;
those who have it will sleep well,
for disaster will not touch them.
24 Some people are so lazy—they reach *for
food* on the plate
but lack the will to bring it up to
their mouths.
25 If you beat one who mocks, the naive
will see and learn a lesson;
if you correct someone with
understanding, that's all he needs
to grow *a little* wiser.
26 Children who mistreat their father and
run down their mother
are a *root of* shame and disgrace.
27 My child, should you stop listening to
instruction,
you will wander from the voice of
knowledge.
28 A worthless witness ridicules justice,
and the mouth of the wrongdoer
savors *every morsel of* trouble.
29 *Severe* penalties are prepared for those
who mock,
and fools expect their backs to be
flogged.

20 *Too much* wine *begins to* mock
you,
too much strong drink leads
to noisy fights,
and whoever is misled by either is
not wise.
2 A king's wrath strikes *fear* like a lion's
roar;
those who provoke him to anger
sentence themselves to death.
3 Honor is due those who refuse to fight *at
the drop of a hat,*
but every fool jumps at an
opportunity to quarrel.

* 19:7 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

4A slacker procrastinates when it is time to plow;
so when it's time for harvest, there are no crops *in the field*.
5The *real* motives come from deep within a person—as from deep waters—
but a discerning person is able to draw them up *and expose them*.
6Most people claim to be loyal,
but can anyone find a trustworthy person?
7The right-living act with integrity;
the children who follow their example are happy.
8When a king sits on his throne as judge,
he ferrets out all evil and scatters it with his royal stare.
9Who can say, "I have cleaned my heart"?
or who can proclaim, "I am purified from sin"?
10False weights and differing measures *are alike:*
both are disgusting to the Eternal.
11Youth reveal their *true* natures by their actions
whether they do what is pure and right *or not.*
12Ears to listen, eyes to see—
the Eternal designed them both.
13Do not fall in love with sleep, or you will awake a poor person.
Stay awake, *get to work,* and you will have *more than* enough food.
14"Bad *quality for a* bad *price,*" bargains the buyer;
but then he runs off *with his prize in tow,* bragging, *"What a steal!"*
15Gold and rubies abound,
but lips that utter knowledge are a rare jewel.
16If someone guarantees a stranger's debt, hold his garment *as collateral*;
if that stranger is a foreigner, hold the creditor responsible.
17*At first the* bread of lies tastes sweet
until *guilt* reduces it to gravel in the mouth.
18Plans are finalized on the basis of good counsel,
so only go to war when you have wise instructions.
19A gossip will reveal *your* secrets!
So avoid the company of people who talk openly *and foolishly.*
20If someone pronounces a curse on his parents,*
the lamp *of his life* will be snuffed out as complete darkness creeps in.
21An inheritance acquired hastily at first will end up not being blessed after all.
22Do not say, "I will get even for this evil."
Wait for the Eternal; He will defend you.
23He despises *dishonesty in business*;
false weights and deceptive scales are wrong.
24Every one of our steps is directed by Him;
so how can we *attempt to* figure out our own way?
25Those who rashly dedicate something to God are trapped;
only afterward do they realize what they've promised.
26A wise king weeds out the wrongdoers,
then drives over them with his threshing wheel *of justice.*
27The lamp of the Eternal illuminates the human spirit,
searching our most intimate thoughts.
28Loyal love and faithfulness safeguard the king;
his throne is perpetuated through loyal love.
29The best asset of youth is the strength *of the body,*
but the beauty of age is gray hair.
30Severe punishment scrubs away evil,
and *tough* blows scour the innermost parts.

21 The king's heart is like a channel of water directed by the Eternal:
He chooses which way He bends it.
2Everyone may think his own way *of living* is right,
but the Eternal examines our hearts.
3To do what is right and to seek justice—
these please Him more than sacrifice.
4The lamp of the wicked *lights his way*;
a proud look, an arrogant heart—all sin.
5A well-thought-out plan will work to your advantage,
but hasty actions will cost you dearly.
6The fortune made by a swindler
is a fast-burning fog and a recipe for death.
7Wicked people will be swept up in their own violence
because they refuse to seek justice.
8Dishonest people walk along the crooked path *they have made,*
but the innocent travel the straight course *they have laid.*

* 20:20 Exodus 21:7; Leviticus 20:9

9It is better to dwell outside on the corner
of your roof
than to live inside your house with a
badgering wife.
10Wicked people delight in doing bad
things;
their neighbors never see even *a hint
of* compassion.
11A naive person wises up when he sees a
mocker punished.
A wise person becomes even wiser
just by being instructed.
12The right-living understands how
evildoers operate;
he *subverts them and* ruins their
plans.
13If you ignore the groans of the poor,
one day your own cries *for help* will
go unanswered.
14A gift given in secret soothes anger,
and a present offered privately calms
fierce rage.
15When justice is done, those who are in
the right celebrate,
but those who make trouble are
terrified.
16People who wander from the way of wise
living
will lie down in the company of
corpses.
17Those *who live to party,* who pursue
pleasure, will end up penniless;
those who enjoy *lots of* wine and rich
food will never have money.
18The wicked become a ransom for those
who live right,
and the faithless *pay the penalty* for
their treachery against the upright.
19You would be better off living in the
middle of the desert
than with an angry and
argumentative wife.
20The wise have a generous supply of fine
food and oil in their homes,
but fools *are wasteful,* consuming
every last drop.
21Whoever pursues justice and *treats
others with* kindness
discovers *true* life *marked by* integrity
and respect.
22One wise person can rise against a city
of mighty men
and cause the citadel they trust to
collapse.
23Guard your words, mind what you say,
and you will keep yourself out of
trouble.
24The name "mocker" applies to one who
is proud and pompous
because he is defiantly arrogant.
25What slackers crave will surely kill them
because they refuse to work.
26All day, *every day* the greedy want more,
while those who live right give
generously.
27The offerings of wrongdoers are
despicable *to God;*
it's even worse when they bring them
with evil motives.
28*The testimony of* a false witness is
eventually impeached,
but the person who *truly* listens will
have the last word.
29The wicked wears a defiant face,
but the right-living plans his path.
30No one is wise enough or smart
enough,
and no plan is good enough to stand
up to the Eternal.
31No matter how well you arm for battle,
victory is *determined* by Him.

► We do not like or want to believe it, but there are limits to what humans can accomplish. Whatever wisdom and knowledge we think we possess is nothing compared to God's. Whatever plans we make will come to nothing unless they line up with God's plans and purposes for us.

22 A good reputation is preferable
to riches,
and the approval *of others*
is better than *precious*
silver or gold.
2Rich and poor have something in
common:
both are created by the Eternal.
3Prudent people see trouble coming and
hide,
but the naive walk right into it and
take a beating.
4A humble person who fears the Eternal
can expect to receive wealth, honor,
and life.
5Thorny branches and traps lie ahead for
those who follow perverse paths;
those who want to preserve
themselves will steer clear of
them.
6Teach a child how to follow the right
way;
even when he is old, he will stay on
course.

7The rich lord it over the poor,
and the borrower is the slave to the lender.
8Those who sow injustice reap disaster,
and their methods of oppression will fail.
9Generous people are *genuinely* blessed
because they share their food with the poor.
10Expel a mocker, and watch the wrangling go *with him;*
rivalry and rude remarks will also stop.
11Those who love a pure heart and speak with grace
will find that the king is their friend.
12The Eternal keeps a watchful eye on *those with* knowledge,
but He subverts the words of the faithless.
13A lazy person says, "A lion! Right outside!
I will surely die in the streets!
Yet another good reason to stay in today."
14The *alluring* words of a seductive woman are a deep hole;
the Eternal is incensed toward those who fall in.
15Foolishness consumes the heart of a child,
but corporal punishment, *properly administered,* drives it far away.
16If you take advantage of the poor or coddle the rich to get ahead,
you will end up destitute.

The Words of the Wise

17Lend an ear, listen to these words of the wise,
and align your thoughts with my instructions
18Because *true* pleasure will be yours by learning them, living them,
and being ready to repeat them *to others.*
19In order that you will trust *only* in the Eternal,
I teach them to you this day—yes, even you!
20*In fact,* didn't I already write down for you
Thirty axioms of *good* advice and *sound* knowledge
21To reveal to you what is reliably true
so you can answer those who sent you with these truths *you've learned*?

22Do not cheat poor people just because they are vulnerable
or *use shady tactics* in court to crush those already suffering;
23For the Eternal is ready to take their case,
and He ruins anyone who is out to ruin them.
24Do not befriend someone given to anger
or hang around with a hothead.
25*Odds are,* you'll learn his ways, *become angry as well,*
and get caught in a trap.
26Do not be a person to guarantee someone else's loan
or put up collateral for the debts *of an acquaintance*;
27For if *you do and* you can't repay,
won't you risk having your bed ripped out from under you?
28Do not *steal property from your neighbors by* moving the boundary markers
your ancestors established.
29And as for those who are skilled in their work,
they will *be recognized and invited to* serve kings
rather than regular folk.

23 When sitting down to eat with a ruler,
take a moment to think about who you are with *and what you are doing.*
2If you are the type who eats too much *too fast,*
do whatever is necessary *to curb your enthusiasm for food.*
3*Also,* do not eye the ruler's delicacies,
for the food may not be what it seems.
4Do not overwork yourself just to become wealthy;
have enough sense to know when to quit.
5As soon as you become fixed on riches, they vanish.
For *suddenly* they sprout wings
and become like a *soaring* eagle flying high in the sky.
6Do not *sit down and* eat the bread of a tight-fisted fellow
or desire any of his delicacies,
7For deep down he's keeping track of the cost.
He may say, "Eat up! Drink *your fill*!"
but he does not mean a word of it.
8You'll be sick and lose what little you did eat,
and you'll waste your *breath carrying on a* pleasant conversation.
9Do not waste your wisdom on a fool,
for he doesn't care for anything you have to say.

10 Do not *shift the property line by* moving
the boundary markers your
ancestors established
or try to steal property from
orphans
11 Because their Redeemer is strong,
and He will plead their case against
you.
12 Develop a disciplined life.
Be attentive so you can be well
informed.
13 Do not withhold discipline from
children,
since corporal punishment will not
kill them.
14 In fact, it may be that kind of
punishment
that will save them from *an early*
grave.
15 My son, if you live wisely,
then my life will be fulfilled.
16 My very soul will jump for joy
when you speak what is *true and*
right.
17 Don't be envious of those wrapped up
in sin,
but always maintain a healthy
respect for the Eternal.
18 Your future *with Him* will be certain,
and you will not have hoped in vain.
19 Listen, my son, be wise,
and steer your life on the right
course.
20 Do not spend time with heavy wine
drinkers
or those who gorge themselves on
meat.
21 For both the drunk and the glutton will
end up broke,
sleeping life away, and clothed in
rags.

22 Pay attention to your father—*after all*, he
gave you life—
and don't ignore your mother in her
old age.
23 Invest in truth, *sock it away!*
Never cash in wisdom, guidance, or
insight.
24 The parents of the right-living will
celebrate;
yes, parents of children who make
wise choices are happy.
25 So make your parents happy;
delight your mother—*after all,* she
brought you into this world.

26 My son, devote yourself to me fully.
Observe my ways, *and follow my*
directions:
27 *Being drawn to* a prostitute is *like falling*
down into a deep well,
and *being involved with* a wicked
woman is *like descending into* a
narrow well.
You may never get out alive.
28 She waits *for you, ready* to ambush you
like a thief
and *ready to* multiply unfaithfulness
among men.

29 Who is *wallowing* in anguish? Who is full
of sorrow?
Who has conflicts? Who has
complaints?
Who has bruises and can't remember
where they came from?
Who has bloodshot eyes?
30 *You know who:* those who stay up late
finishing off the wine,
those who can't stop savoring spiced
wines.
31 Look away from the *enticing beauty of*
wine, the deep red hue;
ignore how it shimmers in the cup
and glides down your throat.
32 Eventually, *when you least expect it,* it
strikes like a snake;
it stings like viper *venom.*
33 Your vision will *blur, and you'll* imagine
strange things;
you will say crazy, hurtful things *and*
regret it later.
34 You will reel and stagger as if caught on
a wave of seasickness,
as a sailor who holds on to a mast *for*
dear life.
35 *You will say,* "They slapped me, but it
didn't hurt.
They beat me, and I didn't feel a thing!
Whenever I wake up *from this stupor,*
I'll have another drink!"

► The abuse of alcohol is as ancient as the first batch of Egyptian beer or the first sip of Noah's wine (Genesis 9:20-21). Its wide availability today has made for binge drinking on college campuses, underage drinking by young teens, drunk driving on city streets, and alcoholic rants and abuse in the home. The sage offers a tragic description of a young man who goes from drink to drink and cannot get his bearings in life. Too many people lose so much life in an alcoholic stupor.

24 Do not envy evil people
or seek their friendship;
2For they are conniving and
violent,
and all they talk about is causing
trouble.

3Wisdom is required to build a house;
understanding is necessary to make
it secure.
4Knowledge is needed *to furnish* all the
rooms
and fill them with beautiful treasures.
5A wise man possesses great strength,
and an intelligent man knows how to
increase it;
6For with wise guidance, you can wage *a*
successful war,
and with a council of many advisors,
you will be victorious!
7Fools can't grab hold of wisdom; it's out
of their reach;
they dare not open their mouths
in public *for no one would listen*
anyway.

8Whoever schemes to carry out evil
will be labeled a troublemaker.
9Such foolish plans are sinful,
and the mocker is deplored by all.

10If you fall apart during a crisis,
then you weren't very strong to begin
with.
11Rescue *everyone you can of* those being
taken away and killed,
and hold on to those *innocent souls*
staggering toward *their own*
slaughter.
12If you *excuse yourself,* saying, "Look, we
didn't know anything about this,"
doesn't God, who knows what you
are really thinking, understand
your motives?
Isn't your Protector aware *of why you*
aren't protecting the innocent?
Will He not repay you in kind?

► Our world is all too familiar with violence and its victims. It's easy to look the other way, pretend we didn't see it, hope it goes away, or live in denial. Perhaps we are numbed to real violence because we are so entertained by the onslaught of it in modern media. But the violence in our homes, across our cities, and throughout the world is very real. Every day someone is beaten, captured, raped, enslaved, shot, robbed, stabbed, or run over. Wisdom calls us to step into those places and help those marching off to their deaths. God knows what we know. He knows what is in our hearts.

13My son, eat honey—it's good *for you*;
the honey that drips from the comb
is sweet in your mouth.
14Know, too, that wisdom is *good* for your
soul:
if you find it, your reward will be a
bright future
and an enduring hope!

15Do not lurk outside the home of the just
like a common criminal;
do not tear up the place where he
rests.
16For a good man may fall seven times and
get back up again,
but the wicked will stumble around
and fall into misfortune.

17Do not celebrate when your enemies fall,
and do not rejoice when they trip up;
18Or else the Eternal will know and be
upset *with you,*
and He will release them from His
anger.

19Do not worry when evildoers *go*
unpunished
or be jealous when the wicked *seem*
to prosper.
20Evil people will have no future;
the life of the wicked will be snuffed
out *like a candle*.

21My son, fear both the Eternal and His
anointed ruler.
It is not wise to associate with those
rebelling *against them*
22Because disaster can arise from *either of*
them without warning,
and who knows what destruction
comes down from both of them?

23The wise also say,
It is not good for a judge to be
partial.
24When a judge says to the guilty, "You are
innocent,"
he will be cursed by all people; he
will be hated by nations.

25 But those who reprimand evildoers will
be celebrated,
and good fortune will come their way.
26 A straight answer is *as precious*
as a kiss on the lips.

27 Complete your work outside,
and get your fields ready *for next season;*
after that's done, build your house.

28 Do not testify against your neighbor
without a reason;
do not give misleading testimony.
29 Do not say, "I'll do to him what he did
to me!
I'll repay him for what he did!"

30 *Once* I passed by the property of a slacker,
by the vineyard of a foolish man.
31 You should have seen it! The entire field
was overgrown with thorns.
Every inch was covered with weeds.
Even the stone wall was crumbling
down.
32 I took a moment to take it all in.
The scene taught me:
33 "A little sleep, a little rest,
a few more minutes, a nice little nap."
34 But soon poverty will be on top of you
like a robber,
need *will strike you down* like a well-
armed warrior.

25 These words, too, are proverbs of King Solomon, *words* which Hezekiah, king of Judah, *later* told his scribes to record *for posterity*:

2 God's glory is shown when He conceals
things;
a king's glory is shown in his ability
to explore *the facts of* the matter.
3 As the heights of heaven and the
depths of earth are beyond
comprehension,
so are the hearts of kings.

4 Take away the impurities from the silver,
and a *good* smith can create
something *of value;*
5 Take away the wicked from among the
king's advisors,
and his reign will be established with
integrity.

6 Do not claim to be important in the
presence of the king
or vie for a position within the
company of great men.

7 Truly, it is *far* sweeter to have someone
of influence say to you, "Come up
here *and join us,*"
than to be ordered to some lower
rank in front of a noble.
Just because *you think* you have seen
something
8 doesn't mean you should be quick
to go to court,
For what will you do
when your neighbor disproves the
charge and embarrasses you?
9 *Instead,* discuss the matter directly with
your neighbor,
but *in doing so,* remember never to
reveal another person's secrets;
10 For if you do, someone who hears you
could disgrace you,
and a bad reputation will cling to
you ever afterward.

11 A well-spoken word *at just the right moment*
is like golden apples in settings of
silver.

12 To an attentive ear, *constructive* criticism
from a *truly* wise person
is like an earring or jewelry made of
fine gold.

13 Like a cooling snow that breaks *the heat of* a harvest day,
so is the messenger who is faithful to
those who sent him,
for he refreshes the soul of his masters.

14 Like clouds and wind that bring no rain,
so is one who boasts of gifts
promised but never delivered.

15 Patience can soften up a leader,
and a tender tongue can break *even*
bone.

16 When you find honey, *remember to* eat
only what you need,
because if you eat in excess, you may
be sick and lose all of it.
17 Don't visit your neighbor too often,
or he will become tired of you and
grow to hate you.

18 Like a maul and a sword and a sharp
arrow *all in one,*
so is anyone who bears false witness
against a neighbor.

19 Like a tooth that is rotten or a foot that
is unsteady,
so is relying on a person who can't be
trusted in times of trouble.

20Like a man who undresses in winter
or *a woman who pours* vinegar on a wound,*
So is anyone who tries to sing *happy* songs
to a sorrowful heart.

21If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink,
22For your *kind treatment will be like* heaping hot coals on his head,*
it may cause a change in heart,
and the Eternal will repay you.

► Acts of kindness, especially when we know they are undeserved, awaken a slumbering conscience, stimulate sorrow, and perhaps even effect a change. They are the best ways to turn an enemy into a friend.

23*As surely as* a north wind drives the rain *before it,*
a backbiting tongue brings angry looks.

24It is better to dwell *outside* on the corner of your roof
than *to live* inside your house with a badgering wife.

25Like cool water to a weary soul,
so is good news from a distant country.

26Like a muddy spring or a polluted fountain,
so is a righteous person who gives in to the wicked.

27Eating too much honey is not good *for you,*
nor *is it good* to seek one honor after another.

28Like a conquered city with no walls,
so is a man who has no self-control.

26

Like snow in the summer and rain in *the time of* harvest,
so honor is never fitting for a fool.

2Like a bird that *flits and* flutters or a swallow in mid-flight,
so a curse that lacks cause will never *come to* light.
3A whip is for the horse, a bridle is for the donkey,
and a rod is for the fool's back.

4Never answer a fool on his own foolish terms,
or you will become like him;
5*Rather,* answer a fool on his own foolish terms,
or he will become wise in his own eyes.

6Like someone who cuts off his feet or drinks to his ruin,
so is the one who uses a fool to pass on his message.
7As lame legs are useless, *dangling* on the crippled,
so is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
8Like one who ties a stone in his slingshot,
so is one who honors a fool.
9Like a thorn in the hand of a drunkard,
so is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
10Like an archer who *shoots at random and* injures everyone,
so is a person who hires a fool or someone off the street.*
11Like a dog who goes back to his own vomit,*
so is a fool who *always* returns to his foolishness.

12Have you seen a person who is wise in his own sight?
Know that there is more hope for a fool than for him.

13A lazy person says, "There's a lion in the road!
A lion in the streets!
Another good reason to stay in today."
14As a door swings on its hinges *and goes nowhere,*
so a slacker turns over in his bed.
15Some people are so lazy that they reach *for food* on the plate
but lack the will to bring it up to their mouths.
16The slacker sees himself as wiser *by far* than seven men who can converse intelligently.

* 25:20 Hebrew text is uncertain, literally "soda"; Greek, "wound." * 25:22 Romans 12:20 * 26:10 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 26:11 2 Peter 2:22

17 Like a man who seizes a *wild* dog by the ears,
so is anyone who walks by and meddles in someone else's argument.
18 Like a madman who hurls flaming spears and shoots deadly arrows,
19 So is anyone who deceives a neighbor and then says, "But I was only joking *with you.*"

20 When there is no wood, the fire goes out;
when there is no one to spread gossip, arguing stops.
21 Like charcoal to smoldering embers and *dry* wood to a fire,
so a hot-tempered man kindles strife.
22 Whispered gossip is like a delicious first course:
it *is devoured with pleasure and then* penetrates deep within you.

23 Like a *shiny* glaze* coating a rough clay pot,
so are burning lips that conceal an evil heart.
24 One who hates may camouflage it beneath pleasant words,
but *deep* inside him, treachery still rages;
25 Don't believe him when he speaks kindly because his heart is completely ruled by evil.*
26 And though he covers his hatred with cleverness,
his wicked ways will be publicly exposed.

27 The one who digs a trap *for another* will fall into it,
and the one who starts rolling a stone will have it roll back over him.
28 Liars take no pity on those they crush *with their lies,*
and flattery spoils *everyone it touches.*

27 Don't brag about *what may happen* tomorrow
because you have no idea what it will bring.
2 Let someone else praise you;
compliments are always sweeter from a stranger's lips than from your own.

3 Heavy is rock and weighty is sand,
but more burdensome than either is the anger of a fool.

4 Wrath is fierce and anger is a tidal wave *of fury,*
but who *of us* can stand up against jealousy?

5 Open rebuke is better
than hidden love.
6 Wounds inflicted by *the correction of* a friend prove he is faithful;
the abundant kisses of an enemy show his lies.

7 The person who is full has no interest in honey;
but to the starving, bitterness itself is sweet.
8 Like a bird that strays *far* from its nest,
so is a person who forsakes his own home.

9 The heart is delighted by *the fragrance of* oil and *sweet* perfumes,
and *in just the same way,* the soul is sweetened by the wise counsel of a friend.
10 Do not neglect your friend or your parent's friend *for that matter.*
When hard times come, you don't have to travel *far* to *get help from* family;
A neighbor who is near is better than a brother who is far away.

11 *Study to* be wise, my son, and make my heart glad,
for then *your life* will be my answer to anyone who hurls insults.
12 The astute see evil *coming* and take shelter,
but the stupid plow right on and *then, of course,* have to pay the price.
13 If someone guarantees a stranger's debt, hold his garment as collateral;
if that guarantee is for the debt of a foreigner, make sure you get a deposit.
14 Anyone who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice
early in the morning,
will find his blessing regarded as a curse.

15 A constant dripping on a rainy day
and a wife's bickering are *very much* alike:
16 Anyone who tries to control her might as well try to control the wind
or pick up oil in his right hand.

* 26:23 Literally, "silver dross" * 26:25 Literally, "seven detestable evils"

17 In the same way that iron sharpens iron,
a person sharpens the character of his friend.

18 Whoever takes care of a fig tree will eat of its fruit,
and whoever cares for his master will be honored.

19 Just as water reflects a person's *true* face,
so the human heart reflects a person's *true* character.
20 Neither the grave nor destruction is ever satisfied;
the desires of people are never *totally* fulfilled.

21 The crucible is used for refining silver,
the furnace for gold,
but praise is what tests a person's mettle.
22 Though you grind a fool like grain in a mortar with a pestle,
still his foolishness will not be separated from him.

23 Pay careful attention to your flocks,
and see to the welfare of your herds
24 Because riches do not last forever,
nor does one dynasty retain power through all generations.
25 When the hay is harvested and the autumn grasses begin to grow
and the herbs of the mountains are gathered,
26 Then the lambs will provide *wool for* your clothing,
young goats can be sold to buy a new field,
27 And there will be enough milk from your goats
to sustain you, your family, and your serving girls.

28 The wicked run away even when no one is chasing them;
the right-living, however, stand *their ground* as boldly as lions.
2 Where there is rebellion in a land,
there are many *petty and contending* rulers;
But where there is a wise and intelligent leader,
peace and order endure.

3 A poor person who oppresses others who are poor
is like a driving rain that *destroys the crops and* leaves no food.

4 Those who turn their backs on *God's* teaching applaud the wicked,
while those who observe *His* instruction oppose them *at every turn.*

5 Evil people are not able to understand justice,
but those who pursue the Eternal understand it completely.

6 It is better to be a pauper walking in integrity
than a dishonest man, even if he is rich.

7 Whoever follows *God's* teaching is a wise child,
but the one who spends time with gluttons *and drunks* disgraces his parents.

8 Anyone who increases his wealth by charging a high rate of interest
is *only* collecting it for another who will deal more liberally with the poor.

9 The one who turns his ear from hearing *God's* instruction
will find that even his prayers are detestable *to God.*

10 Whoever *tries to* deceive a good person into taking the path of evil
will fall into the pit he himself made,
but the *truly* honest shall be the heirs of *all that is* good.

11 A rich man may be wise in his own sight,
but a perceptive pauper will see right through him.

12 There is much glory when just men celebrate;
but when the wicked gain power, people take cover.

13 Whoever *tries to* hide his sins will not succeed,
but the one who confesses *his sins* and leaves them behind will find mercy.
14 Happy is the one who always fears *the Lord,*
but the person who hardens his heart *to God* falls into misfortune.

15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear,
so is a wicked man ruling over an impoverished people.

16 A leader who lacks intelligence cruelly
oppresses the people,
but one who hates corruption will
prosper and live a long life.

17 A man guilty of murder is a fugitive,
fleeing to the *nearest hole in the ground*
but not escaping death's cold pit.
Don't do anything to save him.

18 Whoever walks in honesty will be safe,
but whoever travels the crooked path
will suddenly fall.
19 Whoever cultivates his land will have
plenty of food *in the harvest,*
but whoever cultivates worthless
ventures will have poverty in
abundance.

20 A reliable person will not escape blessings,
but one who wants to get rich quick
will not escape trouble.

21 Showing favoritism is not good;
some will desert the truth for a
measly crust of bread.

22 A greedy person is in a hurry to get rich,
but he is ignorant of the loss that is
about to overtake him.

23 A person who offers *constructive*
criticism will, in the end, be
appreciated more
than a person who engages in *empty*
flattery.

24 One who robs his father or his mother
and says, "There's nothing wrong
with that! *I had it coming!*"
walks in the company of murderers.

25 *When* the greedy *want more, they* stir up
trouble;
but when a person trusts in the
Eternal, he's sure to prosper.
26 Anyone who puts confidence only in
himself is a fool,
but the person who follows wisdom
will be kept safe.

27 Whoever gives to the poor will have
what he needs,
but the one who shuts his eyes *to their*
plight will face curse after curse.

28 When the wicked have the upper hand,
people go into hiding;
but when they perish, the good folk
will begin to increase.

29 The one who remains defiant
after repeated reprimands
will suddenly be shattered,
and there will be no
remedy *for him.*
2 When just leaders are in power, the
citizens celebrate;
but when evil people gain control,
their joys become moans.

3 An adult who loves wisdom *and follows*
its ways gives his parents joy,
but one who hangs out with women
of the street will lose everything.

4 A king brings stability to a land with his
justice,
but one who makes unjust demands
brings it to ruin.
5 The one who flatters his friend
is laying a trap that will catch his
friend's feet.
6 An evil person is *sure to be* trapped by
his sin,
but a man who lives right *is free to*
sing and be glad.
7 The just get involved with the poor and
know their issues,
but the wicked cannot comprehend
such concerns.
8 Mockers stir up a city and inflame
passions,
but the wise *know how to put out the*
fire and ease tensions.

9 When the wise go to court against a
fool,
there will be ranting and raving but
no resolution.

10 Bloodthirsty men despise those who are
honest,
but the just find a way to help them.

11 A fool *does not think before he* unleashes
his temper,
but a wise man holds back *and*
remains quiet.

12 When *it is known that* a ruler listens to
the words of liars,
soon he will have only scoundrels for
advisors.
13 A poor man and his oppressor have this
in common:
the Eternal *created them and*
provides both with light *and life.*
14 The king who is fair in his treatment of
the poor
will see his dynasty continue forever.

15Corporal punishment and correction
produce wisdom,
but a child left to follow his own
willful way shames his mother.
16When evil people *are free to* flourish, sin
is on the rise,
but the just will surely see their
destruction.
17If you discipline your children, they will
make your life easier
and refresh your soul.

18Where there is no vision *from God,* the
people run wild,
but those who adhere to *God's*
instruction know *genuine*
happiness.
19Words are not enough to correct a
servant;
even if he understands, he will not
respond.
20Have you ever met someone who is
overly eager to talk?
There is more hope for a fool than
for him.
21If you indulge your servant from early
in life,
in the end it won't go well *for either
of you.*

22A hot-head provokes quarrels,
and one mastered by anger commits
all kinds of sins.
23A person's pride brings him down,
but one of humble spirit has a *firm*
hold on honor *and respect.*
24Anyone who teams up with a thief must
despise his own life,
for he is bound by an oath to tell *the
truth* and yet refuses.*
25If you fear other people, you are walking
into a *dangerous* trap;
but if you trust in the Eternal, you
will be safe.
26Many people vie for special treatment
from a ruler,
yet *genuine* justice proceeds from the
Eternal.
27The right-living are disgusted by *the
actions of* the unjust;
likewise, the wicked are disgusted by
the ways of the righteous.

30 *These are* the words of Agur, son of Jakeh. An oracle *of wisdom.*
He says, "I am weary, God.
I am weary and spent, O God."*
2Certainly I am a stupid man, as dumb
as an ox.
I don't understand the way that most
people do.
3I have never learned wisdom,
and I have no knowledge *at all* of the
Holy One.
4Who has ascended into the heavens and
then come back down?
Who has collected the winds in the
palm of His hand?
Who has wrapped up the *vast* oceans in
His coat?
Who has *plotted* the ends of the
earth and then fashioned them?
What is His name?
What is His son's name?
Do you know? Indeed, *you do.*

► The answer to all these questions, of course, is "no one but God." Agur, like Job, understands the limits of human strength and knowledge. Unlike many, he freely confesses his need and takes refuge in the one True God.

5Every word of God will be put to the test
and proven true;
He is a defense for those who trust
in Him.
6*Take care.* Add nothing to what He has
said;
for if you do, He will correct you and
expose you as a liar.

7Two things I ask, O God.
Sometime before I die, grant these
humble requests:
8Eliminate *any hint* of worthless and
deceitful words from my lips.
Do not make me poor or rich,
but give me each day what I need;
9For if I have too much, I might forget You
are the One who provides,
saying, "Who is the Eternal One?"
Or if I do not have enough, I might *become
hungry and* turn to stealing
and thus dishonor the *good* name of
my God.

► Wealth and poverty have something in common. Both situations can lead us to forget God. If we are rich, then

* 29:24 Leviticus 5:1-5 * 30:1 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

it is easy to think it was our skill, our strength, and our hard work that got us there. We forget it was God who gave us the time and talent to succeed. If we are poor, then it is easy to steal and then make excuses for what we did. We forget that God said, "You are not to take what is not yours" (Exodus 20:15). When God's people violate His teaching, God is the one who gets a black eye.

10 Never run down a servant to his master
because the slave might curse you
and you would suffer *as a result*.

11 There is a kind of person who curses his father
and pronounces no blessing upon his mother;
12 A kind of person who is without fault in his own estimation
but has not been scrubbed clean of his own sordidness;
13 A kind whose look is too haughty,
whose eyebrows arch *as he looks down on others*;
14 A kind whose very teeth cut like swords
and whose jaws sever like knives,
All the better to consume the poor of the earth
and the oppressed among men.

15 The leech has twin suckers;
"More blood! More blood," they demand.
Three other things are *just as* insatiable,
no, make it four that never say, "Enough":
16 The grave, the *childless* woman who cannot bear,
the parched earth that cries for rain,
and the fire, which never says, "Enough!"

17 *One who* derides his father
and fails to honor his mother *in old age*
Will die in contempt: his eyes will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley
and eaten by the young vultures *when his unburied body lies on the trash heap.*

18 There are three mysteries I find absolutely amazing,
no, make it four I cannot comprehend:
19 The way an eagle flies through the sky,
the way a snake moves over a rock,
The way a boat glides through the middle of the sea,
and the way a man becomes one with his virgin *wife*.

20 An adulterous woman is *so cavalier* by nature.
When she's done, it is as if she washed after eating
and then says, "I have done nothing wrong."

21 Three situations disturb the earth,
no, make it four that it cannot endure:
22 When a slave is elevated to king,
when a fool is full of *fine* food,
23 When a hated woman finally marries,
and when a serving girl takes possession of her mistress's wealth.

24 There are four creatures on earth that are small,
but they are very wise *and we can learn from them*:
25 While ants are hardly a strong species,
they *work constantly to* store up food during the summer;
26 While badgers are animals without *many* defenses,
they *are wise enough to* make their homes in the rocky cliffs;
27 While locusts live without a ruler,
they all *know how to* move in formation;
28 While a lizard is easy enough to catch in your hand,
it *is shrewd enough to* enter the palaces of kings.

29 There are three creatures with majesty in their stride,
no, make it four that move with grace:
30 The lion, which is the strongest of the animals,
does not back down from any *other creature;*
31 The strutting rooster, the male goat,
and a king as he goes out with his army.*

* 30:31 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

32If you have been foolish enough to
insinuate yourself in some high
position
or if you have concocted some sort
of evil plan,
clamp your hand *tightly* over your
mouth;
33For pressing down milk makes butter,
pressing your nose makes it bleed,
and pressing anger makes trouble.

31 *These are* the words of King Lemuel. An oracle *of wisdom* handed down to him by his mother:

Mother: 2What *shall I say to you,*
my son? What *wisdom can*
I impart, child of my womb?
What *insight can I share,* son of my
vows?
3Do not waste your strength on
women
or invest yourself *in women* who
would destroy even kings.
4Take care, *my son,* O Lemuel.
Kings should not drink *too much*
wine
or rulers should not crave strong
drink;
5For *if they do,* they will become drunk
and forget the decree *they just*
made
and alter the *course of* justice for
all the *poor and* afflicted.
6Rather, give liquor to one who is
dying,
and *offer* wine to those struggling
with life's harsh realities.
7Let such a one drink and forget what
he is missing;
then *perhaps* he won't remember
his sorrows anymore.
8Speak out on behalf of those who
have no voice,
and defend all those who have
been passed over.
9Open your mouth, judge fairly,
and stand up for the rights of the
afflicted and the poor.

► King Lemuel's mother warns him of the dangers of women and wine. In different ways, both have brought down great leaders. Both are certainly distractions to a king's true work—defending the poor.

10Who can find a *truly* excellent woman?
One who is superior in all that she
is and all that she does?
Her worth far exceeds that of rubies
and expensive jewelry.
11*She inspires trust, and* her husband's
heart is safe with her,
and *because of her,* he has every good
thing.
12Every day of her life she does what is
best for him,
never anything harmful or hurtful.
13Delight attends her work and guides her
fingers
as she selects *the finest* wool and flax
for spinning.
14She moves *through the market* like
merchant ships
that dock here and there in distant
ports,
finally arriving home with food she's
carried from afar.
15She rises *from bed early,* in the still of
night,
carefully preparing food for her
family
and providing a portion to her
servants.
16*She has a plan.* She considers some land
and buys it;
then with her earnings, she plants a
vineyard.
17She wraps herself in strength, *carries*
herself with confidence,
and works hard, strengthening her
arms *for the task at hand.*
18She tastes success and knows it is
good,
and under lamplight she works deep
into the night.
19Her hands *skillfully* place *the unspun flax*
and wool on the distaff,
and her fingers twist the spindle *until*
thread forms.
20She reaches out to the poor
and extends mercy to those in need.
21She is not worried about the *cold or*
snow for her family,
for she has clothed them all in *warm,*
crimson *coats.*
22She makes her own bed linens
and clothes herself in purple and fine
cloth.
23Everyone recognizes her husband in the
public square,
and no one fails to respect him as he
takes his place of leadership in
the community.
24She makes linen garments and sells
them *in the market,*

and she supplies belts for tradesmen
to carry across the sea.
25 Clothed in strength and dignity, *with*
nothing to fear,
she smiles *when she thinks* about the
future.
26 She conducts her conversations with
wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is ever
her concern.
27 She directs the activities of her
household,
and never does she indulge in
laziness.
28 Her children rise up and bless her.
Her husband, too, joins in the praise,
saying:
29 "There are *some—indeed* many—women
who do well *in every way,*
but of all of them only you are truly
excellent."
30 Charm *can* be deceptive and *physical*
beauty will not last,
but a woman who reveres the
Eternal should be praised *above*
all others.
31 Celebrate all she has achieved.
Let all her accomplishments publicly
praise her.*

► Marrying the right person is one of the most important decisions most people ever make, so they must choose wisely and carefully. The Book of Proverbs ends with a tribute to a wise choice in a wife. She is strong, independent, capable, and cares for her husband, her family, and the poor. She runs the whole household. In ancient Israel, this would mean a large extended family—including servants with all of their activities—and the family business. Her husband would sing her praises publicly before the community leaders. Those who know her would admire her for her skills, her industry, and her character.

* 31:10-31 A Hebrew acrostic poem

ECCLESIASTES

Wise reflections on life

By the wise teacher of Israel

01 02 03 04 05 06

One of the most enigmatic books of the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes is the teacher's treatise on the pleasures and futility of life. Wisdom literature such as this would have been passed down from one generation to the next, perhaps in an assembly of young men from teacher to student or in a home from father to son. The English title, *Ecclesiastes,* comes from the Greek translation of its Hebrew name, *Qoheleth,* meaning "one who gathers." Not much is known about this "gatherer" of students, the teacher. Some identify him with Solomon because of the king's traditional association with wisdom and because of 1:1 and 1:12–2:11, where the teacher claims to be a son of David, king in Jerusalem, and recalls the activities of a king. But the author is anonymous, and the book's context and language imply a much later origin.

It is impossible to determine the exact date when Ecclesiastes was written. Based on the use of Persian loan words and Aramaic phrases within this Hebrew text, it is likely that the writer was living in or around Jerusalem any time from the sixth to fourth centuries B.C.

The teacher provides some meditation on life and on the lives of those who have gone before him. The backdrop to this book is an implied story—the story of empire and what it means to rule and be ruled by powerful kings. This profound consideration of life helps the reader to learn from previous influential figures, from their beneficial and disastrous decisions and pursuits.

One of the most important words used to describe life in Ecclesiastes is *hebel.* It is used 38 times. While this Hebrew word is notoriously difficult to translate, its general meaning is "breath" or "vapor." In Ecclesiastes, it implies that life is fleeting, like a breath, like a morning mist; it suggests that everything that happens lacks permanence and is ultimately provisional. After carefully examining nearly every aspect of life, the teacher concludes that nothing lasts; nothing and no one can escape death, the great equalizer of all. Nevertheless, human beings are wired differently from other creatures, for God has placed eternity in our minds (3:11). So the best a person can do in this life is to remember the Creator, hold Him in high regard, and keep His commandments.

1 These are the words of the teacher,* the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Teacher: 2Life is fleeting, like a passing mist.
It is like trying to catch hold of a breath;
All vanishes like a vapor; everything is a great vanity.
3What good does it do anyone to work so hard *again and again,*
sun up to sundown? *All his labor to gain but a little?*
4One generation comes, another goes;
but the earth continues to remain.
5The sun rises and the sun sets,
laboring to come up quickly to its place again *and again.*
6The wind in its travels blows toward the south,
then swings back around to the north.
Back and forth,
returning in its circuit again *and again.*
7All rivers flow to the sea,
but the sea is never full.
To the place where the rivers flow,
there the water returns to flow once again.
8Words, words, words! So many words!
They are wearisome things;
and yet people cannot refrain from speaking.
No eye has ever surveyed *the world* and said, "I have seen enough";
no ear has ever listened *to creation* and said, "I have heard enough."
9What has been, that will be;
what has been done, that will be done.
Nothing is new under the sun;
the future only repeats the past.
10One person may say of some idea,
"Pay attention to this; it's original!"
But that same idea has already been expressed;
it's been with us through the ages.
11We do not remember those people *and events* of long ago,
as future generations will not remember what is yet to come.

12I, the teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13I decided to seek out and study the wisdom *of the ages,* of all that had been done under the heavens. *I soon discovered* the harsh realities of the work God has given us that keeps us so busy. 14I have witnessed all that is done under the sun, and indeed, all is fleeting, like trying to embrace the wind. 15*There is an old saying:*

Something crooked cannot be made straight,
and something missing cannot be counted.

16I *mused over it all and* thought to myself, "I have done great things, and I have gained more wisdom than anyone who reigned over Jerusalem before me. I have contemplated great wisdom and knowledge." 17I decided to study wisdom and *instead acquainted myself with* madness and folly. It, too, seemed like trying to pursue the wind, 18for as *my* wisdom increased, so did *my* vexation. As *my* knowledge grew, so did *my* pain.

2 **Teacher:** I said to myself, "Let me dabble and test you in pleasure and see if there is any good *in that.*" But look, that, too, was fleeting. 2Of laughter I said, "Foolishness." Of pleasure, "And in the end what is accomplished?" 3So I thought about drinking wine, for it soothes the flesh. But all the while my mind was filled with thoughts of wisdom—about how to rein in foolishness—until I might understand the best way for us to live out our brief lives and number of days under heaven. 4*Next,* I began some enormous projects, building my own houses and planting my own vineyards. 5I designed *impressive* gardens and parks and planted them with all kinds of fruit trees. 6I installed pools of water to irrigate the forests of young saplings. 7I acquired male and female servants; I even had servants born into my household. I had herds *of cattle,* flocks *of sheep and goats*—more than anyone who had ever lived in Jerusalem before me. 8I amassed a fortune in silver and gold, and *I stockpiled* the treasures of kings and provinces. I hired men and women to sing *and entertain me,* and *I pampered myself with* what every man desires—many women. 9I *surrounded myself with all this and* became great, far greater than anyone who had ever lived in Jerusalem before me. And still, my wisdom never left my side. 10*Throughout this experiment,* I let myself

* 1:1 Hebrew, *Qoheleth,* one who gathers

have anything my eyes desired, and I did not withhold from my mind any pleasure. *What was the conclusion?* My mind found joy in all the work I did—my work was its own reward! 11As I continued musing over all I had accomplished and the hard work it took, *I concluded that* all this, too, was fleeting, like trying to embrace the wind. Is there any real gain *by all our hard work* under the sun?

12I turned my attention to *the ways of* wisdom and folly and madness. *I asked,* "What is left for those who come after the king to do? They can only repeat what he has already done."* 13I realized that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. 14*As the old saying goes:*

The wise have eyes in their heads,
but fools stumble in the darkness.

Yet I knew *deep down* that the same fate comes to both of them. 15I said to myself, "Why do I try to be wise when my fate is the same as that of the fool? This pursuit is fleeting too." 16Neither the wise nor the fool will be remembered for very long *once they are gone.* The wise dies, and the fool alike. All are forgotten in the future. 17So I began to hate life itself because all that is done under the sun is so harsh and difficult. Life—everything about it—is fleeting; it's like trying to pursue the wind.

18So I began to hate all the hard work I had done under the sun because I would *eventually* have to leave it all to the one who comes after me. 19And who knows whether my heir will be wise or foolish? Still he will inherit all the things for which I worked so hard here under the sun, the things for which I became wise. This, too, is fleeting *like trying to catch hold of a breath.* 20So I turned these thoughts over in my mind and despaired over how hard I worked under the sun. 21Although someone with wisdom, knowledge, and skill works hard, *when he departs this life,* he will leave all he has accomplished to another who has done nothing to deserve work's reward. This, too, is fleeting, and *it causes* great misery. 22What exactly do people get out of all their work and all the stresses they put themselves through here under the sun? 23For every day is filled with pain and every job has its own problems, and there are nights when the mind doesn't stop and rest. And once again, this is fleeting. 24There is nothing better than for people to eat and drink and to see the good in their hard work. These *beautiful gifts,* I realized, too, come from God's hand. 25For who can eat and *drink and* enjoy *the good things* if not me? 26To those who *seek to* please God, He gives wisdom and knowledge and joyfulness; but to those who are wicked, God keeps them busy harvesting and storing up for those in whom He delights. But even this is fleeting; it's like trying to embrace the wind.

3 **Teacher:** For everything *that happens in life*—there is a season, a right time for everything under heaven:

2A time to be born, a time to die;
a time to plant, a time to collect the harvest;
3A time to kill, a time to heal;
a time to tear down, a time to build up;
4A time to cry, a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, a time to dance;
5A time to scatter stones, a time to pile them up;
a time for a *warm* embrace, a time for keeping your distance;
6A time to search, a time to give up as lost;
a time to keep, a time to throw out;
7A time to tear apart, a time to bind together;
a time to be quiet, a time to speak up;
8A time to love, a time to hate;
a time to go to war, a time to make peace.

9What good comes to anyone who works so hard, all to gain *a few possessions?* 10I have seen the *kinds of* tasks God has given each of us to do to keep one busy, 11*and I know* God has made everything beautiful for its time. God has also placed in our minds a sense of eternity; we look back on the past and ponder over the future, yet we cannot understand the doings of God. 12I know there is nothing better for us than to be joyful and to do good throughout our lives; 13to eat and drink and see the good in all of our hard work is a gift from God. 14I know everything God does endures

* 2:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

The creation story in Genesis 2 recognizes the common origin of humanity and the animals. There God forms the first human from the "dirt out of the ground" and breathes into him the breath of life, and the man known as Adam becomes a living being. But within a few short verses, God declares that it is "not good" for Adam to be alone and seeks a "perfectly suited partner" for the human. So God forms from the "ground" every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and He brings them to Adam to see if any of them are a "right and proper partner." Finally, when no suitable companion has been found, God fashions another creature from Adam's own human flesh. When Adam sees her, he knows he has met a perfect partner. Clearly, both Genesis and Ecclesiastes stress how much humanity shares in common with the animals. While we may be different—as explained in the Genesis story—we are all creatures, made of the same stuff, breathing the same air. And perhaps most to the point, we share a common destiny: death.

for all time. Nothing can be added to it; nothing can be taken away from it. We humans can only stand in awe of all God has done. 15What has been and what is to be—already is. And God holds accountable all the pursuits of humanity.*

► The contrast between God and humanity could not be starker. The teacher drives this point home by reminding his reader that human lives and earthly accomplishments are fleeting. Nothing tangible is permanent. No work lasts. It all slips away and vanishes into thin air. Compare that to God. Everything God does is substantial. Everything God accomplishes lasts forever. Every word God speaks makes a difference. And so, God places within every person a sense of eternity to know yet not understand Him. This world with all its goodness and beauty is not as good as it gets. There is more, so much more, and we are made for that reality too. But not now, not yet.

Teacher: 16Again, I looked *at everything that goes on* under the sun and realized that in place of justice, wickedness prevails. In place of righteousness, wrongdoing succeeds. 17I said to myself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a right time for every pursuit and for every action."* 18I thought about how people act: "God *often* puts them to the test to show them how much they are like the animals." 19The fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so does the other, for we have the same breath within us. *In the end,* we have no advantage over the animals. For *as I have said,* it's all fleeting. 20Humans and animals alike go to one place; all are *formed* from dust, and all return to the dust *once more.* 21Who really knows whether the spirits of human beings go up and the spirits of animals go down into the earth? 22So I realized there is nothing better for us than to find joy in the work we do, for work is its own reward. For who will bring us back to see what will be after we are gone?

4 **Teacher:** Then I looked again and saw all the oppression that happens under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, and no one offered to *help and* comfort them. The oppressors exercise *all* the power, while the powerless have no one to *help and* comfort them. 2It struck me that the dead are actually better off than the living who must go on living; 3and, even better, are those who were never born in the first place. At least they have never had to witness all of the injustices that take place under the sun.

► The imbalance of power creates many victims. Worldly power, sourced in corrupt systems "under the sun,"

* 3:15 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 3:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

is on the side of the oppressor. Few are in the ditches with the broken and poor.

Teacher: 4Then I saw *yet another thing*:
envy fuels achievement. All the work and skills people develop come from their desire to be better than their neighbors. Even this is fleeting, like trying to embrace the wind.

5*As the saying goes*:

The fool folds his hands *to rest*
and lets his flesh waste away.
6And it is better to have one handful of peace
than to have two hands full of hard work
and a desire to catch the wind.

7Again I observed *another example of* how fleeting life is under the sun: 8a person who is all alone—with no child, no sibling—yet he works hard his entire life. Still he is never satisfied with the wealth he gains. Does he stop to ask, "Why am I working so hard?" or "Why am I depriving myself of life's *simple* pleasures?" This, too, is fleeting, *like trying to catch hold of a breath;* it's a miserable situation.

9Two are better than one because a good return comes when two work *together*. 10If one of them falls, the other can help him up. But who will help the pitiful person who falls down alone? 11In the same way, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm. But how will the one who sleeps alone stay warm *against the night*? 12And if one person is vulnerable to attack, two can drive the attacker away. *As the saying goes,* "A rope made of three strands is not quickly broken."

13A poor, wise youth is better off than an old, foolish king who no longer accepts advice. 14*For example,* once a young man marched out of prison to become king; it had not mattered how poor he once had been in his kingdom. 15I saw all those who live out their lives under the sun flock to the side of a second youth who took the king's place. 16There seemed to be no limit to all the people who were under his authority. Yet those who will come later will not be happy with him *and will refuse to follow him.* Even this, you see, is fleeting—*power and influence do not last*—like trying to pursue the wind.*

► How often people have arisen from relative obscurity to lead great movements in society! The Bible itself is full of such stories: Joseph goes from slave to prisoner to vizier of Egypt; David goes from shepherd to king of Israel; Esther goes from foreign exile to queen of Persia; Peter goes from fisherman to church founder. Their stories inspire others, but later generations remember only anecdotes and forget the passion and character that move leaders from obscurity to leadership in the first place. Life is fleeting. Victories do not last. In this imperfect interim world, greatness is only provisional.

5 **Teacher:** Watch your step when you enter the house of God. Be ready to listen *quietly* rather than *rushing in* to offer up a sacrifice to foolish people, for they have no idea that what they do is evil.

God knows what is on the inside. Words and actions are not always necessary.

2Do not be too hasty to speak your mind before God or too quick to make promises *you won't keep,* for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, *watch your tongue;* let your words be few. 3For just as busyness breeds *restless* dreams, so wordiness reveals the voice of a fool.

4If you make a promise to God, do not be slow to keep it; for He takes no pleasure in fools. So do what you have promised. 5*In fact,* it would be better not to make a vow *in the first place* than to make it and not fulfill it. 6Do not let your mouth lead you to sin, and do not claim before the temple messenger that your vow was a mistake. Why should God be angry at the sound of your voice and destroy everything you've worked hard to achieve? 7Daydreaming and excessive talking are pointless *and fleeting things*

* 4:13-16 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

to do, like trying to catch hold of a breath. What good comes from them? It is better to quietly reverence God.

8If you see the poor oppressed, justice denied, and righteousness rejected in a particular place, then do not be surprised at this; for those in power are watched over by those higher up, and they *in turn* by some even higher. 9*Still,* it is better for the land *in every way* to have a king who cultivates the fields.*

Corruption often starts at the top and works its way down.

10*As the saying goes:*

Those who love money will never be
satisfied with money,
and those who love riches will never
be happy with what they have.

This, too, is fleeting. 11The more goods there are, the more people there are to consume them. How does any of this really benefit the owners except they can gaze *proudly* on their possessions? 12Sweet sleep comes to those who work hard, regardless of how much or how little they've eaten. But the abundance of the rich keeps them awake *at night.*

► There is nothing like the sense of gratification that comes from working hard all day, when bread and cheese taste as good as the finest steak. The ability to work, strength to work, and desire for work are all gifts from God. When we understand that and use those gifts accordingly, simple things like sleep and a good meal are causes for joy and celebration. But those who are rich and idle can't buy a good night's sleep or a stress-free meal or a moment's peace.

Teacher: 13I have witnessed a grave evil *pervading our world,* one that has been with us since the first sunrise: harm comes to all who hoard their riches. 14Such riches can easily vanish through some misfortune, so that the rich have nothing left to pass along to their children. 15We all came naked from our mother's womb, and we will leave this world as we came, taking nothing of the wealth for which we have toiled. 16Here, too, is another grave evil: all of us, *no matter who we are,* will depart this world exactly the same way as we came into it. So what good does it do to continue to toil after the wind? 17So all our days we eat in darkness, with mounting frustration, suffering, and anger.

18Then it dawned on me that this is good and proper: to eat and drink and find the good in all the toil that we undertake under the sun during the few days God has given, for this is our lot *in life.* 19Also, God gives wealth, possessions, and power to enjoy those things, and He allows them to accept their lot *in life* and to enjoy hard work. This is God's gift. 20For people like this have no time to despair over life because God keeps them so busy with a deep-seated joy.

6 **Teacher:** I have seen another injustice under the sun, one that is a real burden upon humanity. 2*Sometimes* God gives money, possessions, and even honor, so that we have everything a person might desire; nothing is lacking. But then, *for reasons God only knows,* God does not allow him to enjoy the good gifts. Rather, a stranger ends up enjoying them. This, too, is fleeting; it's a sickening evil. 3If a person has one hundred children and lives for many years but finds no satisfaction in all of the good things *that life brings* and *in the end* doesn't have a proper burial, I say that it would be better if that person had been stillborn 4because the stillborn arrives in a fleeting breath and then goes nameless into the darkness *mourned by no one and buried in an unmarked grave.* 5Though the child never sees the sun or knows anything, it still had more rest than the person *who cannot enjoy what he has.* 6Even if a person were to live one thousand years twice over, but could find no satisfaction, don't we all end up going to the same place?

► The words, "it would be better if that person had been stillborn," may shock the modern reader because it is hoped that no child is stillborn; believers

* 5:9 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

pray for a good life for all of God's creatures. But the writer of Ecclesiastes does not dwell on the fate of the stillborn; instead he contrasts the life of the person who finds no good in life with the fate of the child who never drew breath, never saw the sun, and never was given a name. Life is a gift from God, and the teacher admonishes his readers to find the good in that gift. Yes, sometimes life is not fair; yes, sometimes life deals harsh blows; yes, life slips away far too quickly. But as long as someone draws breath, he or she should find the good in that life.

Teacher: 7*As the saying goes,* "All of our toil
is food for our mouths." *We eat; we drink,*
and yet deep down we do not feel satisfied. 8What good is it to be wise? Are the
wise better off than fools? And what do
the poor know that others do not when
they conduct themselves before the
public?* 9It is better to enjoy what our
eyes see than to long for what our *roving*
appetites desire. This, too, is fleeting, like
trying to embrace the wind.
10Whatever exists has already been
named. Human nature, as it is *with*
its strengths and limitations, is already
known. So no one dares to dispute with
One so much stronger than he. 11The
more a person speaks, the more breath
is fleeting; and what advantage do a lot
of words bring us? 12For who knows the
best way for us to live during the few
days of our fleeting lives? *After all,* we
pass through them like shadows. For
who can say what will happen under the
sun after we are gone?

7 **Teacher:** A good name is worth
more than the finest perfume,
and the day you die is better
than the day you were born.
2*In the same way,* it is better to go to a
funeral
than a celebration.
Why? because death is the end of life's
journey,
and the living should always take
that to heart.
3Sorrow beats *foolish* laughter;
embracing sadness somehow
gladdens our hearts.
4A wise heart is well acquainted with grief,
but a foolish heart seeks only
pleasure's company.
5It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
than a song written by fools,
6For the laughter of fools is like
the *hiss and* crackle of burning
thorns beneath a pot.
This, too, is fleeting.
7Oppression *can* turn the wise into fools,
and a bribe *can* damage the *noblest*
heart.
8Having the last word is better than
having the first,
and patience *will benefit you* more
than pride.
9Do not be quick to anger,
for anger sits *comfortably* in the lap
of fools.
10Do not ask, "Where have all the good
times gone?"
Wisdom knows better than to ask
such a thing.
11It is good to have wisdom along with
an inheritance;
they give a *clear* advantage to those
who see the sun.
12For *together* wisdom and money are
alike in this:
both offer protection *from life's*
misfortunes,
But the *real* advantage of knowledge
is this:
wisdom *alone* preserves the lives of
those who have it.
13Think *for a moment* about the work of
God.
Can anyone make straight what
God has made crooked?

► Often wisdom invites us to ponder great questions. The question, "Can anyone make straight what God has made crooked?" echoes the words of 1:15—"Something crooked cannot be made straight." Only God can determine what is and what is not. God makes our paths crooked or straight. And we often do not understand why one person's way is straight and another's is crooked. The message of the teacher is simple: reverence God regardless of the path you have been given to walk.

* 6:8 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

After each act of creation in Genesis 1, "God saw that His *new* creation was *beautiful and* good." When creation is nearly complete, God not only declares it "good" but is described as "savoring *its beauty and appreciating* its goodness" (Genesis 1:31). In the creation account recorded in Genesis 2, God places the tree of the knowledge of "good and evil" in the garden and commands the first couple not to eat of the tree. But that is precisely what they do; and in the act of eating, they gain knowledge of good and knowledge of what the absence of good brings. Adam and Eve's children live with this dichotomy. For example, when Cain is distressed over God's choice of Abel's offering over his, God says to Cain, "*Don't you know that* as long as you do what is right, then I accept you? But if you do not do what is right, *watch out, because* sin is crouching at the door, ready to pounce on you!" (Genesis 4:7). The temptation to scheme—that is, to do the "evil" rather than the "good"—begins with the first human pair; the teacher of Ecclesiastes reminds his readers that the same temptation still exists.

Teacher: 14When times are good,
enjoy them and be happy.
When times are bad,
think about this:
God makes both *good and bad times,*
so that no one really knows what is coming next.

15In the fleeting time I have lived on this earth, I have seen *just about* everything: the good dying in their goodness and the wicked living to a ripe old age. 16*So my advice?* Do not act overly righteous, and do not *think yourself* wiser than others. Why *go and* ruin yourself? 17But do not be too wicked or foolish either. Why die before it's your time? 18Grasp both sides of things and keep the two in balance; for anyone who fears God won't give in to the extremes.*

19Wisdom is more powerful to a wise person than 10 rulers in a city.
20There is not a righteous person on earth who *always* does good and never sins.
21Don't take to heart all that people say;
eventually you may hear your servant curse you.
22And face it, your heart has overheard how often you've cursed others.

23I have tested all of these sayings against wisdom. I promised myself, "I will become wise," but wisdom kept its distance. 24*True* wisdom *remains elusive*; its profound mysteries are remote. Who can discover it?

25So I *turned and* dedicated my heart to knowing *more,* to digging *deeper,* to searching *harder* for wisdom and the reasons things are as they are. I applied myself to understanding the connection between wickedness and folly, between folly and madness. 26*Along this journey,* I discovered something more bitter than death—a seductive woman. Her heart is a trap and net. Her hands shackle *your wrists.* Those who seek to please God will escape her clutches, but sinners will be caught in her trap. 27Look at this! After investigating the matter thoroughly to find out why things are as they are, 28I realize that although I kept on searching, I have not found *what I am looking for.* Only one man in a thousand have I found, but I could not find a single woman among all of these *who knows this.* 29Here is what I have figured out: God made humanity for good, but *we* humans go out and scheme our way *into trouble.*

8 **Teacher:** How rare to find one who is truly wise,
one who knows how to interpret this *or solve that*!
Wisdom brightens the countenance of the face,
and softens hard lines *etched* in the face.

2Here's my advice: keep what comes from the king's mouth; after all, this matter is really an oath from God. 3Don't be in a hurry to leave the king's presence or throw your support behind a bad cause, because the king can do whatever he wishes. 4Since the king has the power to enforce his word, who dares ask him,

* 7:18 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

"What are you doing?" 5Whoever does what the king commands will stay out of trouble, and the wise heart will figure out the proper time and proper way *to proceed*. 6Yes, there is a time and a way to deal with every situation, even when a person's troubles are on the rise. 7For no one knows what is going to happen, so who can warn him before it does? 8No one can master the wind and contain it—*it blows as it will*. No one has power over the day of death—*it comes as it will*. No soldier is discharged in *the heat of* battle, and certainly wickedness will not release those entangled in it. 9I have witnessed all of this as I have focused my attention on all that is done under the sun: whenever one person oppresses another to lift himself up, it only hurts him *in the end*.

10I have witnessed the wicked buried *with honor* because during their lifetimes they would go in and out of the temple, and soon their *crimes* were forgotten in the very city where they committed them. This, too, is fleeting.* 11When the penalty for a crime is not carried out quickly, then people start scheming to commit their own crimes. 12Although a wicked person commits a hundred sins and still lives a long life, I am confident it will go better for those who worship the one True God and stand in awe before Him, 13and it will not go well for the wicked nor will their days grow long like *evening* shadows because they do not stand in awe of God.

14Here is another example of the fleeting nature of our world: there are just people who get what the wicked deserve; there are wicked people who get what the just deserve. I say this, too, is fleeting. 15And so I *heartily* recommended *that you pursue* joy, for the best a person can do under the sun is to *enjoy life*. Eat, drink, and be happy. *If this is your attitude,* joy will carry you through the toil every day that God gives you under the sun.

16When I applied myself to the study of wisdom and reflected on the *kinds of* tasks that occupy people's attention on earth, I noticed how little sleep they generally get, whether day or night. 17I saw all the works *and ways* of God, and it became clear to me that no one is able to grasp fully this *mystery called life*. Try as we might, we cannot discover what has been done under the sun. Even if the wise claim to know, they really haven't discovered it.

9 **Teacher:** So I set my mind on all of this, examined it thoroughly, and *here's what I think:* The righteous and the wise and *all* their deeds are in God's hands. Whether they are *destined to be* loved or hated, no one *but God* knows. 2Everyone shares a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good [and the bad],* the clean and the unclean, those who sacrifice and those who neglect the sacrifices. The good *and the faithful* are treated no differently than the sinner. Those who take an oath are treated no differently than those afraid to commit. *Such a great injustice!* 3Here is an evil that pervades all that is done under the sun: the same destiny happens to us all. Human hearts are inclined toward evil; madness runs deep throughout our lives. And then what happens? We die. 4So long as we are alive, we have hope; it is better to be a living dog, *you see,* than a dead lion. 5At least the living know they will die; the dead don't know anything. *No future,* no reward is awaiting them, and one day they will be completely forgotten. 6All of their love and hate and envy die with them; then it is too late to share in the *human* struggle under the sun.

► At best, life is unpredictable. No one knows whether a pleasant or harsh future awaits. Perhaps it is better that way. It would be nice if good actions always guaranteed a pleasant future, but they don't. Sometimes, in this fallen world, it is just the opposite. One thing is certain, however: everyone faces death. It is the great equalizer. Yet the teacher is assured of something else: those who are right with God and live wisely are in His hands.

Teacher: 7So *here is what you should do:* go and enjoy your meals, drink your wine and love *every minute of* it because God is already pleased with what you do. 8Dress your best, and don't forget a splash of scented fragrance. 9Enjoy life

* 8:10 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 9:2 Most manuscripts omit this portion.

with the woman you love. Cherish every moment of the fleeting life which God has given you under the sun. For this is your lot in life, *your great reward* for all of your hard work under the sun. 10What-ever you find to do, do it well because where you are going—the grave—there will be no working or thinking or know-ing or wisdom.

11I turned and witnessed *something else* under the sun: the race does not *always* go to the swift, the battle is not *always* won by the strong, bread does not *always* fill *the table of* the wise, wealth does not *always* accrue to the skillful, and favor is not *always* granted to the knowledgeable; but time and mis-fortune happen to them all. 12A person can't possibly know when his time will come. Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds trapped in a snare, without warn-ing the unexpected happens, and people are caught up in an evil time.

When tragedy strikes, neither our wisdom nor our wealth nor our power can spare us from it.

13I have witnessed an example
of wisdom under the sun and admit
I found it impressive: 14Once there was
a small town with only a few people in
it. One day, *out of nowhere,* a king *and his* powerful *army* marched against it,
surrounded it, and besieged it. *The vil-lagers didn't know how to fend off such a powerful enemy.* 15But one man, who
was *very* poor but *very* wise, *rallied the villagers and managed to drive the army away*. (*The village remains to this day,* but
no one remembers the name of that one
wise man who saved the village.) 16So
I said, "Wisdom is better than strength."
But the wisdom of the poor is despised;
nobody listens to their *wise* counsel.

17It is better to hear the soft-spoken
words of a wise person
than the rant of a tyrant in the
company of fools.
18Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
yet one wrongdoer can undo much
good.

10 **Teacher:** *Remember the saying.*
Dead flies can spoil a good
perfume.
In the same way, all the wisdom and
honor *in the world* cannot
outweigh a moment's folly.

2Wise people move to the right *where they honor the goodness of God's creation,*
while fools move to the left *and choose to ignore it.*

► Verse two states that "wise people move to the right . . . while fools move to the left." The contrast between "right" and "left" reflects the ancient Near Eastern ideas of "clean" and "unclean." The right hand was consid-ered the clean hand and was a symbol for prosperity, while the left hand was considered the unclean hand and a symbol for disaster. The clean hand was used for eating, for acts of hos-pitality, and for greeting others. The unclean hand was used for personal hygiene. Thus, in this metaphor the right is equated with God's goodness, while the left is equated with ignorance of God's goodness.

Teacher: 3Fools are easily spotted when
they walk down the street:
their lack of sense is obvious to
everyone.
4If someone in charge becomes angry at
you, don't leave your post;
a calm reply puts great offenses to
rest.

5I have seen another *restless* evil in this world, the kind of error that arises from those in power: 6*fools and their* folly are promoted to positions of authority, while the rich *and talented* are assigned menial tasks. 7I have seen slaves riding on horseback *like royalty* and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

8If you dig a pit, you may fall into it.
If you tear down an old wall, a
snake may come out and bite
you.
9Whoever quarries stones may be
crushed by them,
and whoever splits wood may be
hurt *by flying debris.*
10If a tool is dull and no one sharpens its
edge, the work will be harder;
the advantage of wisdom is *this: it brings* success.

11 If a snake bites before it is charmed,
there is no advantage in being a
snake charmer.
12 The words of the wise bring them favor,
but those of the foolish endanger
them.
13 The first words out of a fool's mouth
are folly;
the last words he utters are evil
madness.
14 The fool babbles on and on, *not
knowing when to stop.*
Though no one knows what will
happen next, *he may think he
knows.*
Who can tell what the future holds?
15 The fools' work wears them out;
they're so weary they can't find their
way to the city.
16 Woe to the land whose king is a child
and whose princes start their feast
in the morning.
17 Blessed is the land whose king is of
noble heritage
and whose princes know when to
feast,
Who discipline themselves with strength
and avoid drunkenness.
18 The roof sags over the head of lazybones;
the house leaks because of idle
hands.
19 Feasts are happy occasions;
wine brings joy to life;
money is the answer for everything.
20 Don't curse the king in your thoughts
or demean the rich even in private.
If you do, a little bird or other winged
creature overhead might
overhear
and wing your words and report
what you said *to those in power*.

11 **Teacher:** *Don't be afraid to*
release your bread upon the
waters,
for in due time you will find it.
2 Divide your portion—put seven here,
maybe eight there—
for you can never be sure when or
where disaster will strike.
3 When the clouds are *dark and* heavy
with rain,
showers will fall upon the earth.
When a tree falls—whether to the
south or the north—
it will stay where it lands.
4 Those who watch *and wait* for
favorable winds never plant,
and those who watch *and fret over*
every cloud never harvest.

5 You can no more predict the path
of the wind than you can explain how
a child's bones are formed in a mother's
womb. Even more, you will never under-
stand the workings of the God who
made all things.

6 Get up early to sow your seed,
and in the evening find worthwhile
things to do,
For you never know which will profit
you—
maybe this, maybe that, maybe
both.

Hard work, not idleness, is at the heart of wisdom. Rewards come when we most need and least expect them.

7 Light is sweet;
one glimpse of the sun delights the
eyes.

8 If a person lives many years, then
he should *learn to* enjoy each and every
one; but he should not forget the dark
days ahead, for there will be plenty
of them. All that is to come—*whether
bright days or dark*—is fleeting. 9 Be
happy, *and celebrate all of the goodness
of* youth while you are young. Cultivate
a cheerful heart every day you have
youth. Go where your heart takes you.
Take in the sights. *Enjoy,* but remember
that God will hold us accountable for all
that we do. 10 *When all is said and done,*
clear your mind of *all its* worries. Free
your body of *all its* troubles *while you
can,* for youth and the prime of life will
soon vanish.

12 **Teacher:** *And so we come to the
end of this musing over life. My
advice to you is to* remember
your Creator, *God,* while you are young:
before life gets hard *and the injustice
of old age comes upon you*—before the
years arrive when pleasure feels far out
of reach—2 before the sun and light and
the moon and stars fade to darkness
and before cloud-covered skies return
after the rain. 3 *Remember Him* before the
arms and legs of the keeper of the house
begin to tremble—before the strong *grow
uneasy and* bent over *with age*—before
toothless gums aren't able to chew food
and eyes grow dim. 4 *Remember Him*
before the doors are shut in the streets
and hearing fails and everyday sounds

fade away—before the *slightest* sound of a bird's chirp awakens the sleeping but the song itself has fallen silent. 5People will be afraid of falling from heights and terrifying obstacles in the streets. *Realize that hair turns white* like the blossoms on the almond tree, one becomes slow *and large* like a *gluttonous* grasshopper, and *even caper berries* no longer stimulate desire. In the end, all must go to our eternal home while there are mourners in the streets. 6-7So before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is shattered: before the *earthen* jar is smashed at the spring and the wheel at the well is broken—before the dust returns to the earth that gave it and the spirit-breath returns to God who breathed it, let us remember our Creator. 8Life is fleeting; *it just slips through your fingers.* All vanishes like mist.

► The teacher advises the readers to "remember" their Creator. Remembrance is a pervasive theme in Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God remembers His covenant people, and the covenant people are told to remember the promises and actions of God on their behalf. In the Book of Psalms, "remember" occurs 45 times, sometimes written by the suffering faithful who cry out to God to remember (Psalms 25:6-7; 74:2, 18, 22; 89:47), and sometimes by the worshiper who marvels that God *has* remembered (Psalms 8:4; 78:39; 111:5; 136:23). Thus remembering in the Old Testament is an action of both God and God's people.

Memory was as fundamental to the faith of ancient Israel as it is today. Believers gather together to remember who they are and to whom they belong. This communal memory shapes reality, forms identities, and determines right living.

9Not only did the teacher attain wisdom by careful observation, study, and setting out many proverbs, but he *was also generous* with his knowledge and *eagerly* shared it with people. 10The teacher also searched for just the right words *to bring hope and encouragement,* and he wrote honestly about truth *and the realities of life.*

11The words of the wise are like goads; the collected sayings of the masters are like the nail-tipped sticks *used to drive the sheep,* given by one Shepherd.

Wise words ring true in our ears, whether we want to hear them or not. They prod us, convict us, and move us; and heeding them strengthens us.

12So be warned, my child, of anything else that might be said! There is no end to writing books, and excessive study only exhausts the body. 13And, when all is said and done, here is the last word: worship in reverence the one True God, and keep His commands, for this is *what God expects* of every person. 14For God will judge every action—including everything done in secret—whether it be good or evil.

SONG OF SONGS

A love song about the Shulammite and her lover

For Solomon, king of Israel

Known by various names, the book called “Song of Songs” or “Song of Solomon” belongs to a category of Near Eastern poetry that celebrates the goodness and beauty of human love. According to tradition, King Solomon is the author of this most sublime song of all, because of the editorial superscription “to Solomon” at the very beginning of the book and because his name is mentioned throughout the song. However, the Hebrew doesn’t necessarily mean the song “belongs to” or was written “by” Solomon. The superscription is just as easily translated “about” or “for” Solomon, meaning he is the subject or audience of the book, not necessarily its author. Because the grammar and dialect used in the poetry cannot be positively identified with the 10th century B.C. when Solomon would have been writing, the exact meaning of the superscription is uncertain. The poetry has similarities to grammatical constructions used in other books as early as the Song of Deborah (which many consider the oldest poetry in the Bible, dating to the 12th century B.C.) and Persian loan words which could have crept into the Hebrew vernacular only after the exile as late as the 5th or 4th centuries B.C. Therefore, scholars have suggested dating schemes that range widely, though most situate it after the exile.

This song of love may be read on two levels. Read literally, it describes the natural and satisfying love between a man and woman. The primary characters are an unknown man and a Shulammite woman who move from courtship to consummation through the song; their relationship is witnessed and encouraged by a chorus of young women from Jerusalem. The poetry is sensuous and filled with erotic overtones; it celebrates physical beauty, longing and desire, and the true goodness of sexual union. Some rabbis apparently found a literal reading of this poem a bit disturbing, and so they developed a more symbolic interpretation. Read in this way, the song describes the love expressed between God and Israel. Such an interpretation is warranted since the prophets had already portrayed the relationship between God and Israel in marital terms. While the prophets use the imagery to condemn the people Israel for their adulterous infidelity, the Song’s image assumes that God and Israel share an intimate relationship. Christians, too, read this love poem symbolically, in light of Christ’s love for the church and the mystical longing of the soul for union with God.

Song of Songs, which is a "book" of the Bible, actually has more in common with Handel's *Messiah* or Puccini's *Tosca* than any prose work of the Old Testament—it's a libretto, a record of the words sung in a musical or opera. While this song is certainly the longest libretto in the Bible, it is not the only one. The Book of Psalms is replete with them; and they often open with directions for musical instruments such as in Psalm 4, which begins, "For the worship leader. A song of David accompanied by strings." Song of Songs lacks such instrumental direction; but through the poetic phrasing and pronoun usage, three distinct vocal parts are inherently identifiable: the female lover (who would sing soprano), the male lover (who would sing tenor), and the observing young women (who would function as the chorus). Even without the musical score, it is possible to imagine these actors breathing life into the libretto on a great stage.

1 For Solomon. The most sublime song of all.

Her *(to him)*: [2]Kiss me with the *sweet* kisses of your lips,
for your love delights me more than wine.
[3]The pleasant aroma of your fragrance *rises in the air*;
your name is like *precious* perfume poured out:
This is why young women adore you.
[4]Take me away with you;
let's run away together!

(to the young women) The king has brought me into his bedroom.

Young Women of Jerusalem *(to him)*: We will *shout for* joy and celebrate over you.
We will make it known that your love is better than *the finest of* wines.

Her *(to him)*: Everyone loves you, and there is no reason why they shouldn't.

[5]*(to the young women) Look at me,* young women of Jerusalem.
I am dark but beautiful.
I am dark like the tents of Kedar;
I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon's *temple*.
[6]Don't stare at my dark skin,
for the sun looked down on me.
My brothers' anger scorched me;
they made me work *all day long* in the vineyards,
So I did not *have time to* care for my own vineyard,
to cultivate my own body.

[7]*(to him)* Tell me, my dearest love,
where are your sheep grazing *today*?
Where are you resting with your flock at midday?
I want to come to you.
Why must I go *looking for you* like the veiled women
wandering among the flocks of your friends?

Him *(to her)*: [8]If you do not know *where I am,*
most beautiful of women,
Follow the tracks of my sheep—
they will lead you to me—
And graze your *flocks of* young goats beside the shepherds' tents.
[9]You remind me, my dear,
of an *honored* mare among Pharaoh's *stallion-driven* chariots;
[10]The strings *of jewels* against your cheeks frame your elegance,
as *also the tender curve of* your neck with precious gems.

Young Women of Jerusalem *(to her)*: [11]We will make for you golden jewelry *to lay against your skin, golden jewelry* studded with silver *to frame your elegance.*

Her: [12]When the king was *relaxing* at his table,
the *seductive* fragrance of my perfume filled the air.
[13]My love is *close to my heart,*
like a sachet of myrrh tucked between my breasts.
[14]My love is like a *fragrant* bouquet of henna blossoms
from the vineyards of Engedi.

Him: 15How beautiful you are, my dear!
How so very beautiful!
Your eyes are like doves.

Her: 16You, my love, are so handsome! A pleasure *to behold*!
Our bed is *a lush,* green *field,*
17The beams of our house are *majestic* cedars,
and the rafters are *tall* pines.

2 **Her:** I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily *found in one* of the valleys.

Him: 2Like a lily among thorns, that is what she is;
my dear is *a captivating beauty* among the young women.

Her: 3My love is like an apple tree in a wooded forest;
he is *a ripe tree* among *a grove of saplings,* those young men.
I sat beneath his *ample* shade, filled with such joy.
I tasted the sweetness of his fruit *and longed for more.*
4He placed me at his banquet table,
for everyone to see that his banner over me declares his love.

5*(to those around)* Sustain me with *sweet* raisins.
Refresh my *energy* with apples
Because I am lovesick *for him.*
6His left hand cradles my head;
his right embraces me.

7(to the young women) You of Jerusalem *heed my warning.*
By the gazelles and deer of the field,
I charge you not to excite your love until it is ready.
Don't stir *a fire in your heart* too soon,
until it is ready to be satisfied.
8I hear his voice! The voice of my love!
Here he comes,
Leaping over the mountains,
bounding among the hills.
9My love is like a gazelle,
sure-footed and swift as a young stag.
Look, there he is! Standing behind my wall,
watching through the windows,
peering through the lattice.
10My love responded and said to me,

Him: Arise, my dearest, my beauty,
and come away *with me.*
11Don't you see? The winter is done.
The rains *and clouds* have come and gone.
12The flowers are unfolding in the fields;
the birds are warming up their songs,
The cooing of the turtledove
is heard throughout the land.
13The fig trees are bringing forth their first fruit,
and the vines are in blossom, filling the air with their fragrance.
So arise my dearest, my beauty,
and come away *with me.*
14Now, my dove, *don't be shy.*
Don't hide from me in the clefts of the rock
or nest like a bird in secret among the cliffs.
Show me your *lovely* form.
Let me hear your beautiful voice,
For it sounds so sweet,
and your face is so lovely.

Young Women of Jerusalem *(to the couple)***:**
15Catch the foxes for us,
those little foxes that menace the vineyards,
For our vineyards *are so vulnerable when they* are in full bloom.

Her: 16My love is mine, and I am his.
He grazes among *my* lilies.
17As the day breathes its morning breeze
and shadows *turn and* flee,
Turn to me, my love, like a gazelle;
come to me like a young stag on rugged mountains.

3 **Her:** *Restless* night after night in my bed,
I *longed and* looked for my soul's *true* love;
I searched for him,
but I could not find him.
2I will get up now and search the city,
wander up and down streets and plazas;
I will look for my soul's *true* love.
I searched for him, but I could not find him.
3The watchmen found me as they kept watch on the *silent* city.
"Have you seen my soul's *true* love?"
I asked.
4Not long after I left them,
I found him—I found my soul's true love.

This libretto is full of imagery. Two of the most common images are that of the gazelle and the lotus blossom (translated here as "lily"), both frequently used in many ancient Near Eastern cultures. The gazelle is a species of antelope whose males have long horns. Both males and females move with grace and strength as they cross flat savannahs or climb steep cliffs. It is because of these traits that the gazelle is equated with sexuality, youth, and stamina. The Israelites used it in poetry to represent the youthful joys of love and sexual vigor, while many Near Eastern pagan religions used it in images honoring fertility goddesses. The lotus is a type of lily found in watery regions. Because of its shape, which resembles the womb, and its fragrance, which is alluring, the lotus became the flower of choice for lovers across the Near East. In Israel it was featured in poetry and even dominated the capitals of the columns supporting Solomon's temple; in Egyptian and Phoenician cultures, it represented the gods themselves. With just one word, "gazelle" or "lotus," this poet conveys a bevy of ideas about love, youth, strength, and passion.

I pulled him to me and would not let
him go
until I brought him to my mother's
house,
to the very room where she
conceived me.

5(to the young women of Jerusalem)
Heed my warning:
By the gazelles and deer of the
field,
I charge you not to excite your love
until it is ready.
Don't stir *a fire in your heart* too
soon, *until it is ready to be
satisfied.*

Young Women of Jerusalem: 6Who is
this coming up from the desert,
with billowing clouds of *dust and*
smoke,
with a sweet aroma of *burning*
myrrh and frankincense,
with fragrant spices fresh from the
merchant?

The royal litter carries the groom to the wedding, and upon the litter is the king with his crown.

7Look, it is Solomon's litter,
surrounded by 60 strong men,
some of the very best soldiers in
Israel,
8All armed swordsmen,
battle-hardened heroes, experts at
war,
Marching with swords at their sides,
ready to guard *the king* from the
terrors of the night.
9King Solomon built his own *royal*
carriage
from the trees of Lebanon.
10He had its posts fashioned from silver,
its back made of gold,
its seat covered with royal purple,
its interior decorated with love by
the young women of Jerusalem.
11O go out, young women of Zion,
and see King Solomon
Wearing the crown with which his
mother has crowned him on his
wedding day,
on the day his heart overflows with
joy.

4 **Him** *(to her)*: You, my love, are
beautiful.
So beautiful!

Because stimulating images come forth when the lovers describe in intimate detail each other's bodies, Jewish men were discouraged from reading this greatest of songs until the age of 30.

Your eyes are like doves
nestled behind your veil.
Your hair *moves as gracefully* as a flock
of goats
leaping down *the slopes of* Mount
Gilead.
2Your teeth are *pearl white* like a flock of
sheep shorn,
fresh up from a wash.
Each *perfect and* paired with another;
not one of them is lost.
3Your lips are *as red* as scarlet threads;
your mouth is beautiful.

Your cheeks *rosy and round* are
beneath your veil,
like the halves of a pomegranate.
4Your neck is *elegant* like the tower of
David,
perfectly fit stone-by-stone.
There hang a thousand shields,
the shields of mighty men.
5Your breasts are like two fawns,
twin gazelles grazing in a meadow
of lilies.
6As the day breathes its morning breeze
and shadows *turn and* flee,
I will go up your myrrh mountain
and climb your frankincense hill.
7You are so beautiful, my love,
without blemish.
8Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon.
Journey *with me* from the crest of
Amana,
from the top of Senir even the
summit of Hermon,
From the lions' *dangerous* den,
from the mountain hideouts of
leopards.
9My heart is your captive, my sister, my
bride;
you have stolen it with one glance,
caught it with a single strand of
your necklace.
10How beautiful is your love, my sister,
my bride!
Your love is more pleasing than *the
finest* wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume
brings more delight than any
spice!
11Your lips *taste sweet* like honey off the
comb, my bride;
milk and honey are beneath your
tongue.
The scents of your clothes are like the
fresh air of Lebanon.
12You are a locked garden, my sister, my
bride, *open only to me;*
a spring closed up tight, a sealed
fountain.
13Your sprouts are an orchard of
pomegranates and exotic
fruits—
with henna and nard,
14With nard and saffron,
calamus and cinnamon—
With rows of frankincense trees
and myrrh and aloes and all the
finest spices.
15*My bride,* you are a fountain in a garden,
a well of life-giving water flowing
down from Lebanon.

► What does he mean by "my sister, my bride"? Is this a sudden revelation of an incestuous relationship? No. He is describing how sexual expression can bring two people intimately together, as close as two people can be; the man and woman are now family. This image would have been particularly meaningful in ancient Israelite society, where life was centered on familial relationships and calling someone "brother" or "sister" was a sign of deep intimacy and care. Blood relatives lived together, worked together, traded with each other, and were buried together. By calling the woman "sister," he is declaring they are now blood relatives. In the covenant relationship called marriage, blood is drawn during consummation, bonding the two parties together as man and wife, as brother and sister, forever.

Him *(to the winds)***:** 16Rise, you north wind;
come, you south wind.
Breathe on my garden,
and let the fragrance of its natural
spices fill the air.

Her: Let my love come into his garden
and feast from its choice fruits.

5 **Him** *(to her)***:** I have come into my
garden, my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with
its *natural* spices.
I have tasted the honeycomb dripping
with my honey
and have drunk my wine and milk
together.

(to his young friends of Jerusalem) Eat,
friends, drink your fill!
Be intoxicated with love.

Her: 2I was sleeping, but my heart was
awake
when I heard a sound, the sound of
my love pounding *at the door*.

Him: Open yourself to me, my sister, my
dearest,
my *sweet* dove, my flawless beauty.

My head is drenched with dew;
my hair *is soaked* with the wetness
of the night.

Her: [3]I have taken off my robe.
How could I ever put it on again?
I have washed my feet.
How could I walk across this dirty
floor?
[4]My love put his hand on the latch;
my insides began to throb for him.
[5]I leaped from my bed to let my love in.
My hands were dripping *sweet*
myrrh,
My fingers were coated with myrrh
as I reached for the handles of the
lock.
[6]I opened for my love, but he had turned
away and was gone.
He'd left, and my heart sank.
I looked for him, but I did not see him.
I called out to him, but he did not
answer.
[7]The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds in the
city.
They beat me, they left bruises on my
skin,
and they took away my veil, those
watchmen on the walls.

[8](to the young women of Jerusalem)
Promise me that if you find my love,
you will speak with him, telling him
that I am faint with love.

Young Women of Jerusalem: [9]How is
your beloved better than all the
other lovers,
most beautiful of women?
How is your beloved worth more than
all the rest,
that you would make us promise
this?

Her: [10]Because my love is radiant and
ruddy,
he stands out above 10,000 *other
men.*
[11]His head is pure gold;
his hair is thick and wavy and black
as a raven.
[12]His eyes are like doves at the edge of a
stream,
mounted like jewels and bathed in
pools of milk.
[13]His *bearded* cheeks are like a spice
garden, with towers of spice:
His lips are lilies dripping *and
flowing* with myrrh,
[14]His hands are like *strong* rods of gold,
each set with jewels.
His body *displays his manhood*
like an ivory tusk inlaid with
sapphires.
[15]His legs are like pillars of white marble,
both set on bases of gold.
He stands *tall and strong* like *the
mountains of* Lebanon,
with all its majestic cedars.
[16]His mouth *tastes* sweet, so sweet;
he is altogether desirable.
This is my love. This is my dear one, *as
I am his,*
O young women of Jerusalem.

6 **Young Women of Jerusalem** *(to her)*:
Where has your love gone,
most beautiful of women?
Do you know which direction he went
so we can help you find him?

They pass through many obstacles as they celebrate their union in different venues. Love is found in a garden or a parental home. Ecstasy comes in a dream or reality.

Her: [2]*Women of Jerusalem, I know where my
love is.*
My love has gone into his garden
Among the beds of *aromatic* spices,
like a gazelle grazing among his
gardens
and *a gardener* gathering the lilies.
[3]I belong to my love, and my love
to me.
He feeds his flock among the lilies.

Him *(to her)*: [4]You are beautiful, my dear, *as
beautiful* as Tirzah,
as lovely as Jerusalem,
as regal as an army *beneath* their
banners.
[5]Turn your eyes from me
because they overpower me *as
always.*
Your hair moves *as gracefully* as a flock
of goats
leaping down *the slopes of* Mount
Gilead.
[6]Your teeth are *pearl white* like a flock of
sheep shorn,
fresh up from a wash.
Each is *perfect and* paired with
another;
not one of them is lost.
[7]Your cheeks are *rosy and round*
beneath your veil,
like the halves of a pomegranate.

[8]There may be 60 queens and 80
concubines—
there may be more virgins than can
be counted—
[9]But my dove, my perfect *love* is the only
one *for me,*
the only daughter of her mother,
the pure *and favored* child to the
one who bore her.
The young women saw her and called
her blessed;
the queens and concubines praised
her.

Young Women of Jerusalem: [10]Who is
this who looks down like the
dawn,
as radiant as the full moon, as
bright as sunlight,
as majestic as an army beneath
their banners?

Her: [11]I went down *to walk* among a stand
of walnut trees,
to take in the new growth of the
valley,
To see if the vines had budded
or the pomegranates were
blooming.
[12]Before I knew it, my passions set me
before some chariots,
those belonging to my noble
people.*

Young Women of Jerusalem: [13]Come
back, come back, O Shulammite!
Come back, come back to us, so
that we can look upon you.

Him: Why should you look upon the
Shulammite,
as *you would stare* at the dance of
joyous victory at Mahanaim?

7 **Him:** Your feet are so beautiful,
perfectly fitted in sandals, noble
daughter!*
Your sculpted thighs are like jewels,
the work of a master hand.
[2]Your hidden place is *open to me* like a
goblet, *perfect and* round,
that never runs dry of blended
wine;
Your waist is a mound of wheat—
curved and white and fertile—
encircled by lilies.
[3]Your breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
[4]Your neck is *as stunning* as an ivory
tower;
your eyes *shimmer* like the pools in
Heshbon
by the gate of Bath-rabbim.
Your nose is *strong and proud* like the
tower of Lebanon,
which points toward Damascus.
[5]Your head is as stately as *Mount*
Carmel;
your hair *shines* like a tapestry of
royal purple cloth—
the king is held captive by your
locks.
[6]How beautiful you are, my love, and
how pleasing
In all your delightful *and satisfying*
ways.
[7]Your stature is as *elegant as* a date
palm tree,
and your breasts are *sweet,*
attractive, and round like
clusters of its fruit.
[8]I say, "I will climb the palm tree;
I will take hold of its fruit."
May your breasts be like clusters of
grapes,
the fragrance of your mouth* like
fresh apples,
[9]and may your kisses *satisfy* like the
best wine.

Her: *May the wine* go down smoothly for
my love,
flowing gently over his lips and
teeth.*
[10]I belong to my love,
and he has desire for me.

(to him) [11]Come out into the fields, my
love,
and there spend the night in the
villages.
[12]Let's rise with the morning and go to
the vineyards
to see if the vines have budded,
If their blossoms have opened,
and if the pomegranates are in
bloom.
There I will give you my love.
[13]The mandrakes send out their *seductive*
fragrance,
and the finest fruits wait at our
doors—
New *pleasures* as well as old—
I have stored them up for you, my
lover.

* 6:12 Hebrew, *Ammi-nadiv;* meaning is uncertain. * 7:1 Hebrew, *Bath-nadiv;* meaning is uncertain. * 7:8 Literally, nose
* 7:9 Hebrew manuscripts read, "lips of sleepers."

Why would she break the parallel language and say that he "has desire" for her instead of saying he "belongs" to her as she does to him? Certainly he does belong to her, now that they are intimately bound in covenant. Her words may be said in light of Genesis 3:16, the passage where God outlines humanity's punishment for their first sin. There it is narrated that Eve is to have desire for her husband who will rule over her. What the woman has said here is the exact opposite of the post-sin marriage structure: it is the man who desires the woman. Therefore, the depiction of the marriage relationship in Song of Songs gives a glimpse of what marriage might have looked like prior to the first sin in Eden. God designed the relationship between husband and wife to be one of love, passion, and pleasure. This should be the ideal all couples strive for in their marriages as they work together to avoid sin in their lives.

8 **Her** *(to him)***:** If only you were like my brother, *my love,*
nursed at my mother's breast!
Then we could show our affection in public.
I would kiss you, *and no one would think anything of it.*
Nobody would look down on me.
2I would take you by the hand
and bring you to my mother's house—
she has taught me *to be a woman.*
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
and you could enjoy the juice of my pomegranates.

3His left hand cradles my head,
and his right hand *reaches out to* embrace me.

4(to the young women of Jerusalem)
Heed my warning:
I charge you not to excite your love until it is ready.
Don't stir *a fire in your heart* too soon,
until it is ready to be satisfied.

► Three times in this most beautiful song (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), the female lover encourages her friends not to stoke the fires of passion until the proper time. This is wise instruction because unbridled passion can be very satisfying or quite destructive. The woman is presumably reminding the royal harem of this proverb to hold off on sexual intimacy. The "young women of Jerusalem" is probably a reference to the concubines of the king and how they, like most women, want to experience true and lasting intimacy. The difficulty is that these women may only know one night with the king and have their dreams of deep relationship go unrequited.

Young Women of Jerusalem: 5Who is this *woman* coming up from the desert,
leaning on her love?

Her: Under the apple tree I roused your *love for me,*
in the place where your mother conceived you,
in the place where she gave birth to you.
6Set me as a seal over your heart;
wear me as an emblem on your arm
For love is as strong as death,
and jealousy is as relentless as the grave.
Love flares up like a blazing fire, a very ardent flame.
7No amount of water can quench love;
a raging flood cannot drown it out.
If a person tried to exchange all of his wealth for love,
then he would be surely rejected.

Young Women of Jerusalem: 8We have a little sister
whose breasts have not yet developed.
How shall we protect her
until the time when she is spoken for?
9If she is a wall,
we will build silver towers of protection;

If she is a door,
we will barricade the door with the
strongest cedar.

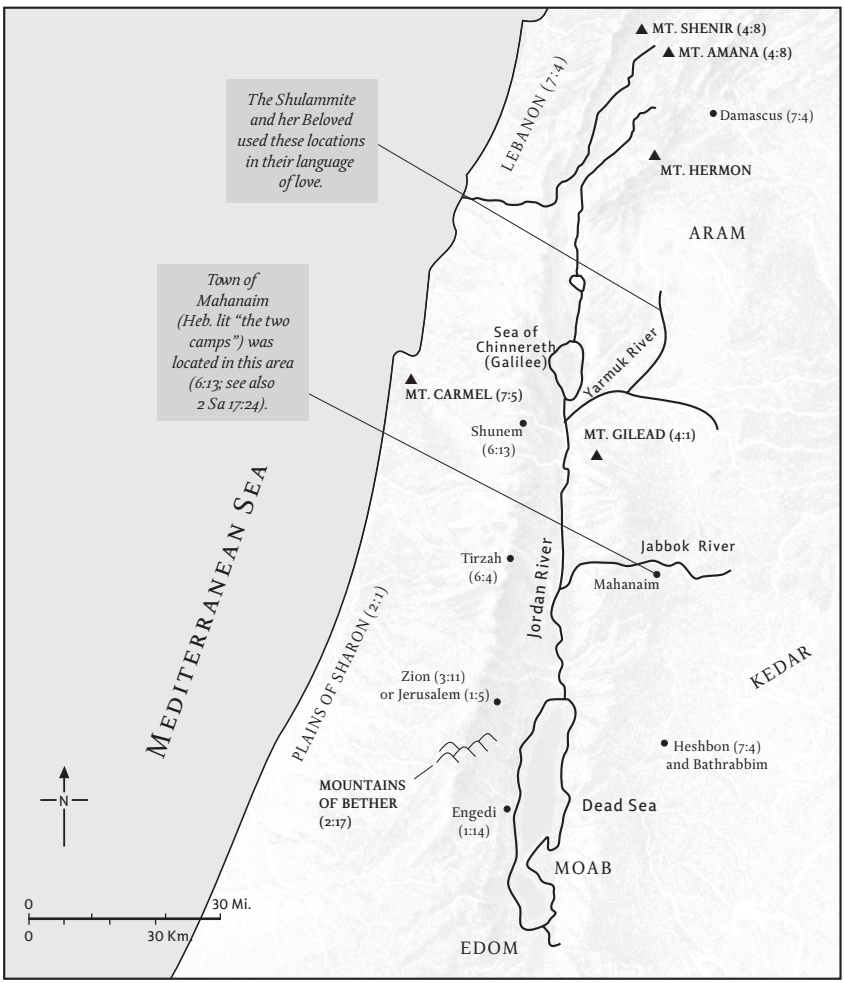
Her: [10]I was a wall,
and *now* my breasts are like towers;
At that time I found completeness *and*
satisfaction in his eyes.

[11]Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-hamon;
he let farmers tend it and
charged each *a ransom* for its
produce—1,000 pieces of silver.

[12]My vineyard is my own—mine to lend
or mine to lease.
Solomon, you may have your 1,000;
Those who tend the fruit, your 200.

Him: [13]You who dwell in the gardens,
whose friends are always attentive
to your voice,
Let me hear it.

Her: [14]Come quickly, my love.
Be like a gazelle or young stag on
the mountains of spices.



Locations in Song of Songs

ISAIAH

Prophecies concerning God's judgment and salvation

The message of Isaiah, a prophet and servant of God

Few biblical books have been more quoted or influential than Isaiah. Its status as one of the Major Prophets is due to its length, scope, and enduring significance. Tradition associates this book with the prophet Isaiah who lived in Jerusalem at the end of the eighth century before Jesus. But the composition of it appears to be more complicated, for the prophecy addresses three distinct communities: those threatened by the Assyrians in the eighth and seventh centuries (chapters 1–39), those deported by the Babylonians in the sixth century (chapters 40–55), and those restored to Jerusalem by the Persians in the fifth century (chapters 56–66). The scope of the prophecies implies that the book was compiled and edited by scribes over the centuries and completed after Isaiah's death. Prophecy was primarily a spoken event, not a written text, so it was left to the prophets' disciples to collect and preserve their teachers' messages.

Isaiah is a master of prophetic word and action. He often dramatizes his messages in ways that are sure to unsettle and be remembered. His brilliant analysis, skillful prose, and creative metaphors demonstrate the artistry necessary to speak effectively to king and commoner alike. For Isaiah, the troubles on the horizon are not the willful actions of tyrants; they are orchestrated by God. These troubles are God's just punishment on His errant children for what they have done. But Isaiah knows that God is not content with merely judging; He is committed to restoring His repentant people. The prophet directs his oracles primarily to Judah, even though he often turns a prophetic eye to the surrounding nations (chapters 13–23). Isaiah looks to Israel's distant past to understand his own troubled day. The exodus, for example, becomes the pattern for a new exodus one day when the exiled faithful—the remnant—will come home. God's covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David form the foundation of Isaiah's future hopes. In particular, one born from David's royal line is destined to rule, establishing peace and justice throughout the world. Prophecies of a new creation (chapters 65–66) reflect the original idyllic scene where God and humanity enjoy pristine and perfect interactions in the garden. In some ways, the new creation will be like the first; but unlike the first, it will usher in an era of peace for a desperately broken world. Some of the most memorable and moving aspects of Isaiah's message are the Servant Poems (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; and 52:13–53:12); these poetic verses portray and pay tribute to the career of God's remarkable Servant, whose faithful obedience makes the world right. Early Christians read these lines in light of Jesus' life as God's Servant.

1 This is the vision that Isaiah (son of Amoz) saw *and what he prophesied* about Judah and Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah:

► In the time of Isaiah, prophets are known to be astute observers of their particular times and places. They speak what they understand to be God's words to the people about how their thoughts and actions, especially their actions, relate to God's expectations for them. When the people fall short of such expectations, prophets tell them what God thinks and what the consequences might be.

2 Listen and take note,
from the farthest reaches to the nearest!
Listen up heaven and earth,
for the Eternal One has spoken.
He is not happy with the children He raised.

Eternal One: Despite all I've done,
My children have rebelled against Me.
3 Oxen know their owners;
even donkeys know where their master feeds them,
But Israel is ignorant.
My very own, they ignore Me.

4 Truly this is a wicked nation,
a people fat with wrongdoing,
Like a litter of miscreants,
a pack of wilding adolescents.
They've rejected the Eternal,
despised the Holy One of Israel;
they've turned their backs on Him.

5-6 Why do you insist on taking a beating?
Why do you persist in such reckless rebellion?
Your bodies already suffer head to toe—
your heads ache and hearts flutter;
Your skin is covered with bruises,
swollen with welts, and gaping with wounds,
with no tending, no healing, no soothing.

7 Your country is a waste.
Your cities are dead, sooty rubble.
Your farms and fields are consumed,
everything you worked for destroyed
by foreign *armies* as you look on—
helplessly.

8 Zion, *our portion of heaven on earth,* is no longer protected;
Jerusalem stands like a watchman's shelter in a vineyard,
Like a hut in a melon field,
like a city *assaulted and* besieged.

9 Except for the fraction of us who hang on
by the grace of the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
We'd be *destroyed and deserted*
like Sodom and Gomorrah, *utterly done in.**

10 Listen to the word of the Eternal One,
you rulers of Sodom!
Attend to God's instructions,
citizens of Gomorrah!

Eternal One: 11 What do I care for all of your slaughter-gifts?
I have had enough of your burnt offerings.
I'm not interested in any more ram meat or fat from your well-fed cattle.
The blood of bulls, lambs, or goats does not please Me.
12 When you come into My presence,
who told you to trample down the courtyard of My *temple bringing all of this*?
13 Just stop giving Me worthless offerings;
your incense *reeks and* offends Me!
Your feasts and fasts, your new moons and Sabbaths—
I cannot stand any more of your wicked gatherings.
14 *Likewise,* I deplore your holidays,
those calendar days marked specially for Me;
They weigh Me down.
I am sick and tired of them!
15 When you summon Me with your hands in the air, I will ignore you.
Even when you pray your whole litany, I won't be listening
Because your hands are full of blood *and violence.*

* 1:9 Romans 9:29

16 Wash yourselves, clean up your lives;
remove *every speck of* evil in
what you do before Me.
Put an end to *all* your evil.
17 Learn to do good;
commit yourselves to seeking
justice.
Make right for the world's most
vulnerable—
the oppressed, the orphaned,
the widow.

18 Come on now, let's walk and talk;
let's work this out.
Your wrongdoings are bloodred,
But they can turn as white as snow.
Your sins are red like crimson,
But they can be *made clean again*
like *new* wool.
19 If you pay attention now and
change your ways,
you can eat good things from a
healthy earth.
20 But if you refuse *to listen* and
stubbornly persist,
then, by violence and war, you
will be the one devoured.

These things were spoken by the very mouth of the Eternal.

21 O that city, once so loyal, has become a
prostitute.
Where there had been perfect justice,
equity and compassion,
Now there are murderers.
22 All that once made your community
shine like silver is now tarnished,
your best drink watered down *like a*
cheapskate's wine.
23 Your leaders are liars, running around
with thieves,
wheedling for bribes—greedy for
"contributions."
They don't defend the needy and pay no
attention to the weak.

24 Consequently, the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, the Mighty
One of Israel,
will not keep quiet.

Eternal One: Oh yes, I will get relief
from my enemies
and settle the score with My foes!
25 I will take action against you, *My*
sinful children,
burning off whatever is
worthless, purging whatever
is impure.
26 I will bring back legislators *who*
have integrity,
people like your founding
fathers—*principled decision-*
makers.
Then your city will be called
honorable and just,
a model of ethics, trustworthy,
and strong.

27 *In that way, this place* Zion will *pass the*
test:
the city restored by justice, her
citizens delivered by repentance.
28 But those who arrogantly persist in
doing wrong will be crushed.
Whoever abandons the Eternal will
be done in.
29 You will be ashamed because you found
pleasure in *idols and* oaks;
you will suffer disgrace because you
bowed *before images* in gardens.
30 Like a tree that withers, like a garden
without rain,
you will *fall apart,* fade, *and*
dry up.
31 And those *who seem* strong *among you*
will become *dry* straw,
their work the spark *that sets it all*
ablaze,
Burning everything to the ground
and there won't be anyone around
to stop it.

2 This is what Isaiah (son of Amoz) prophesied about Judah and *its capital* Jerusalem:

2 There will come a time in the last days
when the mountain where the
Eternal's house stands
Will become the highest, most
magnificent—
grander than any of the mountains
around it.
And all the nations *of the world* will run
there,
wanting to see it, feel it, fully
experience it.
3 Many people *of all languages, colors, and*
creeds will come.

People: Come! Let's go to the Eternal's
mountain,
to the house of the God of
Jacob,
So that we might learn from Him
how best to be,
to go along *in life* as He would
have us go.

After all, the law will pour out from Zion,
the word of the Eternal, from
Jerusalem.
4God will decide what's fair among
nations
and settle disputes among all sorts
of people.
Meanwhile, they will hammer their
swords into sickles,
reshape their spears into pruning
hooks.
One nation will not attack another.
They will not practice war anymore.

► Isaiah sees an amazing picture of the future, a future which only God can create. In that vision, Jerusalem and the temple of the only God will sit on the highest mountain at the center of the world. In that day, all the nations of the world will stream to the holy city and seek God's guidance and instruction. God will sit as King and Judge, dispensing real justice—not some man-made counterfeit—not only in international but also local matters. Perhaps, most amazingly for a world weary of war, this will be a time when war is a thing of the past and its lethal instruments are turned into tools for life and peace.

5O house of Jacob—*people of the
promise*—come, come walk
with me
by the light of the Eternal.
6See, You have abandoned Your people,*
the house of Jacob!
For they have taken on attitudes and
postures of other cultures,
*imitating anyone and anything that
crosses their path*
Practicing divination like the Philistines,
making deals with outsiders.
7Their land is full of silver and gold,
rich with mind-boggling wealth.
Their countryside is full of warhorses;
there are more chariots than you can
count.
8Their land is full of *worthless* idols.
They worship their own creations;
They bow down to what they have
made, *bought, and sold.*
9But now the people will be humbled,
reminded of their simplicity and
limits—
don't just absolve them!
10Get into the caves, hide in the dust,
in the face of the Eternal's terrifying
Self,
in the face of His *dread and*
enormous majesty.
11The *bubble of* human pride will be
burst;
the arrogant will be pulled down
from their pedestals.
Then, finally, the Eternal, no one and
nothing else,
will be *the center of attention,* lifted
up *in high esteem.*
12The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, has identified a time for
assault
against the arrogant and proud,
against all who think they're so
indomitable.
They will be humbled.
13Against all the high and lofty:
against the cedars of Lebanon
and the oaks of Bashan,
14Against the tallest mountains
and the highest hills,
15Against every watchtower
and every defended border,
16Against all the *trading* ships of Tarshish,
against all the luxury vessels.
17On that day, humankind's *false* pride will
be shattered and pulled down.*
Then the Eternal, no one and nothing
else, will be *the center of attention,*
Lifted up in high esteem.
18As for all the idols, they will vanish.
19People will hide themselves away in
rocky caves and *dusty* holes in the
ground
in the face of the Eternal's terrifying
Self,
In the face of His *dread and* enormous
majesty,
when He comes forth to overwhelm
the earth.
20When that day arrives, people will leave
behind
the idols they made to worship—even
those made of silver and gold,
The things they felt were so important—
to the moles and the bats.
21They hide themselves away in rocky
caves and clefts,
in the face of the Eternal's terrifying
Self,

* 2:6 Greek manuscripts read, "it applies to His people." * 2:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

In the face of His *dread and* enormous
majesty,
when He comes forth to overwhelm
the earth.
22Stop believing in human beings *as so*
amazing, so capable!
We are *short-lived,* only a breath from
death *and worth as much.*
What makes us think we're so special?

3 See here! The Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies,
will take away the supply of
bread and water—
the whole supply—from Jerusalem
and Judah.
2*He will take away their* heroes and
warriors,
judges and prophets, fortune-tellers
and elders,
3*He will take away their* military officers
and high-ranking officials,
advisers and skilled workers, and
experts with charms *and amulets.*
4*In the chaos of their absence,* I will make
mere kids rule.
Even infants will govern them,
5Leaving people to take advantage of
each other,
making their lives miserable.
Youngsters will terrorize the elderly,
and the most despicable will bully
the upstanding.
6*Desperate* people will grab anyone who
seems the least bit ordinary.

People: You managed to hold on to
your coat, so you must be
our leader;
this heap of rubble will be under
your command!

Chosen Leader: 7I will not play the
nurse *for your wounds.*
Do not elect me to lead the
people—I can barely feed
and clothe my own.

8O how *this precious city, this* Jerusalem,
has gone wrong,
and Judah is in shambles.
For all they say and do is an affront to
the Eternal,
resisting His glorious presence.
9The look on their faces tells the true story;
they flaunt their sins like Sodom.
They don't even try to hide them—how
terrible it will be for them,
for they will pay for their self-serving
carelessness.

10Tell those who have done right *in the*
eyes of God
that all will be well for them,
For they will be rightly rewarded.
11But whoever persists in wrongdoing will
rue the day—
everything will go wrong for him—
Whatever he's done will come back to
him.
12Oh, *how I ache for* my people! They are
oppressed by children,
ruled by women, *naïve and*
inexperienced.
O my people, your leaders are misleading
you,
guiding you down the path to
disaster.

13But now the Eternal is taking *the bench;*
He's ready to judge;
He rises to lay out the people's case.
14The Eternal will bring charges
against those in positions of
authority over His people.

Eternal One: You *are charged with*
devouring *everything in* the
vineyard,
and leaving nothing *for the needy.*
You've ransacked the poor to fill
your houses.
15*How dare you!* How dare you crush
My people,
and grind the faces of the poor
into the ground!

This is what the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies has to say.

Eternal One: 16Because the daughters
of Zion are so proud,
so preoccupied with themselves—
strutting and flirting,
Skipping and dancing, winking *and*
giggling for attention—
17I will shame them with *unsightly*
scabs on their heads,
these daughters *who should*
be the pride of Zion, *God's*
precious place.
I will make them feel naked
when I uncover their foreheads
and make them bald.

Under God's judgment they will lose all the things they have that make others notice, desire, or envy them.

18-23When the time comes, the Lord will
simply take away the jewelry for their

ankles, heads, noses, arms, ears, wrists,
and fingers; these chains and gems,
baubles and bangles, sashes and veils,
perfume bottles and lucky charms, festive
clothes and undergarments, purses and
mirrors—*everything that consumed their
attention to get attention.*

24Then instead of a lovely scent—they'll
smell of decay;
instead of *leather* belts—they'll don
a rope;
Instead of a cut and style—they'll have
bald heads;
instead of silky-soft fabric—
they'll put on *scratchy* burlap
sacks;
Instead of beauty—they'll be branded
with shame.
25*Jerusalem,* your fathers and sons will be
slaughtered,
your valiant protectors killed in
battle,
26And your gates will cry out in grief.
The city will sit *in a heap* on the
ground, desolate *and empty*.

4 On that day, seven women will beg
the same man:

Women: Please, take away our shame.
We will support ourselves—eat our own
bread, make our own clothes—just let us
be called by your name.

► The prophet warns of a time when only a few of God's people will be left. The shredded fabric of families will leave the most vulnerable exposed and desperate. Women, who in this ancient Israelite society depend on relationships to men for social and financial security, will resort to doing whatever they can to survive beyond the deaths of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Although the framework of their culture will seem to have crumbled, the story will move forward as the God of Israel remembers His own. There will always be a remnant of those who follow the Lord. Utter despair gives way to hope.

2Then, oh then, a tiny shoot cultivated
and nurtured by the Eternal will emerge
new and green, promising beauty and glory.
Everything that comes from the earth
will offer itself, lovely and magnificent, to
those who escaped Israel's demise. 3Those
who survived in *precious* Zion, all who
remain in *that special city,* Jerusalem, will
be called holy. They are destined to be
alive, *these remaining few,* in Jerusalem.
4Then the Lord will wash away the filth
that clung to the daughters of Zion and
clean up the blood that stained Jerusalem's streets with a spirit of justice and the
breath of fire. 5And the Eternal will create
wonders over the whole of Mount Zion
and those who gather there—cloud and
smoke to dim the day, bright shining fire
to light the night, all billowing over Zion's
glory like a *satin* canopy. 6And it will be a
resting place, protected from the heat of
the day, a place of shelter and retreat amid
storms and rain.

► This prophecy echoes stories of the great exodus, when God led Israel out of slavery in Egypt and guided them safely through the barren, rocky crags of the Sinai Peninsula. God was their comfort and sustainer, an ever-present guide and protection. The ancients spoke of traveling beneath the cool shade of a cloud by day and a pillar of warm, bright fire by night. Now the prophet sees ahead to a day when God will provide His people rest and comfort—a new exodus—in His chosen place, Zion.

5 Let me now sing for my dear friend,
a love song about his vineyard.
My friend, whom I dearly love,
had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
2He *labored to prepare the ground,* tilling
the soil and digging out rocks,
and then he planted it with the best
plants *he could find.*
In its midst, he built a watchtower over it
and cut out a winepress *in the hill
nearby;*
Then he waited, hoping it would be
bountiful.
But the vineyard produced only wild,
bitter grapes.

Eternal One: 3 *That's it. Enough.* Now,
you who live in *My special city,* Jerusalem,
you people of *this choice country,* Judah,
Who's in the right—Me or My vineyard?
4 What else could I possibly have done to make it flourish?
Why, when I had every reason to expect great *beauty and bushels of* grapes,
Did it yield only wild, *bitter* fruit?

5 I'll tell you what I'm going to do,
what I've determined to do to My vineyard:
I'm going to take away its protective fence
and let *the deer, raccoons, and rabbits* devour it.
I'll break down its wall,
let the vines be *eaten and* trampled.
6 I will set it up for destruction—
do no pruning, no tilling—
And it will be overrun with *nasty* briars and thornbushes.
I will even order the clouds not to water it.

7 See here, the vineyard of the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies,
is the house of Israel, *His special people.*
And the shoots and buds He nursed so lovingly along
are the people of *this choice country,* Judah.
He expected a paragon of justice and righteousness—
but everywhere *injustice* runs bloodred *in the streets,* and cries echo *in the city*!
8 Oh, how bad for those who *hoard property and wealth,*
buying up houses and fields, right and left,
Until there is no place left for anyone else;
you will find yourselves very alone in the midst of this *great* land!
9 I was there when the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies,
told us *what to expect.*

Eternal One: Make no mistake about it: many houses will be abandoned.
Grand, beautiful houses *with all the luxury will echo* empty.

10 *Huge investments in* 10-acre vineyards
will yield *tiny dividends,* mere gallons of wine.
Prime property planted with plenty of seed
will grow a nearly worthless amount of grain.

11 Oh, I can't help but groan for people who rise and drink
without stopping from early morning to late evening
Until *their passions and emotions* burn within them.
12 They entertain *themselves* with lyres and harps,
tambourines and flutes, and plenty of wine at their feasts.
But they don't think for a minute about all the Eternal has done.
They don't stop to consider the work of His hands.

Eternal One: 13 Make no mistake: My people are headed for exile
because they never took note;
Even the most honorable among them will endure hunger
while the majority will be parched with thirst.

14 Make no mistake: the force of death is insatiable.
The great gaping grave is opened wide
To swallow whole Jerusalem's opulence and pageantry—
her noble citizens and her common folk, all the raucous revelry.
15 Human beings will be cut down to size, one after another.
Those who walk around with their noses in the air will be humiliated.
16 By contrast, the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies,
will be high and mighty because He judges fairly.
The holy God will be shown to be so because He does what is right.
17 At that time, Jerusalem will become a pasture where lambs graze,
and foreigners will eat in the ruins where the wealthy once dined.

18 O how terrible for those who drag their guilt around,
worthlessness and wrongdoing in tow—

19They sneer, "Well, *where is He?* Let Him
be quick about it!
Let's see this business of the Holy
One of Israel;
Let's see what He has in store so we can
know what it is."
20O how terrible for those who confuse
good with evil,
right with wrong, light with dark,
sweet with bitter.
21O how terrible for those who think
they're so wise,
who consider themselves so clever.
22O how terrible for those heroes who can
outdrink anyone,
those champions who *take pride* in
mixing drinks,
23Those *judges* who set the guilty free in
exchange for "a little something,"
all the while denying the innocent
what they deserve!
24Therefore, as fire eats up the stubble and
dry grass is engulfed by flames,
*so it will be for everything they count
on for the future—*
Their roots will rot, their flowers will
wither and fly away like dust,
for they refused to accept the law of
the Eternal, the Commander of
heavenly armies;
They derided and disparaged the word
of the Holy One of Israel.

25It's no wonder the Eternal burns with
anger at His people.
He has raised His hand against them
and crushed them,
So that the whole earth rang *with the
blow, and you couldn't move
without stumbling over their* corpses
lying like trash in the street.
Despite all this, He's still very angry;
His hand is still raised; He's not done
yet.
26He will signal to distant nations,
and whistle for their armies: *unleash
the dogs of war*.
At breakneck speed they come,
a *war machine like no other—*
27Never tired, never weak;
no one needs to rest or sleep.
Not a belt needs tightening,
not a sandal strap needs fixing.
28Their arrows have been sharpened;
their bows have been bent, *ready for
action.*
Their horses' hooves spark like flint;
their chariots' wheels spin like
whirlwinds.
29*Their* roaring *is deafening,* like a lion, like
a pack of roaring lions.
When they *attack,* they growl and
pounce on their prey,
Carrying them away; no chance of a
rescue.
30On that day, they will roar over *this
people* like a roaring, angry sea,
and the land will go sorrowfully dark,
the light eclipsed by the clouds
of war.

6 In the same year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a grand throne way up high with a flowing cape that filled the whole temple. 2*Bright* flaming creatures waited on Him. Each had six wings: two covering its face, two covering its feet, and two for flying. 3*Like some fiery choir,* they would call back and forth continually.

Flaming Creatures: Holy, holy, holy is
the Eternal, the Commander
of *heavenly* armies!
The earth is filled with His
glorious presence!

4They were so loud that the doorframes shook, and the *holy* house kept filling with smoke.

Isaiah: 5I am in so much trouble! I'm
ruined!
I'm just a human being—*fallible
and stammering.*
My lips are encrusted with filth;
and I live among people just
like me.
But here *I am, and* I've seen with
my very own eyes
none other than the King, the
Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies.

6Then one of the flaming creatures flew to me holding a red-hot ember which it had taken from *God's table,* the *temple* altar, with a pair of tongs. 7The creature held it to my lips.

Flaming Creature: Look! With the
touch of this *burning ember*
on your lips,
your guilt is turned away;
All your *faults and* wrongdoings are
forgiven.

8Then I heard the Lord's voice.

Eternal One: Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?

Isaiah: Here I am! Send me.

Eternal One: 9Go to this people and say,
"Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
Keep looking, but do not understand."*

10Make their hearts hard, their ears deaf, and their eyes blind.
Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts, and then turn and be healed.*

Isaiah: 11How long, Lord?

Eternal One: Until cities are in ruins,
the houses sit empty,
and the land has become a wasteland.

12*You see,* the Eternal has *determined to* move the people far away;
place after place will be completely abandoned.
13And even if just a tenth survive, it will be burned again;
imagine a terebinth or an oak; once it is cut down, the stump remains.
The holy seed remains in the stump.

The stump remains: a testament to what the people used to be, a promise of what is to come.

7 When Ahaz (Uzziah's grandson, Jotham's son) was king *here in the Southern Kingdom* of Judah, *a coalition of two other* kings—Pekah (Remaliah's son) from *the Northern Kingdom (also called* Israel *and Ephraim)* and Rezin from Aram *(which is Syria)*—determined to attack *our capital* Jerusalem. But they failed to take it. 2*This is what happened:* When our *royal* house (descended from David) heard that Aram was in league with Ephraim against us, the king was terrified. The news shook the hearts of the people like trees in the wind. 3So the Eternal told Isaiah *to get involved.*

Eternal One: Catch up with Ahaz at the end of the stream that comes out of the upper pool—*you know,* the one at the highway where they wash and bleach cloth. And bring your son who's named Shear-jashub *(which means "Returning Remnant").* 4-6Tell Ahaz, "Keep your wits about you. Stay calm. Don't panic just because those two angry northerners, Rezin of Aram and *Pekah* (Remaliah's son), threaten you and say: 'Let's march against Judah, terrorize the people, overthrow it, and set up Tabeel's son as our *puppet* king.'"

God promised that David's dynasty would continue forever. Since Ahaz is of David's line, he should be confident before the threat. But he needs the support of God's prophet.

7Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say.

Eternal One: It's not going to work;
what they determine is not going to happen.
8-9The head of Aram is Damascus, and its head is *King* Rezin;
Ephraim's head is Samaria, and its king is Remaliah's son.
Ephraim will fall apart *as a nation and* as a people within 65 years.
Now then, if you don't hold firm, if you don't believe, you will not remain firm.

10The Eternal One also said this to *our king,* Ahaz:

Eternal One *(to Ahaz)***:** 11Ask for *proof,* a sign from the Eternal your God. *Go ahead,* ask anything, *anything at all;* it can be high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.

Ahaz: 12*No way.* I wouldn't dare to ask, to test the Eternal One.

Isaiah: 13Listen then. *You are none other than* the house of David, *the one who inherited God's promise of permanent kingship for David's descendants.* Is it so easy to be a bore to people that you would exhaust God's patience too? 14*Suit yourself.* The Lord will give you a proof-sign anyway: See, a young maiden* will conceive. She will give birth to a son and name Him Immanuel, *that is, "God with us."** 15*There will indeed be something*

* 6:9 Luke 8:10 * 6:9-10 Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27 * 7:14 Greek manuscripts read, "virgin."
* 7:14 Matthew 1:23

Godlike about Him. He'll be eating curds and honey when he knows to choose what is right and good and refuse what is not. 16But before the boy has the wisdom to refuse evil and choose good the territory of the two kings you now dread will be abandoned.

17*But it's not all rosy for you, either.* The Eternal will bring against you, against this population, this *blessed* kingdom, such trouble as hasn't been seen since *the 10 northern tribes, led by* Ephraim, seceded from Judah—*trouble in the form of* the Assyrian king. 18At that time, the Eternal will summon the Egyptian flies and the stinging pests of Assyria, calling them 19to settle into every *crack and* crevice of the country, every place high and low—*mountains, fields, deserts, and cities*—every thornbush and watering hole. 20In that day, the Lord will hire the Assyrian king from beyond the *Euphrates* River to shave every part of you, *humbling you like slaves.* 21Each person will hang onto *only what he or she absolutely needs*—a heifer and two sheep—*in order to survive.* 22*But some will survive* because those who are left will eat curds and honey, for their animals will produce plenty of milk. 23*They will no longer live off the land because* wherever there had been flourishing vineyards with 1,000 vines, worth 1,000 pieces of silver, they will produce nothing but briars and thorns. 24No one will venture into this wasteland of briars and thorns without bow and arrow. 25No one will dare to cultivate the hills that once were tilled for fear of what is out there; only the hardiest animals—cattle and sheep—are released to graze *the ragged slopes.*

8 The Eternal told me to take a large tablet and write—"Swift the Spoils *of War* and Speedy Comes the Attacker"—2and to get believable witnesses, both the priest Uriah and Zechariah (Jeberechiah's son), to watch me do it. 3I approached the prophetess—*a woman who, like me, speaks for God*—and she became pregnant and had a son, whom the Eternal said I should name Maher-shalal-hash-baz *(Swift-the-Spoils-of-War-and-Speedy-Comes-the-Attacker)*; 4because before he is old enough to say "My father" or "My mother" the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carted off to become the property of *their enemy,* the king of Assyria.

► Prophets like Isaiah not only speak their messages, but they sometimes act them out. Isaiah is a master of both prophetic speech and prophetic acts. It is common for God to ask prophets to expose important aspects of their families' lives to demonstrate a message He wants to convey. Perhaps it is because the prophet speaks for God and Israel is God's family. In this case, God tells Isaiah to embed His message into the name of his child. And what is that message? "Ahaz, the two countries currently threatening you will soon be conquered by a greater power—Assyria. It will attack quickly, defeat soundly, and carry off the spoils of war from Damascus and Samaria. So there is no need to fear them; instead, trust in your God."

5The Eternal One explained to me,

Eternal One: 6*This disaster will happen*
because this people have
rejected the stream of Shiloah
that flows gently *to Zion.*
Instead they rejoice over Rezin and
Remaliah's son.
7Just watch—the Lord will
overwhelm them
with great waves of the
Euphrates River.
Like a river, Assyrian might and
glory will bear down on
them;
it will rise over its banks *as*
unstoppable as a raging flood.
8This *Mesopotamian power* will pour
into Judah, rise and pass
through,
wreaking near-fatal havoc.
And its reach will extend over all
your land.

God, be with us.

9*Go ahead,* make your alliances, you
peoples, yet you'll be crushed.
Listen closely, even if you're far away:
Get ready for battle—*get ready* to be
battered;
get ready for battle—*get ready* to be
shattered.

No one wants to believe that God would use foreign power to wreak destruction on other lands and peoples. Yet, as God is holy, so God's place must be holy. He simply cannot dwell where holiness is not. He cannot make a larger-than-life Zion out of an earthly Jerusalem, unless that place (and its people, of course) are right. At best, these people seem to think that paying lip service to God is enough; at worst, they don't even care about God. A simple explanation is the people must be clean and holy. And this condition of rightness, holiness, and cleanliness is a product of how they are—in relation not only to God, but also to each other and the very land itself; these things are inseparable. The consequences of their failure to ensure the holiness of this sacred place by being right with God, land, and others are dire indeed. God must cleanse His people and place because He determines to be represented within and by them. So, better days will come again, and His covenant people will be set right and be happy and prosperous again.

10 *Go ahead,* devise your plans, but they
will fail;
your proclamations won't matter
because God is with us.

11 See, this is what the Eternal told me.
God leaned in close—His strong hand on
me—to keep me from following these
people.

Eternal One: 12 Don't call for an alliance,
like all the rest of this
people do.
Don't fear what they fear, or
dread what they dread.
13 *After all,* only the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly*
armies, should terrify you.
Only God is holy. Only God
should leave you trembling.
14 *Look what I'm going to do in Zion:*
The Eternal will be for you a
sacred place,
But for both houses of Israel I'll also
be a stone that blocks their
way
and a rock that trips them up;
For those who live in Jerusalem, I'll
be a trap and a snare.
15 Many will stumble over them. They
will trip and be broken;
they'll succumb to capture and
be grabbed up.

God who provides a place of safety and security for those who trust in Him is the same God who puts obstacles in the way of those who disregard Him.

16 *Now* take care to keep this message as
it is.
Seal up this teaching
and hand it over to my disciples.

17 *As for me,* I will wait for the Eternal, *even though He feels absent,* even though He has hidden His face from the family of Jacob. I will put *all* hope in Him. 18 You see, I and my children whom the Eternal One gave to me, we personify the promise. We are signs of what God *intends and* will do in Israel, what amazing things the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies has in mind, the One who is indeed present in Zion, *this heaven on earth.*

19 People might tell you to ask the fortune-tellers, consult the babbling astrologers, conjure the dead to tell the living what's to come, but shouldn't they ask their God? 20 Go to God's teaching and His testimony *to guide your thoughts and behavior*! If any response disagrees with the word of God, then it's *muddling and wrong and* not the least bit illuminating. 21 It leaves the people bedraggled and desperate, drifting here and there. In their hunger, the people are bound to be infuriated and curse their king and God. They'll look up *to the heavens* 22 and down to the earth, yet see nothing but trouble, gloom, anguish, and darkness. They will be driven out into the darkness.

When God's people haven't seen a hint of light or hope of day, God will do something new.

9 But there will be no more gloom for those who knew such hardship. In times past, God humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali; later, He will restore the *honor and* glory to the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee, home of the nations.

2The people who had been living in darkness
have seen a great light.
The light of life has shined on those who dwelt
in the shadowy darkness *of death.*
3*And You, God, will make it happen.* You bolstered the nation,
making it great again. You have saturated it with joy.
Everyone in it is full of delight in Your presence,
like the joy they experience at the harvest,
like the thrill of dividing up the spoils *of war.*
4For as You did back in the day when Midian *oppressed us,*
You will shatter the yoke that burdens them,
You will lift the load that weighs them down,
You will break the rod of their oppressor.
5*It's true.* All the fabric of war will go up in flames:
the troops' heavy boots *that stamped us down* and *their* blood-soaked garb
Will all be burned *beyond recognition or use.*
There will be a new time, a fresh start.
6*Hope of all hopes, dream of our dreams,*
a child is born, *sweet-breathed;* a son is given to us: *a living gift.*
And even now, with tiny features and dewy hair, He is great.
The power of leadership, and the weight of authority, will rest on His shoulders.
His name? His name *we'll know in many ways—*
He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Dear Father everlasting, *ever-present never-failing,*
Master of Wholeness, Prince of Peace.
7His leadership will bring such prosperity *as you've never seen before—*
sustainable peace for all time.
This child: God's promise to David—
a throne forever, *among us,*
to restore sound leadership that cannot be perverted or shaken.
He will ensure justice without fail and absolute equity. Always.
The intense passion of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies,
will carry this to completion.

8The Lord has dispatched a word against Jacob;
it will come down *hard* on Israel.
9All the people of Ephraim and the citizens of *its capital* Samaria will know.
In their pride and arrogance they say:
10"*Hey!* The walls have collapsed, but this gives us a chance to rebuild
better than it was before with the best stones instead of brick.
The invaders may have chopped down the sycamores,
but we will plant cedars in their place."
11But the Eternal stirs up Rezin's enemies *to move* against Israel
and arouses all their foes to join them.
12*They come, these enemies, from both sides* (Syrians on the east and Philistines on the west)
and consume Israel, swallowing it whole.
Still, God's anger smolders.
His hand is raised; there's more to come.

13But the people don't return to God after all His punishment.
They don't change their ways and right their paths
To seek the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies.
14Therefore, *He will take them to task.*
In a single day He'll cut off from Israel the head and the tail;
He'll cut down the noble palm and lowly reed.
15The head are those charged with leadership—political and religious—
who used their power in the worst possible ways;
And the tail are the prophets who slur their lies.
16These misguided leaders have misled this people;
and those who follow have become swallowed up in their deceit.
17-18Even now the Lord takes no joy in a single one, not even the young.
Mercy has run out for *even those without power*—the widows and orphans.
For every single person is at fault and behaves badly.
No one thinks or acts as God would have them do.

Every mouth utters foolishness like a
wildfire, *out of control;*
wickedness rages, leveling and
clearing briars and thorns;
Forests and thickets burn, leaving the
whole a smoking heap.
Still, God's anger smolders. His hand
is raised; there's more to come.
19The Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly*
armies,
sets our world on fire in His fury.
The *rotten* people become kindling for
the fire,
turning against one another until no
one is spared.
20They slice off what's on the right and are
still hungry;
they eat what's on the left and still
aren't satisfied.
And *in their voracity,* they consume their
own.

Ravenous in their greed, no one is spared—not brothers or sisters, not allies or kin.

21Manasseh and Ephraim devour each
other
and turn their covetous eye *south,*
toward Judah.
Still, God's anger smolders. His hand is
raised; there's more to come.

► Manasseh and Ephraim are family; they have a common language and common culture, and they come from common stock. In every way that matters they are brothers, but they are at war with each other. And they don't stop there. They turn against Judah, their southern relative. Amazingly, God has chosen them all to be His people, a nation of promise and destiny. How sad that it's come to this! What is God to do with His children? God will not abandon them, yet neither will God put up with their destructive consumption, their greed and injustices. Indeed, their wrongdoing takes its own course of self-destruction, and God will not stop it. Sometimes God's judgment consists of Him stepping back and leaving people to their devices—letting their will be done.

10 1-2How awful it will be for
those who mandate
wickedness
and legalize oppression, denying
justice to the needy,
Taking away the rights of the poor
among My people.
Such leaders intend to make helpless
widows and orphans their prey.
3How will you *opportunists* handle the
day of reckoning?
What will you do when trouble
comes from far away?
Will you run away from the disaster you
caused?
Who will help you? Where will you
leave all your wealth?
4You, too, must cower among the captives
or fall among the dead.
Still, God's anger smolders. His hand is
raised; there's more to come.
5*Hah! God has determined to let loose a*
punishing disaster like you've never
seen.

Eternal One: How awful it will be for
Assyria, the rod of My anger,
as they come crashing in on you;
the club they bear is My fury.
6I am sending Assyria against a nation
that refuses to act rightly,
delegating it to *humble* a people
who have *frustrated*
and infuriated Me *by their blithe*
dismissal.
Assyria will snatch their wealth,
seize their treasures,
and trample over them like mud
in the streets.

7But *they will get cocky.* Assyria has its
own intentions for destruction,
to move against other people and
other places to cut them down.
8-9*The victories make them think they're*
invincible:
The king of Assyria says:
"Aren't all of my princes *destined* to
be kings?
Calno fell just like Carchemish.
I took Hamath as *easily as* Arpad.
Samaria, too, fell like Damascus.
10My *powerful* hand has reached *out to*
subdue kingdom *after kingdom*
whose idols were more famous and
respected than those in Jerusalem
and Samaria.
11Now I will move in and take over
Jerusalem and her idols
as easily as I did in Samaria."

The Assyrians imagine that it is by their initiative and power that they gain control of these great cities and their populations. They are mistaken.

12God will punish Assyria and its king
for their *blasphemous* rants and arrogant
self-satisfaction once my Lord has finished
using them to accomplish His purposes
here on Zion and in Jerusalem.

Assyrian King: 13I am so smart, so
strong, so knowledgeable.
I am clearly superior to
everyone else,
Moving easily into other countries
and using them to suit my
needs,
taking their treasures at will and
humbling their citizens.
14I just reach out and take the land
and the riches I want—
from all over the earth—as
easily as one gathers eggs
from a nest.
They don't flap their wings;
they don't make a sound, *while*
they look on helplessly.

15*But wow, are they ever mistaken! Assyria*
seems to think it has used God.
Can an ax take credit instead of the
one who swings it?
Is a saw better than the one who uses it?
Only if a club or rod can move on its
own.
16So the Lord, the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies,
will afflict Assyria's brawny soldiers
with disease,
And they will waste away to nothing.
God will kindle a roaring fire beneath
Assyria's *fleeting* glory.
17-18The light of God's people will be like a
fire that burns up
the thorns and briars in a single day.
The Holy One will become a flame *and*
make an end of all of Assyria's
schemes.
God will consume the grandeur of
his forest and fruitful fields;
He will consume both body and soul,
as when the sick *grow weak and*
waste away.
19So few trees will remain of his glorious
forest
that a child could count them.

20Then, the few that remain of Israel,
that handful of Jacob's people who
escape,
Will finally quit depending on *the power*
of others
(others who abuse *and take*
advantage of them)
And will instead lean on the Eternal
One, the Holy One of Israel.
21This remnant of Jacob's people *who*
endure and escape the great
destruction
will come back to the Mighty One, to
the embrace of God.
22*But don't doubt*—though the number of
the people of Israel
are like the sand of the sea,
Only a remnant of them will *be rescued*
and return *to survive.*
For destruction is *sure—the matter*
settled—*God is* absolutely right
to do so.
23For the Lord, the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies,
will carry out His destructive decree
over the whole land.*

24But *as for the Holy City, Zion,* the Lord,
the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, has this to say:

Eternal One: Listen, My people living in
Zion. Don't be afraid of Assyria even
though that *great and terrible* nation bat-
ters *and wounds you,* presses its weight
and might against you as Egypt once
did. 25*Don't worry.* It won't be long until
My anger against you will be over, and
I'll turn it instead in Assyria's direction.

26The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, will lash Assyria with His whip;
and Assyria will feel the crushing power
of God's judgment just as the Midian-
ites did at the rock of Oreb,* just as the
Egyptians did when Moses raised his staff
and drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea.*
27When that time comes, all the weight
of Assyria will be lifted off of your shoul-
ders; its yoke will be removed from your
neck, and the burden *of their assault and*
demands will evaporate, *and you'll be free.*

Isaiah describes the southern march of the Assyrian army. Village after village falls until the enemy is so close the clamor of its forces shakes the streets of Jerusalem.

* 10:22-23 Romans 9:27-28 * 10:26 Judges 7:25 * 10:26 Exodus 14:15-17

28 *Oh, sure, first you'll feel that terrible force*
coming on *you from the north*
through Aiath and then Migron; at
Michmash, they store their gear;
29 They take the *mountain* pass, and camp
at Geba for the night;
closer they come as Ramah trembles;
Saul's town Gibeah flees *before them.*
30 Cry out, Gallim! Heed the warning, Laishah!
Poor Anathoth!
31 Madmenah is on the run.
So, too, are the citizens of Gebim.
32 But today, they will stop their march at
Nob
and shake their fists at beautiful
Mount Zion, the mountain of
Jerusalem.
33 *But wait,* look! The Lord, the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
will protect you;
He will cut the arrogant and self-
serving down to size.
With terrifying power He will prune
Assyria's branches,
hack down the high and mighty,
and humble all those who think
they're so great.
34 He will wield the ax and cut down the
brushy undergrowth of the forest;
even *the cedars of* Lebanon fall before
the Mighty One's blow.

11 *But on this humbled ground,* a
tiny shoot, *hopeful and*
promising,
will sprout from Jesse's stump;
A branch will emerge from his roots to
bear fruit.
2 And on this *child from David's line,* the
Spirit of the Eternal One will
alight and rest.
By the Spirit of wisdom and discernment
He will shine like the dew.
By the Spirit of counsel and strength
He will judge fairly and act
courageously.
By the Spirit of knowledge and reverence
of the Eternal One,
3 He will take pleasure in honoring
the Eternal.
He will determine fairness and equity;
He will consider more than what
meets the eye,
And weigh in more than what he's told.

4 So that even those who can't afford a
good defense
will nevertheless get a fair and
equitable judgment.
With just a word, He will end wickedness
and abolish oppression.
With nothing more than the breath
of His mouth, He will destroy evil.
5 He will clothe himself with righteousness
and truth;
the impulse to right wrongs will be *in*
his blood.

With unwavering steps and integrity uncompromised, He will establish peace.

6 *A day will come when* the wolf will live
peacefully beside the *wobbly-*
kneed lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with
the young goat;
The calf and yearling, *newborn and slow,*
will rest secure with the lion;
and a little child will tend them all.
7 Bears will graze with the cows *they used*
to attack;
even their young will rest together,
and the lion will eat hay, like gentle
oxen.
8-9 Neither will a baby who plays next to a
cobra's hole
nor a toddler who sticks his hand
into a nest of vipers suffer harm.
All my holy mountain will be free of
anything hurtful or destructive,
for as the waters fill the sea,
The entire earth will be filled with the
knowledge of the Eternal.

10 Then on that day, that root from Jesse's
line
will stand as a signal for the peoples
of the world
Who will come to Him seeking *guidance*
and direction;
and glory *will be restored* to the land
where He resides.*

11 At that time, my Lord will reach out and gather in the remnant of His scattered people a second time. God's people, *those who had been defeated and exiled,* will make their way back from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea.

12 When God raises a signal, the whole
world will hear *the news*
of how He is assembling the people
He had banished,
Gathering those scattered from Judah
from across the whole wide earth.

* 11:10 Romans 15:12

► There are no capricious acts with God. God, and no one else, is the undoing of Israel. He may use Assyria as His agent to chastise the people of Judah for their wrongdoing, but judgment is never God's last move. When God judges—when God punishes—He does so for a reason. His judgment is always measured, finite, and based on His covenant loyalty. God takes no delight in His people's suffering; but sometimes, tragically, it is necessary. Willful ignorance and blatant disregard for God and others cannot be ignored. In the end, God's purpose is to repair a world deeply injured by sin and its consequences. So His next move is to rescue and restore His covenant partners. Reconciliation and grace always follow destruction.

13 At that time Ephraim will no longer envy
Judah,
those who afflict Judah will be
brought down,
For those groups who had been at odds
with each other—
envy and hostility will end.
14 But they will *join forces against those who*
threaten them,
swooping down on the slopes of
Philistia in the west,
Plundering and prevailing over the
nations in the east *who oppressed*
them:
Edom, Moab, and Ammon.
15 And the Eternal *will make it easy,*
so easy for God's people to return from
Egypt and Assyria.
He will create a swath of dry land
through the gulf of Egypt's sea;
with a wave of His hand, He will
blow a scorching wind
Over the Euphrates—breaking it up into
seven streams—
so the people can cross it in their
sandals.
16 He will build a highway for the remnant
of His people as they leave
Assyria behind,
just as He did for the Israelites
when they left the land of
Egypt.*

12 In *the face of such grace* that
day, you will *thank God.*

People: Thank you, *thank you, thank*
you, Eternal One,
God of our people, of our promise

For establishing an end to our
punishment,
for taking me back *with*
kindness, and comforting me.
2 See, God has come to rescue me;
I will trust *in Him* and not be
afraid,
For the Eternal, indeed, the Eternal
is my strength and my song.
My *very own* God has
rescued me.

God has given His people a new surety and confidence, a new sense of purpose, strength, and determination.

3 With joy *in each step,* you will drink
deeply from the springs of
salvation.
4 You'll want to sing out that day,

People: Give thanks to the Eternal; call
on His name.
Spread *the news* throughout the
world *of* what He has done
and how great is His name!

5 Sing praises to the Eternal!
Everyone, everywhere should know
that God acts in amazing ways.
6 You who live in *this God-blessed place,*
this Zion, shout out and sing for
joy!
For *God is* great, *and God is here*—
with us and around us—the Holy
One of Israel.

13 The burden of Babylon (Isaiah,
Amoz's son, saw this message):

► Isaiah, like many prophets, bears a burden: speaking as God's mouthpiece in the world. But the burden he bears is nothing compared to the punishing burden Babylon will face for the violence it inflicts on the small nations it is annexing. Isaiah "sees"

* 11:16 Exodus 14:21

this message; no one knows how. Was it a vision? Was it a dream? Was it an insight gleaned from some ordinary moment in his extraordinary life?

Eternal One: 2Raise a signal on a bare
mountaintop;
flash the message; broadcast it
widely.
Shout out to the nations *to*
assemble an army;
wave them on *and welcome them*
at the gates of the nobles.
3I have enlisted them to be the ones
to execute My fierce anger.
They are mine—I have
commanded and
consecrated them—these
high and mighty ones.

4Listen! There is restlessness and
rumbling on the mountains,
as a powerful company assembles.
Listen! There is an uproar among the
nations
as they gather their might together.
The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies,
is mustering an army—*thousands,*
maybe millions—for war.
5They come from lands far away,
beyond distant horizons.
That's where the Eternal calls up His
weapons of wrath—
in order to destroy the whole land!

6Cry out *in terror!—the time is coming:*
the day of the Eternal is nearly here,
Violence and destruction as only God-
All-Powerful can wreak.
7-8This is why all hands will shake and
tremble;
every heart will *flutter and* melt.
People will be paralyzed with fear,
weakened with terror.
Taut and shaking, they'll be
overcome like a woman in labor.
They'll look to each other dumbfounded,
their faces flushed with fear.

9See here! *The fury of God has been*
building and is too great to stop;
the day of the Eternal is nearly here.
It will come down in all its cruelty, fury,
and fiery anger,
to make the land a wasteland, to
wipe out all who failed God.

So complete, so persistent are the nation's sins that even the lights of heaven go out.

10For the stars that define the
constellations in the heavens
will fail to give their light.
The sun will go dark even when it's high
in the sky;
the moon will not shine.*

Eternal One: 11I will turn the world's
wrongdoings back on itself.
I will punish those who act
wickedly.
I will stop the arrogant musings of
the proud and pompous,
and make them puny and weak.
12People will be a rarity *in the land,*
like *great chunks of* gold from
Ophir.
13*Like nothing you've ever dreamed,*
the heavens will tremble and
the earth itself will rock out
of place,
When the fury of the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly*
armies, is unleashed
and the power of God's anger is
loosed.
14Then, *in their confusion and distress,*
like a hunted gazelle or a
neglected stray sheep,
They will turn to their own people
and *run for whatever seems*
safe;
they'll try to escape to their own
land.
15*The terror rages on.* Anyone who's
found will be run through
with a sword.
Those who are caught will die by
its *cruel* edge.
16Their babies will be dashed to
pieces *on the rocks* as they
look on *in horror*;
their houses will be ransacked,
and their wives will be raped.

17See, I'm rousing up the Medes against
them; they are a people
who *kill indiscriminately* and
can't be bribed off with silver
or gold.

18The young warriors will fall before
their arrows;
not even infants or toddlers will
receive mercy at their hands.

* 13:10 Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25

19But *afterward,* the awesome and
mighty city Babylon, pride of the
Chaldeans,
will be *razed to the ground* like
Sodom and Gomorrah, which
God destroyed.
20It'll never be inhabited again, and future
generations will never call it
home;
there Arab nomads won't pitch their
tents; shepherds won't rest their
flocks.
21Only desert animals will occupy the
deserted city;
owls will nest in their *formerly swept-clean* houses.
Mangy jackals and wild goats will roam
among the rubble
and romp *among the ruins.*
22Hyenas will *prowl around and* howl
among its towers;
jackals will haunt its *formerly* palatial
palaces;
Babylon's time *of destruction* is coming;
her days are numbered.

14 For the Eternal will extend mercy to Jacob, *this family of God's people.* God will choose Israel all over again, and He will settle them *in comfort and rest* back on their land. Others who are unrelated will *want to* join them and stick close to the house of Jacob, *God's promise people,* 2who will take them in. These others will work for and among Israel. Whoever used to hold Israel captive—*controlling the people's every moment and every move*—will in turn be controlled by Israel; and whoever used to oppress Israel will instead be subject to Israel.

3*Ah, Israel,* there will be a time when the Eternal will give you rest from the burden of your labor, the pain of your servitude. 4And then you will take up this chant against the *fallen* king of Babylon:

People: How silent and still the
oppressor;
the pressure is gone; the raging
is done!
5The Eternal has broken the hold of
the wicked,
snapped *the staff and* the
scepter of *tyrannical* rulers.
6They would *stop at nothing to* beat,
batter, and bruise the nations,
constantly raging as they
hunted down and tyrannized
the peoples.
7The whole earth, *mountains to sea,*
breathes a sigh of relief;
the *peace and* quiet erupts into
a lively, joyful song.
8The cypresses and cedars of Lebanon
rejoice *at his demise,* singing:
"*You can't hurt us anymore.* Now
that you've been cut down,
No one comes to cut us down!"

9*O Babylon,* the land of the dead is
excited to greet you at its
door.
Your king will enter the grave with ghastly pomp.
It stirs the *shadows and* spirits of
the dead—all *long forgotten*
leaders—
it arouses all the dethroned
kings of the nations *to welcome your arrival.*
10These *departed souls* will respond
to you *with rattling voices,*

Departed Souls: Even you, *who were so powerful and unstoppable in life,*
have been weakened just like us!
11All of your pomp *and power* and
the music of your harps join
you here
where the dead abide,
Where maggots squirm beneath
you,
where worms cover you *like a blanket.*

12My, how you've fallen from *the heights of* heaven!
O morning star, son of the dawn!
What a star you were, as you *menaced and* weakened the nations,
but now you've been cut down, *fallen* to earth.
13*Remember how* you said to yourself,
"I will ascend to heaven—*reach higher and with more power—*
and set my throne high above God's own stars?"
Remember how you thought you could be a god, saying:
"I will sit *among them* at the mount of assembly in the northern heights.
14I will rise above the highest clouds and make myself like the Most High"?
15*Hah!* Instead, you have sunk *like a stone* to where the dead abide.
You've hit bottom of the bottommost pit.

16People peer down at you *from above,*
and their curiosity *overflows.*

People: *Wow,* is this the man who once
terrorized the world?
Is he the one who rocked
the earth's kingdoms *and*
threatened us with disaster?
17Is he the one who turned the
bustling cities of the world
into a wasteland,
and never let the prisoners *of*
war go home?

18While all the other world leaders are
memorialized with honor,
and each occupies his own *elaborate*
tomb,
19You will be reviled and disgraced—your
tomb desecrated,
your corpse thrown aside like a
worthless branch.
Those slain in battle, pierced by swords,
will cover you;
you'll go down to the pit like a corpse
left on the battlefield.
20Because you wrecked your own land and
killed your own people,
your corpse will not share in *the*
honor of a proper burial.
May the offspring of such evil never be
mentioned again;
don't speak their names or hear their
tales.
21Let them be obliterated because of their
fathers' wicked deeds
so that they never have a chance *to*
follow in their steps,
Terrorizing and possessing the earth,
filling up the world with their cities!
Then people can live in normalcy and
peace.

Eternal One: 22-24I will move against Babylon and put an end to her future generations. I will cut them off—leaving no survivors—*so that your oppressors* will become nameless and faceless shadows. I'll sweep that city with My broom of destruction and turn its pools into stagnant marshes and leave its ruins to be ruled by wild animals.

God swears that our oppressors will be punished. The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, makes this pledge.

Eternal One: Things will happen as I
plan.
Things will be as I determine.
25I will break Assyria's hold on My land;
on mountain after mountain I
will trample over them.
Then My people will no longer have
to bow beneath the Assyrian
yoke
or bear up under its heavy
burden.
26Because I, *God of earth and heaven,*
have devised a plan for the
whole earth;
I have reached out and am ready
to effect change among the
nations.

27And who can argue with that or stand in
God's way?
The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, has determined
That this is how it should be.
And so it will be.

► While most of Isaiah's messages are directed to the people of Judah, he pronounces other oracles against neighboring nations and empires. This is typical of most prophets. Chapters 13–23 contain a number of oracles (or prophetic messages) addressed to the nations and cities such as Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Babylon, and others. Each message is distinct, for the sins of their citizens and the threats they face are unique to them. Still each message contains an overriding, dominant claim: God is sovereign over all the earth; and although He has a special relationship with Israel and Judah, all the nations must ultimately bow before God.

28When *our* king, Ahaz, died *having endured and survived Assyria's attacks against us,* the prophet received this message.

29Don't get too excited, Philistia, because
your enemy is dead.
The rod that struck you may be
broken,
But from the root of the serpent, a viper
will come out;
the offspring of that viper will be a
flying cobra.

30The poor among us will have enough
to eat;
the needy and most vulnerable will
sleep in peace.
But I will go after your key people with
famine,
and then wipe out any who remain.
31Look out, Philistia; you will soon vanish!
Let your gates and your city *walls*
cry out!
It'll be bad for you soon, because an
army from the north
Is *bearing down on you,* burning *cities in
its wake;*
and there is not a straggler in its ranks.

32So, how do we answer the ambassadors
of the nations?
The Eternal has made Zion what it
is—
And His humbled and afflicted people
will find shelter there.

15 A message about Moab:
In the cover of night, Moab was
attacked and decimated.
Both Ar and Kir were decimated in a
single night.
2The whole community traipses up to the
temple, to Dibon
to weep *and cry out to the gods.*
Moab *weeps and* wails over *the dead in*
Nebo and Medeba,
every head and beard shaved *in
mourning.*
3They wander the streets dressed in
sackcloth;
on roofs and public places people wail,
collapsing in *abundance of* tears.
4The cries of Heshbon *in the north* and
Elealeh *nearby*
reach to Jahaz *in the east.*
Moab is shaken to the core, *wracked with
terror, sadness, and grief;*
even its bravest soldiers cry out.
5It breaks my heart to hear Moab.
Refugees make for Zoar *at Edom's
border* to Eglath-shelishiyah.
They climb, weeping, to the heights
of Luhith and along roads to
Horonaim.
They go with shattering cries.
The land itself is destroyed, dead.
6Where it had been green and rippling
with tall grasses, now it's *brown
and* dusty.
Where *sweet* water glistened all along
Nimrim, now it's *dry and* desolate.
7So the people are carting away all their
belongings.
Whatever they've gathered, they carry
along the brook lined with poplars.
8And Moab cries; the whole country
wails.
From Eglaim to Beer-elim, you can
hear the crying.
9The waters of Dimon run red with blood.

Eternal One: I will bring more disaster to
Dimon: those fugitives of Moab will fare
even worse—I'll send predators upon the
remnant of the land *to hunt them down.*

16 **A Refugee** *(to the Moabites)***:**
Bring tender lambs to
the ruler of the land.
From Sela through the desert
to the beautiful mountain called
Zion, *maybe they'll let us in.*
2And indeed like birds whose homes
were demolished,
like baby birds torn from their
nests,
Moab's daughters, *scattered and
fluttering,* arrive at the fords,
ready to cross the Arnon *River.*

(to Jerusalem) 3Give *us your best*
advice and do what is right.
When the day is at its fiercest,
hide us in your *cool* shade.
Shield the *trammeled and* abused.
Keep your mouth shut when
our enemy comes looking,
seeking us out.
4Let these refugees of Moab come in
and stay.
Protect these tempest-tossed; be their
hiding place,
a shelter safe from the destroyer.

See, when the one who has squeezed
and oppressed you is gone
and the forces of crushing violence
wane in the land,
5Then *God* will establish a royal throne, in
loyal love—
the One who rules there will be
utterly reliable,
With absolute integrity under the
auspices of David.
With a passion for justice, He will
be quick to decide and do what
is right.

God's answer to Moab's plea for help is none other than the Messiah. One day David's son will take the throne and rule with absolute justice.

6 *Oh yes,* we've heard of Moab, how much
they think of themselves—
so important, so valuable, so hot-tempered;
But we know it's just idle boasts.
7 Let them bemoan *their destruction and fall*—every last one of them.
Go ahead, mourn, all you who were struck down;
Cry for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth.

8 The *productive* fields of Heshbon are withering *in the heat;*
the *choice* vines of Sibmah are decimated.
The rulers of the nations are wreaking havoc *across the land,*
crushing its grape clusters *and leveling its old stout vines.*
Moab's tender shoots spread from Jazer to the desert,
then right down to the sea* and even across it.

9 This is why I cry *salty tears* over Jazer,
over the vines of Sibmah and over *the fields of* Heshbon.
And *God's-Ascent,* Elealeh, I weep for you—*over your branches,*
once so green and strong, now broken and brown with death.
No one rejoices anymore over your fruits and harvest.

10 What joy these fields and orchards brought, what pleasure and delight,
with their beauty, with their bounty.
But no more cheerful shouts accompany the harvest of the vineyards.
No one is left to press *the grapes into* wine.
I have silenced all your *joyous* shouting.
11 My heart hums like a harp *with grief* for you, Moab.
I ache with soul-sadness for Kir-hareseth.

12 When the people of Moab present themselves *to their gods,* when they weary themselves with *frequent journeys to* their high places, when they enter their sanctuary to pray, then they will find none of their gods are able to help them. 13 This is the message the Eternal gave *Isaiah* earlier about Moab. 14 But now He has another message.

Eternal One: In *just* three years—as a hired hand might count them—the power and prestige of Moab will come to an end. Its population will be killed and scattered; only a few, the poor and powerless, will survive *the onslaught.*

17 A message about Damascus:

► An ethnic group of Arameans control what will one day be the southern region of Syria; it is known as Aram. Damascus is its capital. Out of fear of Assyria and its brutal expansion west, Israel and Aram form an alliance and try to bully Judah and her king, Ahaz, into joining the futile confederation. But the prophet Isaiah holds a different opinion. He boldly instructs the king not to make any alliances or form any confederation as the Assyrian threat grows; instead, the prophet says, trust in God and God will protect you. But Israel and Aram attempt to force Judah into their alliance, unseating her king and replacing him with someone they can control. So Ahaz makes an alliance, not with Israel and Aram, but with their enemy, Assyria. When he asks for the empire's help, they eagerly agree. Although Assyria assists Ahaz in warding off one threat, Assyria itself constitutes an even greater threat as Judah will soon experience.

Eternal One: So much for the "city of Damascus."
It's done for. Soon it will be just a pile of rubble.
2 The towns around it* will empty of people *and be turned back to open land.*
Imagine—sheep grazing and lying down *where people used to live.*
There won't be a soul to scare them *off.*
3 *The defenses of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, will fall—*
Ephraim's fortress walls will tumble down;
Damascus will no longer rule itself.
Aram—what is left of them—will resemble Israel's *fading* glory.

* 16:8 The Dead Sea * 17:2 Hebrew manuscripts read, "cities of Aroer."

That's what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says.

Eternal One: [4]*Israel will be humbled*
then too;
our cousins, the children of Jacob,
will lose their luster, their
wealth and excess.
[5]The land will resemble a field
stripped until it is nearly
bare,
like when the harvest has come
and gone,
like the *meager* grain gleaned in
the valley of Rephaim.

[6]But some gleanings will remain
like when olive trees are beaten,
Where two or three olives remain at
the top of a tree
and four or five hold on tight to
its fruitful branches.

So says the Eternal One, Israel's God.

[7]Then, in that day, people will turn to the
One who shaped them.
They'll look on the Creator, the Holy
One of Israel,
[8]And disregard the things they'd made
into gods.
They'll turn away from *worthless,*
handmade objects, sacred poles,
and incense altars.

[9]And then, in that day, their great cities
will be abandoned
like *defenseless outposts in* a hilly
forest,
Like those deserted when the Israelites
took the land;
the scene will be *eerily* quiet and
empty.

Israel's devotion to things of their own making will come to nothing. If God is not the center of their work and striving, every gain is in fact a loss.

[10]You have proven forgetful of God—how
God pulls you clear of danger,
how God stands firm, like a great
Rock where you can take shelter.
Because you have forgotten *the one True*
God,
you planted pleasant gardens and set
out tender vines of a strange god.
[11]They sprouted so quickly the day you set
them out;
they budded immediately the
morning you planted them;
But you will never gather any *sweet*
grapes from them.
What you reap will be illness and
pain; that day will be filled with
sadness.

[12]Listen to the *restless* roar of the peoples!
They roar like a *fitful* sea.
Listen to the crashing thunder of the
nations;
they thunder like a powerful surge
of water.
[13]But even if they thunder like a wall of
water,
when God rebukes them, they will
run far away;
With a word they'll be driven like chaff in
a mountain gust
or dust in a windstorm.
[14]In the evening, look, their enemies
terrorize them;
but by morning, they're gone.
So it will be for those who attack and
steal from us;
those who take, take, take will come
to nothing *and run away.*

18 O land abuzz with the whirring
of wings,
far away past the Ethiopian
rivers,
[2]With papyrus-reed boats shuttling
ambassadors back and forth!
Go quickly, you messengers, to *those*
impressive people,
Those fearsome and terrifying people so
lank and smooth.
Theirs is a powerful nation divided
by rivers.

[3]All citizens of the world, every last
inhabitant of the earth, *pay*
attention!
When you see a signal raised on the
mountains, look!
When the trumpets sound *the alarm,*
listen!
[4]Because the Eternal told me,

Eternal One: *I am in control—calm and*
serene.
I am watching quietly from
where I dwell
Just as surely as the heat shimmers
in the blazing sun
and the dewy mists cool the
warmth of a harvest day.

5For even before the harvest begins, when
the buds blossom
and the flowers make way for the
ripening grapes,
God will cut back their shoots with
pruning shears,
lop off and clear away the spreading
branches.
6He will leave the trimmings for the birds
of prey
and the wild animals on the mountain.
The vultures will feed on their flesh
during the summer,
and the wild animals will be
nourished on their bones through
the winter.

► At times God watches "behind the scenes" quietly, calmly. But when it is the right time, God knows where and how to act. Throughout history nations rise and fall, but God is as constant as the summer heat and the cool fall breezes. Many nations such as Ethiopia look for diplomatic solutions and alliances in the face of the Assyrian threat. But Isaiah counsels them to stand back and watch, for he knows what God is about to do. Before the harvest, that is, before the armed rebellion against Assyria is set to begin, God moves in, pruning, lopping, clearing, and preparing the world for a better day.

7Then those terrifying peoples—the lank
and smooth from far away,
from the land divided by rivers,
powerful and domineering—
Will honor the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies, with gifts.
These *proud* people will bring them
to Mount Zion,
Where the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies, has placed His
special name.

19 A message about Egypt:
The Eternal One will come
winging in to Egypt
On a swiftly moving cloud, making her
idols quake.
The Egyptians themselves will lose
heart *in the face of God.*

2, 4The Lord, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says,

Eternal One: I will subject the
Egyptians to oppressive
forces
and heartless leadership of a
dictator-king.
I will make them turn against each
other,
Egyptian against Egyptian, *a
civil war,*
Right down to the houses within a
neighborhood—
city against city, district against
district.*
3They'll lose all courage and I'll
frustrate their plans.
They'll seek the advice of long
dead ancestors and *empty*
idols,
mediums and fortune-tellers.
But it is I who determine their fate.

5-7Egypt's waterways and everything that
lives in them will dry up and
die—
saltwater and fresh, standing pools
and running streams will all
evaporate.
All the reeds and rushes along the river's
edge will wither and die and rot
away.
All the crops sown by the Nile will turn
brittle and dry,
to be blown away—completely
away—*by sultry winds.*

The people who depend on these waters for their livelihood will see their lives and future evaporate before them.

8Fishermen who set their lines and cast
their nets into the Nile
will languish and mourn.
9Weavers who comb flax *into spinning
fibers*
and produce linen will be deep in
despair.
10The solid citizens *of Egypt* will be
crushed,
and all who work *hard* for a day's
wage will be deeply distressed.

11The leaders of Zoan are fools!
And those who count themselves
among the Pharaoh's smartest
counselors

* 19:4 Verse 4 has been moved forward to help in the comprehension of the passage.

Base their advice on bizarre flights of
fancy.
How can you tell Pharaoh,
"I am among the *long line of Egypt's* wise
and an heir of ancient kings"?
12I certainly don't see any such sages. If
they're here,
they should be able to tell you
what the Eternal One, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, has in store
for Egypt.
13The elite, the nobles from the northern
delta *south* to *bustling* Memphis,
have been overconfident, deluded
fools.
These cornerstones of society have led
Egypt in the wrong direction,
and Egypt pays the price.
14The Eternal has mixed them up and
confused them.
God has frustrated Egypt's efforts in
everything.
Weaving and sick like an everyday drunk.
15There will be nothing left for Egypt
to do.
Nobody—no head, no tail, no noble
palm, no lowly reed—
will be able to help *Egypt.*

16Then, in that day, when the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, raises His hand and displays His power, the Egyptians will cower like frightened women. 17Egypt will even be terrified of *our little* Judah. Just the word "Judah" will set everyone trembling and shaking because of what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, plans to do against them.

18In that day, five cities in Egypt, one of which is called the city of destruction,* will adopt the language *we speak* in Canaan and swear to remain faithful to the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

19When that day arrives, there will be an altar *for rituals,* marking the Eternal's *sacred space right there* in the middle of Egypt, and a pillar erected to Him at its border. 20These will serve to notify everyone that the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, is present; *God can and will be* in Egypt. *And if things get bad for them,* the Eternal will respond to their cries for help by sending someone—a liberator and defender—to deliver them from their oppressors. 21The Eternal will make sure the Egyptians know Him. They will know and worship Him with gifts and praise, solemn promises and offerings. 22After all God's disciplining action, the Eternal will take them back *with gentle care.* After His punishment, there will be healing; the Egyptians will turn to Him, and He will hear and heal them.

Though Egypt and Assyria are mortal enemies, God is about to do something new for them both. The God of peace always seeks to make peace among the nations.

23When that day arrives, there will be a road connecting Egypt to Assyria and people of both nations will travel it to worship together, side-by-side. 24Our land of Israel, *through which that road travels,* will then be allied with these other great nations, and Israel will be a whole-earth blessing, *the hub of proper worship.* 25The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, declares such blessing:

Eternal One: Egypt, *too,* shall be blessed
and called "My people" and Assyria "My
doing," *because I made it.* Israel, *of course,*
is simply Mine—now as before and as ever
will be—"My heritage."

20 In the same year that the Assyrian field marshal sent by Sargon *II,* who was king in Assyria *at that time,* attacked and successfully defeated Ashdod, 2Isaiah (Amoz's son) was told by the Eternal to deliver a message *by acting it out.*

► It is said "a picture is worth a thousand words." Too true: in order to communicate a spiritual message, sometimes God uses a physical action—something everyone can see or hear—much like a picture. In this instance the actions of Isaiah become the picture God wants His people to see. The prophet himself becomes the focus of attention as he demonstrates in shocking ways what God is intending to do to Israel's southern neighbors, Egypt and Ethiopia. God is able to speak with clarity because all attention is focused on this prophetic drama that is being played out before them.

* 19:18 Or "city of the sun," *Heliopolis*

Isaiah is given a vision of a frightening event. It comes roaring at him like a sandstorm blowing across the Negev. The vision is harsh and violent, but very real. The prophet describes this vision and the others like it as "burdens," for it is hard to bear such bad news. This particular vision is given to the "sea of Wilderness" or Babylon; it is the second prophecy predicting Babylon's punishment (chapters 13–14). He addresses a series of burdensome messages to other cities, nations, and peoples. What is common to all of these prophecies is that God is angry with these nations for the harsh way they treat His covenant people, and He will not just let it go. So God has decided to punish them, and He warns his prophet ahead of time what is about to happen. This message is welcome news to the Judeans who suffered beneath the cruel tyranny of these foreign powers. On the one hand, God used Judah's enemies to accomplish His purpose. On the other, they have overstepped the limit.

Eternal One: Take off all your clothes of mourning, and take off your shoes too.

Of course, Isaiah did that, which left him utterly naked, head to toe.

Eternal One: [3]My servant Isaiah has walked around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign that Egypt and Ethiopia will be *stripped of everything.* [4]Assyria will take away Egypt's captives and Ethiopia's exiles, young and old alike, naked and barefoot *as slaves.* The Egyptians' shameful *impotence* and their bare behinds will be on display *for all to see as they are driven away by the Assyrians.* [5]They will be mortified and humiliated, for they depended on each other, confident that Egypt and Ethiopia *could withstand Assyrian assault.* [6]In the face of it, people along the coastland, *like Ashdod,* will say, "If countries *like those* that we counted on for support and security are falling to the might of Assyria's king, we don't have a chance!"

21 A message about the Sea of Wilderness *(Babylon)*:

From the desert, from a frightening land
it comes
like *a raging tempest,* a sandstorm in
the Negev.

[2]A vision most harsh came to me:
The deceiver deceives,
and the abuser abuses.
Get up and go, Elam;
and Media, cut off supplies!
All groaning will cease; I've put an end *to*
the sounds of misery.
[3]My stomach sinks. My gut churns with
pain.
As a woman in labor wrenches and
writhes, *I can hardly bear the news.*
I cannot hear because I'm bent over with
agony.
I cannot see because I'm deep in the
fog of depression.
[4]My heart skips a beat; *my mind is*
buzzing, terribly unsettled.
Horror and trembling rattle the
serenity of the evening I longed
for.
[5]*Meanwhile,* the ones *who are in charge*
are spreading out a feast, eating and
drinking *just like normal.*
I want to say to them:
"Get up, officers.
Oil your shields, *and be prepared!*"
[6]Because the Eternal has told me,

Eternal One: Get someone to keep an
eye on things.
Have him report whatever he
sees.
[7]Tell him to watch closely for riders
on teams of horses, donkeys,
and camels.
If he sees them, put him on full
alert.

Sentinel: [8]I stand *guard* at the
watchtower, Lord, day after
day.
I never leave my post during the
night.

[9]Look! They're coming *just as you*
said: a chariot driver and a
team of horses.
The driver tells me "Babylon is
fallen!
Our oppressor has fallen and all
their idols,
worthless imposters of the one
True God, are shattered on
the ground."

10O, my people, who have been threshed
and winnowed *like wheat,*
I am telling you what the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
Israel's God, said.

11A message about Duma:
Someone is calling me from Seir.

Edomite *(to a sentinel)*: How much
remains of this night?
How long until morning?

Sentinel: 12Morning is coming, *you can*
be sure of it.
But night will *quickly* follow.
If you want to know, then check
back later.

13A message about Arabia:

Spend the night in the forests of Arabia,
off the beaten path,
O caravans from Dedan.
14Hey, people of Tema, bring them *supplies,*
water for the thirsty and food for the
refugees.
15They're on the run, refugees tired of war,
trying to escape the edge of the
sword, the bent bow,
And the imminent threat of battle.

Eternal One *(to Isaiah)*: 16Within a year—
as a hired hand might count it—Kedar
will be finished. All that made it so
impressive *will crumble*. 17As for its
archers and mighty warriors, they will all
but disappear.

It will happen because the Eternal, the
God of Israel, said so.

22 A message about *the* valley of
Vision*:

What *in the world* is wrong with you?
Why have you climbed on
your housetops *and started*
celebrating?
2What noise! The whole city is in an
uproar.
Don't you realize that your fallen
comrades didn't actually die
fighting,
3That your leaders *turned tail* together
and ran,
only to be captured *without a fight,*
without even drawing their
weapons?
The rest of you tried to run far away
but were still captured.
4This is why I said, "Just leave me alone;
let me weep bitterly *over this travesty*.
Don't tell me *it's not that bad,* or that
everything will be all right.
We're talking about the destruction
of my cherished people!"
5The Lord, the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies,
determined that this would be the
time for *destruction*—
Smashing and crashing, wreaking havoc
and chaos in the valley of Vision,
battering down walls and crying out
to the mountains.
6*You tried,* but how could you hold off
Elam's *skilled* archers
with chariots and horsemen and Kir's
soldiers—shields held high.
7*The invader's* chariots overran your
pristine valleys,
and their horsemen made their stand
at the city gates.
8But *God* simply did away with Judah's
defenses.
In that day you put your trust in
weapons stored in the armory.
9You began to fix the many breaks in the
walls of the city of David.
You stocked up on water from the
lower pool.
10You took stock of the houses in
Jerusalem,
and began to dismantle them *stone-*
by-stone to shore up the city wall.
11You built a reservoir between two walls
to hold the water of the old pool.
But *in all this* you neglected the One
who could really save you;
You failed to consider the One who
actually made this place
and established it so long ago.

12Consequently, the Lord, the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
determined that day would be a time
of weeping *and regret,*
A time of shaved heads and donning
sackcloth
and a time for mourning.
13Yet you *missed the point and* made merry,
slaughtering cattle and sheep for a
giant celebration,
Eating and drinking your fill of wine!

People *(to each other)*: Eat up, drink up,
for tomorrow we die.*

* 22:1 A reference to Jerusalem * 22:13 1 Corinthians 15:32

This message beginning with verse 15 is laid on the people of God living in and around Jerusalem. The prophet's word is a corrective to those who proudly and confidently presume that they enjoy a privileged status with God by virtue of where they live and who their ancestors are. After all, God has pledged to King David that his dynasty will continue. The Judeans assume this means they will not have to worry about their enemies, regardless of how faithful or faithless they are to God. So when the enemy threat materializes on their border and moves right into bow-shot, they do what most people do: they make reasonable, defensive preparations. But what they forget to do is key: they forget to turn to God. They put their trust in their weapons and their engineering skills. They ignore the One who established the city and made them a nation in the first place. So God tells Isaiah to have a talk with Shebna, the caretaker of the royal palace. God is about to make a change.

Eternal One *(to Isaiah)*: 14This sin will
not be forgiven.
It will stay with you until your
dying day.

That's what the Lord, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, said.

Eternal One:* 15Come on. Go to
Shebna, the caretaker of the
royal household,
and confront him saying,
16"Why are you here, anyway? Do you
really belong here?
What right do you have to build
yourself an *elegant* tomb
And stone monument here out of
the rock on this hill?
17Look, strong man! The Eternal is
about to throw you out,
wildly, violently. With a firm grasp
18He will crush you like a ball—hurl
you deep into a land
far, far away where you go to die.
You will be *known as* the shame of
your master's house
and your splendid chariots will
lie *empty*.
19I will see to it that you're driven
from your post, toppled from
your position,
*with all the disgrace and shame
that you deserve.*
20When that day comes, I will
summon My *faithful* servant;
Eliakim the son of Hilkiah will
be called
21To *take over and* assume your
authority *and office*.
I will clothe him in your *royal*
robes and fasten your sash
securely around him.
He will be a father to the people:
He will have authority over
Jerusalem and Judah.
22I will grant him the key to David's
royal house and
no one can shut what he opens;
no one can open what he shuts.
23I will attach him securely like a peg
to that house,
and he will bring honor to his
father and his family.
24On him will hang all the riches,
all the honor, of his family's
future.
25On the appointed day, the peg that
was attached so securely to
that house
will become weak, break off, and
fall *to the ground*.
And everything that had been
hung on it will fall down and
shatter.

The Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has declared it to be so.

23

A message about Tyre:

► For a period under David and Solomon, the Israelites live in harmony with their neighbors. But jealousy and envy are frequently under the surface. The people of Israel occupy a key location that becomes a battleground for domination by world powers because of its important trade routes. At some point, every single one of

* 22:15 "The Eternal One, Commander of *heavenly* armies" has been shifted to the end of the discourse (verse 25) to avoid confusing the identity of the speaker.

Israel's neighbors attacks and abuses this little nation. This oracle has to do primarily with the city of Tyre, a port on the Phoenician coast famous for the people's advanced technologies and skills in shipbuilding, sailing, and trading. But those who sail across the Mediterranean so easily are getting ready to face hard times.

Cry out in anguish, you who travel the
Mediterranean from east to west!
Cry out, Tarshishian ships, because
Tyre is no more.
It is devastated—no houses, no harbor—
nothing is left.
The people from Cyprus have
witnessed it.
2Grieve quietly, you people along the
coast,
you merchants of Sidon, who cross
the sea.
3You go through great waters *in boats*
filled with the grain of Shihor;
the harvest of the Nile was *Tyre's*
revenue;
She was the marketplace of the
nations.
4Shame runs deep for Sidon since the sea
has said,
"I bore and raised no sons or
daughters as my own."
5Egypt will be terribly upset, too,
when they learn about Tyre's
destruction.
6So you who live along the coast,
make for Tarshish, and bewail *your*
fate.
7*One wonders:* could this *really* be the
same city?
It was so jubilant, *so magnificent, so*
commanding for its trade.
Is this the city that's been around longer
than memory
and her citizens have traveled to
exotic, faraway places?
8Tyre's merchants and traders were
princes *and nobles,*
respected everywhere around the
world.
Who did this to Tyre,
a city that awards *honor* with
crowns?
9The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, has determined,
Tyre should be destroyed, wrecked,
and disgraced
To spoil the *foolish* arrogance of all glory
and
to show how insignificant earthly
honors are.
10People of Tarshish, you should traverse
your land as if it were the Nile.
With Tyre out of the way, there's
nothing to stop you anymore.
11God's power extends across the sea;
He has terrified the nations,
turning Canaan loose against them
to demolish their fortresses.

Eternal One: 12The celebration is
over, downtrodden virgin
daughter of Sidon.
There's nothing left of you to take
pride in.
Go ahead, *pack up and* move to
Cyprus.
But you still won't find rest.

13Just look at the land of the Chaldeans *in southern Mesopotamia.* There are no such people anymore. The Assyrians *came along,* took it over, and left it for the desert animals; they built their siege machines, stripped its palaces, and determined that it should be ruined.

14Cry out in anguish, ships of Tarshish
because your fortress is no more.

15Tyre will be forgotten for 70 years—the lifespan of a king. After that Tyre's fate will be like the song of the prostitute:

16"O forgotten *woman, yesterday's*
prostitute,
take up a harp, and walk about the
city.
Play it well, and sing your melodies,
so you will be remembered."

17When 70 years have passed, the Eternal will visit Tyre, and she'll return to her wicked ways—selling herself to all the countries of the world. 18But everything Tyre earns—her profit, her goods—won't be stored or saved: all will be devoted to the Eternal; her stocks will supply all the food and fine clothing needed by those who serve in the presence of the Eternal One.

24 See here, the Eternal One will
empty the earth.
He will lay it waste, contort
the mountains and plains,
And scatter its inhabitants all over the
place.

2 *Things will be topsy-turvy, hierarchies*
upended. No one will be safe,
not laypeople or priests, not servants
or masters,
not maids or mistresses, not buyers
or sellers,
not lenders or borrowers, not
debtors or creditors.
3 The earth will be *emptied,* all emptied,
despoiled, utterly despoiled.
The Eternal said that it should
be so.

4 So the earth mourns, droops *wearily*
down;
the world languishes and droops;
the high and mighty languish in
grief.
5 The earth is polluted by those who live
on it;
they pay no attention to God's
teaching.
They violate His directives and break
the everlasting covenant.
6 Consequently, a *nasty* curse consumes
the earth,
and those who inhabit it are to
blame for it.
They'll be burned up,
leaving very few people *to survive.*
7 Luscious wine grapes shrivel to nothing.
The vines rot, and everyone who had
taken
joy *from their nectar* sighs *in deep*
depression.
8 *No more music, no more songs,* no more
dancing to tambourines,
laughing with revelers, or playing the
harps.
9 People don't drink wine and sing with
pleasure anymore;
the stronger stuff is *mostly* bitter to
those who drink it.
10 The chaotic city is in shambles,
and every house is boarded up so no
one can go in.
11 People rebel in the streets, demanding
wine.
All joy turns to gloom; happiness has
been banished from the land.
12 In the city nothing is left but desolation,
and the gate is battered and ruined.

13 This is how it will be on the earth for the
nations—
only a few survivors will be left—
as when an olive tree is shaken *and a*
few olives hold on
or when the grape harvest is in and a
few grapes remain for gleaning.

14 But people *will take joy again.*
They will shout out and sing
of the Eternal One's majesty across
the ocean.
15 *Join in the song and* praise the Eternal
from the east.
Praise the Eternal, the God of Israel,
all along the coast of the sea.

16 *Listen and* you can hear the merry voices
from the corners of the earth
singing, "Honor to the Righteous
One." But *as for me,*
I say, "I am wasting away, wasting away.
Woe is me!
I can see treachery, treachery, and it
wears me down.
Traitors deal in treachery."

17 Terror, pit, and trap face you,
you people of the earth.
18 And whoever runs from the sound of
terror will only fall into a pit;
when he climbs out of the pit, he'll
run and be caught in a trap.
The sky above will open up
and the ground below will quake—
nothing will be safe.
19 The earth is broken and shattered and
splits apart.
It shakes and quakes violently.
20 Like a drunk, the earth staggers and
reels;
it shudders and shakes, like a shack
in the wind.
For its rebellion weighs so heavily on it,
that it will fall
and have no chance for repair.

21 On that day, even the heavenly powers
and earthly rulers
will feel the Eternal's punishing
wrath.
22 They'll be gathered up like prisoners,
thrown in a dungeon,
and suffer the punishment *of God*
after many days.
23 A shadow of shame will settle over the
full moon and bright sun,
and their brilliance will begin to fade;
for the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies,
Will rule from *His chosen place on*
earth—Mount Zion in Jerusalem,
and His glory will shine *out with*
brilliance for the elders to see.

25 Eternal One, You are my God.
I will lift You up and praise
Your name.

Because You have made wonders
marvelous and beautiful—
the most ancient designs holding
strong and sure.
2*Your power is awesome.* You have brought
down whole cities,
turned fortresses and strongholds
into piles of sticks and rubble.
A citadel of foreigners is no longer even
a city.
Those structures are gone forever.
3This is why nations strong *and mighty*
will glorify You;
the cities of ruthless people will fear
and respect You.

4Because You stand up for the poor and
weak,
You *comfort and* empower them in
their distress,
Giving them safe harbor and cool shade
when it's hot;
You shelter them from their
oppressors' blows
As a strong wall holds back the driving
rain.
5*You shelter* from the *relentless* heat of the
desert.
You quiet the clamor of outsiders,
ease them to stillness.
Like a full, dark cloud relieves the heat,
You silence the *arrogant* song of the
violent.

6The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, is preparing a feast,
a feast for everyone on this *mystical*
mountain
With aged wine and good food, the
finest wine and choicest meat.
7And God will swallow up the oppression
that weighs us down.
He will take away the *heavy* shroud
that is draped over all peoples *of the*
world.
8God will swallow up death forever.
The Lord, the Eternal, will wipe away
the tears from each and every face
And deflect the scorn and shame His
people endure from the whole
world,
for the Eternal determined that it
should be so.
9And in that moment, *at that glorious*
time, people will say,

People: This is our God! We put our
hope in him.
We knew that He would save us!
This is our God, the Eternal for
whom we waited.
Let us rejoice and celebrate in His
liberation.

10For on this mountain, the *powerful* hand
of the Eternal abides.
He will *smash and* tread Moab like
straw on manure.
11And God will reach out, like a swimmer
pulling water,
and drag down their arrogance and
everything that made them proud.
12God will bring down their strongest
walls, their impenetrable defenses,
and grind them to the ground until
they are only dust.

26 When that time arrives, *the*
people of this place called Judah
will sing this song:

People: *By the grace of* God, our city is
strong;
its structures and defenses He
made secure.
2Now open the gates to welcome the
righteous,
so that those who keep faith
may enter in.
3You will keep the peace, a perfect
peace, for all who trust in You,
for those who dedicate their
hearts *and minds* to You.
4So trust in the Eternal One forever,
for He is like a great Rock—
strong, stable, trustworthy,
and lasting.
5He humbles the high and mighty.
Even the indomitable city falls
before His strength, reducing
it to dust.
6The feet of the poor, the weak, *the*
infirm and forgotten
will trample the dust *of the*
formerly great.

7The path of those who do right is *straight*
and smooth.
O God, You who are upright, You make
the way of the righteous level.
8When we act in justice *and*
righteousness—following Your
laws—we wait for You.
We are eager to hear Your holy name
and remember Your ways.
9At night I long for You with all that is
in Me.
When morning comes, I seek You
with all my heart.
For when Your justice is done on earth,
then everyone in the world will learn
righteousness.

10If grace is extended to those who do wrong,
the perpetrators never learn what is right.
Even when surrounded by upright people, they gravitate to evil
and never even notice the awesome beauty of the Eternal.
11O Eternal One, even when Your hand is raised against them, they do not see it.
When they finally do see how passionately
You act on the people's behalf, they will be ashamed.
Ah, let the fire that consumes Your enemies consume them.
12Eternal One, You are preparing peace for us;
in fact, everything we have accomplished has come from You.
13Others have tried to rule over us,
but You, Eternal One, are our God.
At the end of the day, when all is done,
we acknowledge only You.
14But now these *would-be rulers* are dead, never to live again;
these shadowy spirits will never rise.
You have punished and *utterly* destroyed them—
You erased every memory of them.
15*By contrast* You have made this people great, Eternal One—
made this nation vital and strong. To you be all glory!
You have expanded the borders of this land.

16When You corrected their wrongdoing, Eternal One,
they could hardly even whisper a prayer.
Weak with distress, they looked to You *for help*.
17You witnessed us twist and turn before You, O Eternal,
like a birthing woman in agony of labor.
18We were that woman, laboring to deliver,
but we gave birth only to futility *and emptiness*.
We couldn't deliver the earth, *save it, renew it*.
We couldn't make it teem with life.
19But Your dead will live; their *lifeless* bodies will rise up again!
You who sleep in the dust, get up and shout for joy!
The dew of a new day *will wash you glistening fresh,*
and the earth will push forth those who had passed before.

20O my people, hide in your rooms for a time. Shut the doors behind you
and hide away until God's anger has passed.
21See here, the Eternal One will emerge from His place
to punish the earth's inhabitants for their wrongdoing.
The earth will not hide the blood that has been spilled into her dust;
she will no longer cover those who have been murdered.

27 On that day, the Eternal One will unsheathe His sword—fierce, great, and strong—and punish *the monster of chaos and terror,* Leviathan the fleeing serpent. He will strike Leviathan, the twisting serpent, and slay the dragon of the sea.
2In that day, *O joy,* sing out about the vineyard most fruitful.

Eternal One: 3I, the Eternal One, tend and keep this vineyard;
I water and guard it day and night,
Protecting it against any that might *wish to* harm it.
4I am empty of anger.
If it produces nasty weeds and thorns,
I will simply stomp them down and burn them up.
5But let My vineyard look to Me for protection *and nurture*;
let it seek My peace;
let it seek My peace.
6In days to come *this people,* Jacob, will take root;
Israel, *My promise people,* will burst into bloom
And fill the whole world with fruit *to enjoy*.

7Has God struck Israel as He struck those who struck her?
Has she been killed as her killers were killed?
8By driving her away, You have dealt with her;
You blew her away with a fierce blast
As when the east wind comes *ripping through.*
You sent her away *to live as strangers in a foreign land.*

9In this way, *the people descended from*
Jacob will have their sins forgiven.
This is how they'll pay in full the
penalty for their wrongdoing—
When God crumbles all the stones of
their altars into dust like chalk,
and when not one of their sacred
poles and incense altars is left
standing.

10The city that had been so strong *and vibrant*
is isolated and alone, abandoned,
a deserted wilderness.
Calves munch through it, lounging
around
and eating whatever twigs *dare to shoot up*.
11When the branches are *dead and* dried
and broken,
women will gather and burn them up.
For these people *are foolish and* lack
understanding,
so their Creator will not be
compassionate toward them.
Though He made them, He will not
show them favor.

12On that day, people of Israel—*people of promise*—the Eternal will thresh *the lands* from the Euphrates to the Nile, *from Mesopotamia to Egypt,* and gather you up one by one. 13With a great trumpet blast, everyone who was dying in captivity—in Assyria and Egypt—will come to worship the Eternal on the holy mountain that is Jerusalem.

28 Oh, it will be bad for you
drunkards of Ephraim.
That once proud elegance
of yours
Now droops and falls like a fading flower.
You leaders of the fertile valley are
now drowning in your own wine.

Samaria overlooks the finest land in Israel. But these are the last days for this fading flower because God has selected Assyria as His agent of judgment.

2Look well—the Eternal has *called up* one
who is fierce and mighty.
Like a powerful hailstorm *followed by*
destructive winds,
Like a storm that spawns devastating
floods,
God's agent will drive *Ephraim down and smash* him to earth.

3Then the *tarnished* elegance of
intoxicated Ephraim
will lie trampled *in the dirt*.
4And the fading flower of its glorious beauty
that crowned Ephraim's fertile valley
Will be snatched up and consumed as
soon as someone sees it,
like the first ripened fig before
summer.
5In that day the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, will be a
beautiful crown,
a glorious diadem, for His people
who survive.
6*He will be* a spirit of justice to those who
sit in judgment
and a source of strength to those
who battle at the gate.
7*Ah, what contrast to* the drunken and
bumbling priests and prophets
who can't even see straight, whose
minds are addled,
Whose steps wobble, whose visions
mislead,
whose judgments waver, because of
all their drinking.
8There's vomit on all of the tables,
filth all over the place.
9*The priests and prophets mock:*
"Who is left for God to instruct in
knowledge?
Who will *listen and* understand His
message?
Maybe those *infants* just weaned off of
milk,
those *innocents* just taken from the
breast?
10For here is how it goes: Command after
command. Command on *top of*
command.
Rule after rule. Rule on *top of* rule. A
little here, A little there."
11For now that God's people *reject His message,*
He will speak to them through the
stammering lips
And foreign language *of an invader*.*

Eternal One: 12This is the way: here is
rest for the weary.
I am showing you rest.

But they wouldn't listen to Him.*
13And so the word of the Eternal One to
them will be *just as they said*:
"Command after command.
Command on *top of* command.
Rule after rule. Rule on *top of* rule. A little
here, a little there."

* 28:11 1 Corinthians 14:21 * 28:12 1 Corinthians 14:21

For generation after generation of God's people who have watched their country being attacked repeatedly and humbled by their enemies, Isaiah's words must provide a great deal of comfort. Nothing could be more traumatic than to know that the temple to the one True God is under siege and finally destroyed. When Isaiah's words are heard, many audiences must think of a restored temple in Jerusalem. God Himself is promising to lay the foundation for that restored temple, assuring that those who trust in His work will never have to rush around again to figure out how to save themselves from another invader. God's foundation will hold firm, no matter what, so there is every reason to be confident.

Early Christians see in Isaiah's message a promise of a new temple, a temple not made with hands. Simon, whom Jesus names "Rock" (Peter), refers to this prophecy when he writes of believers coming to Jesus to form a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:6). Jesus' followers confess Him to be the stone that forms the foundation for God's new temple. He is the cornerstone: though rejected by some, He is chosen and precious in God's sight.

But they'll go and fail. They'll fall
back, broken and trapped,
and be taken away *by another people.*
14*Let this be a warning,* the Eternal's word
to you sarcastic jokesters,
you leaders in Jerusalem.
15For you have made an *audacious* claim:

Leaders: We have made a pact with
death; we've made a deal
with the grave.
When the scourge *of disease and*
doom comes our way, they
won't touch us.
Death and the grave will pass us by
for our fraud disguises us, and
deception is our shield.

16So the Lord, the Eternal, has this to say:

Eternal One: See here, I am laying in
Zion a stone, a tested stone—
a cornerstone, chosen and
precious—for a firm
foundation.
Whoever trusts in it will never be
disgraced.*

17Justice will be the line by which I lay
out its floor plan,
and righteousness will be My
leveling tool.
A hailstorm will *pulverize and* wash
away the *fraud and* deception
behind which people hide,
and floodwaters will overrun
their hiding place.

18Then your pact with death and the grave
will be annulled.
When the scourge that you fear
comes along,
It will *find you and* pummel you down.
19Whenever it does come your way, it will
grab you.
It could be anytime—morning, noon,
or night.
To fathom its message will be sheer terror.
20The bed is too short to stretch out and
the blanket is too small
for you to hide in *or pretend you are*
not here.

21For the Eternal will stand as He did at
Mount Perazim
and shake it all up as He did in
Gibeon Valley,
To accomplish whatever it is that God
wills to accomplish—
strange deeds indeed.
22So don't keep laughing it off,
or your chains will be made even
stronger.
For I heard from the Lord, the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
that an absolute end has been
determined for the whole earth.
23Pay attention! Listen well;
take care to hear my words.
24Does a farmer constantly plow and turn
the soil to plant his seed?
No, of course not.
25When he's leveled *and tilled* the soil,
doesn't he plant each seed according
to its specifications?
He scatters the dill, sows the cummin,
plants the wheat in rows,
puts barley and spelt where they
grow best.

* 28:16 Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6

26God instructs and directs the farmer
in how best *to manage the land.*
27For dill isn't threshed with a sledge,
and you don't roll a cart over the cummin.
Dill is properly beaten free with one kind of stick,
and cummin with another.
28*Similarly,* you have to grind grain *to have flour* for bread,
but you don't grind it endlessly.
When the wheel on the cart and the horses go over the grain,
you must be careful not to crush it.
29The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies,
is the source of such wisdom.
His advice is wonderful.

29 O Ariel, woe to you Ariel, *our Jerusalem,*
where David set up his camp *to stay.*
Go ahead, go on with your *fruitless* festivals,
your calendar of events, year in and year out.
2*In the meantime,* I will trouble Ariel to the point of mourning and crying.
She will be for me a fiery hearth.
3I will surround you, enclose you, *cut you off.*
I will isolate you *from aid or reprieve;*
I will attack the city walls with towers and siege works.
4That will humble you so low, you'll speak from the earth itself.
And when you do, your voice will issue from the very dust where you lie;
Your voice will rise from the ground like the voice of a ghost,
like a *soft* whisper from the earth.
5But in an instant your ruthless enemies, who seem too many to count,
will become as fluttering dust, as wind-driven chaff.
They will be blown away in the snap of a finger.
6For the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will visit you
with thunder and earthquake and great noise,
With raging wind and tempest and consuming fire.
7And all those armies intent on destroying Ariel,
that great international coalition of Jerusalem's enemies
Battering *against the city of God,* will disappear.
They'll evaporate like a night's dream *in the light of day.*
8As when a starving person dreams of eating *at a banquet* and wakes hungry,
or a thirsty person drinking *his fill* in sleepy night visions
Finds himself still parched when the morning comes,
that's how it will be for the horde attacking Mount Zion, *His chosen place.*
9But it will take some time. Wait *and wonder.*
In the meantime, make yourselves unable to see *or understand.*
Make yourselves drunk and unsteady, but not from wine or liquor.
10For the Eternal One has poured you *a cup of* sleep—
deep, heavy sleep.
O prophets and seers, He has closed your eyes and covered your heads.

11-12Everything God is disclosing to you will be like the words recorded in a book that is sealed. When it is given to one who is literate, he can't read it because it is sealed. When it is given to one who is illiterate, he can't read it because he doesn't know how.

The prophet's message seems inaccessible or unintelligible to many. For some, a few rituals are enough. But a relationship with God demands a complete commitment to something, Someone greater.

Eternal One: 13These people think
they can draw near to Me by saying the right things,
by honoring Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me.
Their worship of Me consists of man-made traditions learned by rote;
it is a meaningless sham.*
14Therefore, I will do something extraordinary with this people.
I will add wonder to wonders—
Shut down the wisdom of their wise
and hide what the discerning have figured out.

* 29:13 Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7

15Oh, it'll be bad for those of you who
conceal your thoughts from the
Eternal,
who do your deeds in the dark and
say:
"Who sees us? Who knows what we are
doing?"

Do they really think that God cannot know what they have hidden, so dark and deep? They are sure to be surprised.

16*My goodness,* how you've turned things
around!
You seem to think that the potter is
equal to the clay;
Should the pot say about the potter, "He
didn't make me"?
Or does the thing formed say about
the one who formed it,
"He doesn't understand anything"?
17Surely you know that in just a little while
the forests that clothe Lebanon will
become rich fields
And the fields will be considered *as
valuable* as the forests.
18Then the deaf will hear the words read
from a book,
and darkness and gloom will fall
from the eyes of the blind.
19A renewed sense of joy will come over
the humble, thanks to the Eternal;
and joyous celebrations will break
out among the poor, because of
the Holy One of Israel.
20For cruelty *and mean-spiritedness* will
come to an end,
and those who laugh dismissively
will be silenced.
All those who are determined to do evil
will be cut down.
21Those who level a false charge against an
innocent person,
who twist an honest testimony and
tell lies
in order to incriminate the innocent,
will be stopped.
22So the Eternal One, who rescued
Abraham, says concerning Jacob:

Eternal One: The people of Jacob's line
will no longer be ashamed,
nor will they grow pale *with
embarrassment.*
23For when they lay eyes on their
children, the work of My
hands,
they will protect My name and
keep it holy.
They will recognize that I am sacred,
the Holy One of Jacob,
and stand in awe of Me, the God
of Israel.
24Whoever thought otherwise and
wandered off will know the
truth,
and whoever *said otherwise and*
voiced criticism will quietly
learn.

30 **Eternal One:** Oh, it will be
so bad for you, My
rebellious children,
who enact a plan but not as I
would have you do,
Who form an alliance contrary to
My Spirit,
compounding sin, one bad
choice after another.
2You look to Egypt for security and
help without consulting Me.
You seem to think that Pharaoh
is the answer,
That Egypt will protect you from
harm.
3*But because you cling to the earthly
power of great nations,*
you will be disappointed and
ashamed
In the very thing you grasped—
Pharaoh and Egypt.
4For even though Egypt's princes
and ambassadors are *in the
delta region,*
in Zoan and Hanes,
5They will be *no help to you,* no
security or revenue for you.
You'll be embarrassed that you
ever thought they would be
And you will be shamed and
disgraced *for associating with
them.*

6A message about the beasts of the Negev:
Nevertheless, the Judeans go down
to Egypt,
Crossing through a land of trouble and
anguish,
tracked by lionesses and lions, in
danger of vipers and poisonous
snakes,
All their precious valuables packed on
the backs of donkeys and camels.
They look to a people who can offer
them nothing.

Eternal One: 7Egypt's help is no help
at all.
Therefore I call Egypt "Rahab"—
a storm that just sits there.

8So, go on—write all this down on a tablet in their presence;
inscribe it on a scroll as a permanent record
So people will know about it forever.
9After all, these people are rebellious and distrustful.
They *won't accept,* don't even pay attention
To what the Eternal has tried to tell them.
10They say to those gifted with discernment and insight:
"Stop with your visions. *We've had enough of them.*"
They say to the prophets, "Tell us only what we'd like to hear;
save your truth-telling *pessimism for someone else.*
We want to hear flattery.
11*And for goodness' sake,* stop talking about the Holy One of Israel.
Get out of the *gloomy* rut you are in—
Your message is a bit stale—take a different path."

12But the Holy One of Israel says,

Eternal One: Because you refused to accept this *truth, My* word *and purpose,*
and trusted instead in deceit and manipulation, *you will fall.*
13Your wrongdoing, *your misplaced confidence and web of lies,*
will be your undoing.
Like a breach in a wall that bulges out and suddenly gives way,
your façade will come crashing down in an instant.
14Your destruction will be as complete
as when someone savagely smashes a piece of pottery.
There won't be even a single piece big enough
to scoop an ember from the fire or skim *a sip of* water from a cistern.

15*Listen!* The Lord, the Eternal, the Holy One of Israel says,

Eternal One: In returning and rest, you will be saved.
In quietness and trust you will find strength.

God invites His people to lean only on Him. If they will just stop their busyness and self-reliance, God will be able to take care of them.

But you refused. 16*You couldn't sit still;*
instead, you said, "No! We will ride out of here on horseback.
Fast horses will give us *an edge in battle.*"
But those who pursue you will be faster still.
17When one person threatens, a thousand will panic and flee.
When five terrorize you, all will run *pell-mell,*
Until you are as conspicuous as a single flag standing high on a hill.

18Meanwhile, the Eternal One yearns to give you grace and *boundless* compassion;
that's why He waits.
For the Eternal is a God of justice.
Those inclined toward Him, waiting for His help, will find happiness.

19Oh, people of Zion, citizens of Jerusalem, you will not cry anymore. God hears the sound of your weeping, and He will answer with grace. 20Even though the Lord has fed you the *bitter* food of adversity and offered you the water of oppression, your great Teacher will reveal Himself to you; your eyes will see Him. 21Your ears will hear *sweet* words behind you: "*Go this way.* There is your path; this is how you should go" *whenever you must decide* whether to turn to the right or the left. 22Then you'll get rid of all your *worthless* idols clad in silver and your *despicable* images plated with gold. You will destroy these idols and discard them as you do filthy rags, saying, "Get out of here."

23And then God will see to it *that your efforts are fruitful*—He'll give you rain for your seedlings, bread from the earth, *grain* nourishing and plentiful. On that day your livestock will graze on acre after acre of green pastures. 24Also if the oxen and donkeys that work that ground *for you* are well fed with good grain that is carefully winnowed with shovel and fork, *then they will be content.* 25When the day arrives and your enemies are slaughtered and the towers come tumbling

down, there will be rushing brooks of *clear, sweet* water running down every high mountain and steep hill. 26When the time comes and the Eternal One binds up the brokenness of His people and heals what He had bruised, then the light of the moon will shine as brightly as the *midday* sun, and the sun will shine seven times brighter than normal, as if one day had seven days of sunlight.

27See now, the name of the Eternal is
echoing from far away.
God is coming with a fury
inescapable *to set things right again.*
God is coming like fire and smoke;
His lips, indignation—His
tongue, consuming fire.
28God's breath barrels down like
hurricane rain,
rising right up to the neck to
rattle the nations
And to subdue all peoples as a
horse handler bridles *a crazy mare for slaughter.*
29*In your newfound freedom,* you will
sing as if it's a festival night.
With lighthearted joy, you will
dance your way *toward Jerusalem,*
To the Eternal's mountain, the Rock
Israel can trust.
30Then the Eternal One will make
unmistakable His *absolute* authority
when all hear His voice, and
God's power will be obvious
For all to see—God's anger *against the nations*—that consuming fire
like a cloudburst, thunderstorm,
and hailstorm *all at once.*
31And Assyria
will cover its ears, terrified at the
sound of God's voice
When He comes to strike them
with His *punishing* rod.
32And every wave of the Eternal's
attacks against Assyria
will be accompanied by a song
with tambourines and harps.
In battle after battle, He lifts his
arm and fights against them.
33After all, long ago, God prepared *the place of vindication,*
a funeral pyre for Assyria's king
laid deep and high,
A large stack of wood just waiting
for God's breath like
brimstone to ignite it.

31 O how bad it will be for you
who look to the south
to Egypt for help and
depend on her horses,
Who trust in its many chariots and fix
your hopes on its strong drivers.
Yet you do not look to the Holy One
of Israel *for relief*
or even bother to consult Him.
2God is both wise and willing to wreak
disaster;
He does not second guess Himself or
backtrack on what He says.
God will amass *all divine power* against
those who do evil
and against whoever aids and abets
them.
3As for Egypt, *why do you rely on them?*
They are *great, yes,*
but merely human, not God—their
steeds just creatures, not spirits.
But when the Eternal reaches out *and makes His power felt,*
those who lent their help will
stumble; those who looked for
help will fall.
Together they will be *routed and* killed.

Eternal One *(to Isaiah)*: 4Just as a lion
or a young lion *fiercely* growls
over his prey,
even while shepherds band
together to fight him off,
A lion won't be scared off by their
shouts
or deterred by their noise *and threatening gestures.*
So, too, the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies, will descend
to defend Mount Zion and its
hill *without fail.*

► In Scripture God is often described as having the strength of a lion. The power and skill of the lion are legendary. Here the picture Isaiah paints is of a hungry lion fixated on his prey, refusing to be distracted by the threats of its victim's would-be protectors. The prophet uses this picture to inspire and encourage the faithful. Zion and the people of His holy mountain are God's great prize; they are His possession, and He is not about to give them up. He will defend His prize and not share it with the predator-nations

that surround Judah. Isaiah is clear in declaring that God will use these predators for His purposes, but He will not be frustrated by their schemes.

5As birds hover *protectively* over their nests
so the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will guard Jerusalem *from all harm.*
Not only that, but God will protect and save it,
rescue *and keep it.*

6*So give up,* children of Israel. Return, *people of promise,* to God against whom you so blatantly rebelled. 7For in that day you'll see *the worthlessness of the idols* you so wickedly made, and everyone will throw away their gods of silver and gold.

Eternal One: 8And then, *the one you fear,* Assyria, will fall and be defeated,
not by the sword of man but by the sword *of God.*
It will try to escape the edge of the blade,
but its young men will be *captured and* put to forced labor.
9The very thing the Assyrians thought was permanent
will disappear *into thin air,* fleeing in fear;
And the discipline of their military will come to nothing.
They'll panic and run.

This is what the Eternal, whose fire burns in Zion, whose furnace blazes in Jerusalem, has said.

32 Look, a *good* king, right *with God,*
along with princes, too, will rule with justice.
2*For the people* they'll be like cover from the storm, a wall against the wind.
They'll be like streams of water in a dry place
and the *cool* shade of a giant boulder in the burning sun.
3Then the eyes of those who see will see indeed,
and the ears of those who hear will listen.
4*Careless and* impulsive minds will take time to really understand,
and clear speech will return to the *shy* stutterer.
5Fools will no longer be called noble-minded,
nor will criminals be respected.
6For fools utter nonsense, and their minds are preoccupied with evil;
they regularly misrepresent the Eternal in what they say and do,
Leaving *true seekers frustrated and confused,*
the hungry with empty stomachs and the thirsty with parched mouths.
7As for the criminals—their schemes are *vile and* evil;
they are constantly looking for ways to hurt the innocent,
To ruin the poor with their lies, and to twist a justified complaint.
8By contrast, those who are noble have noble intentions,
and they stand confidently by their honorable *words and* actions.

► Isaiah looks down the corridors of history to see the arrival of a good king who will do what is right, repair what is broken, and restore justice to the oppressed. More than any other prophet, Isaiah speaks of this coming king, God's anointed ruler. When the Messiah comes, He will shelter His people from harm and deal finally, decisively with evil. No longer will wrong be called right, folly be celebrated, evil triumph, and complacency and apathy rule the day. When this good king arrives, the world—with all of its problems—will be set right.

9Get up, you women who lie around *in your life of ease;*
hear my voice, you careless daughters, and listen to what I have to say.
10*Soon*—in a year and a few days—you will shudder and shake;
your mindless lounging will come to an end, careless daughters.
For the wine *you so enjoyed* will be gone, *with none to replace it.*
There will be no fruit, *no grapes to mash and juice.*

11 Be *worried,* women of ease;
be bothered and anxious, careless daughters.
Strip off your *fine* clothes and replace them
with sackcloth; *dress for mourning.*
12 Beat your breasts over the loss of those lush vineyards,
over the vines, heavy with fruit.
13 *Mourn* over my people's land, *verdant and lush,*
now the habitat of thorns and briars—
Yes, for all the happy homes and vibrant cities.
14 Palaces and bustling cities will be abandoned;
hilltop *posts* and watchtowers will serve as caves for animals;
wild donkeys and flocks will enjoy the wide open spaces.
15 *So it will be* until God pours out the Spirit from up above,
and *the land comes alive again*—
desert to fertile field, fertile field to forest.
16 Then justice *and truth* will settle in the desert places,
and righteousness will infuse the fertile land.
17 Then righteousness will yield peace, and the quiet and confidence
that attend righteousness will be present forever.
18 My people's homes and hometowns will be filled with peace;
they'll relax, safe and secure.
19 *Before such reconciliation,* there will be *cold, hard* hail,
raining down when the forests fall and the cities are razed to the ground.
20 And you, you who plant on streams' edges
and let your oxen and donkeys range free,
You will be happy.

33 Oh, how bad it will be for the one who ruins and is not yet ruined,
who lies, cheats, and steals without experiencing the same in return.
It will come back to you. When you've exhausted your destroying,
you will find yourself destroyed,
And your treachery will come back to haunt you at the treacherous hands of others.

► If Assyria thinks it has a license to do whatever it wishes, to destroy whatever is in its path, to betray with impunity, then it is sure to be surprised when God shows up to rescue His people.

2 We've been waiting for you, Eternal One, to come and shower us with grace.
In the morning, be our strength;
in times of trouble, be what saves us.
3 People flee when they hear the *crashing* thunder of Your voice;
nations scatter when You arise.
4 The spoil of the nations is gathered—*swiftly and decisively*—
as a hungry locust gathers, as a swarm of locusts rushes *to strip the land.*
5 The Eternal One is high above it all; for that is where He lives;
He will fill Zion *(that heaven on earth)* with justice and *all manner of* doing right.

6 God will be what holds things together, fast and firm during these times.
He will be boundless salvation,
the roots and fruits of wisdom and knowledge.
Zion's most precious possession
is the people's awe-filled respect of the Eternal.

Reverence for God is crucial to the welfare of God's people, regardless of where they live.

7 Look, their stoutest men run screaming in the streets;
their messengers of peace have broken down in bitter tears.
8 The roads are empty; no one ventures out.
The Assyrians have broken their treaty,
Disavowing the promises they made before witnesses.
They show no respect for anyone.
9 The land itself, *like a new widow,* grieves and wastes away.
Lush Lebanon decays, *once-rose-covered* Sharon looks like a desert,
And *the tree-topped mountains of* Bashan and Carmel
are completely denuded.

Eternal One: [10]Now's the time *for action.* I will arise.
People will esteem Me and recognize My greatness.
[11]For you have produced nothing but chaff and worthless stubble.
Your breath is a fire that will *sweep back and* consume you.
[12]Your people will be burned to ashes like thornbushes cut down and burned up in the fire.
[13]Listen well, *wherever you are*; make sure you know
that I have accomplished this.
Near and far, you'd better take note of My *incomparable* strength.

[14]Those who do wrong, the guilty and criminal in Zion, are terrified;
in the presence and power of God, the godless tremble.
They ask themselves,
"Who could possibly survive this all-consuming conflagration?
Who can live through the unrelenting heat, the flames, *the smoke?"*
[15]*I will tell you who:* the one who goes through life with integrity and
speaks truth with conviction, refusing to take part in fraud *and abuse,*
Whose hands are free of bribes, whose ears are covered to violent schemes,
and whose eyes are shut to *the temptations of* evil.
[16]That one will survive *and prosper* on the heights *of Zion*
and take comfort in *the shelter of* rock fortresses,
And never be hungry, never thirsty.

[17]*Ah,* you will *see for yourself* the beauty of the One who rules *over all.*
Your eyes will take in a land that stretches far beyond *the horizon.*
[18]You will think back on the terror you experienced:
"Where is the officer who counted *the plunder,* weighed out our taxes,
and calculated our defenses?"
[19]You will no longer see rude and arrogant people *in charge of the city,*
and you will no longer have to listen to their strange babbling and incomprehensible muttering.
[20]Ah, just look at Zion! The city *where we celebrate,*
where we make our God-appointed feasts.
You'll see a Jerusalem *at peace,*
untroubled, undisturbed,
like a permanent tent with stakes driven deep and ropes that never break.
[21]There, the Eternal, so splendid and regal,
will be for us a place of broad rivers and wide canals.
No large boats will pass through them—
no mighty ships will sail their waters.
[22]For the Eternal One is our Judge; He has prescribed our laws;
He rules over us, and He is the One who will save us.
[23]*You who try to sail in will be unable,*
as if your lines are limp, your mast is wobbly, and your sails are furled.
The spoils *in your hold* will be divided *among the deserving.*
Even those who can hardly walk will take what you had taken.
[24]And nobody who lives in God's city will say he doesn't feel well.
For everyone will be *washed clean and* forgiven for their wrongdoing.

34 Gather around, everyone. All peoples take note!
The earth and everything in it,
The world and all that comes from it should hear this, too,
[2]For the Eternal One is furious with all the nations. He has had it with their armies.
He has marked them for destruction, and has given them over to slaughter.
[3]Their blood will run *like rivers* down the mountains,
their corpses tossed out, *heaped up, and randomly piled in a great* stinking *mound.*
[4]All the stars in the *once-vibrant* heavens will vanish:
and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll.
All the starry hosts will wither and fall,
like *grape* leaves crisped *by fall* or fig leaves shriveled *by winter.**

Eternal One: [5]For once my sword has had its fill in the heavens;
I'll set it against Edom, *those people who despise My own.*
I have marked Edom for judgment and destruction.

* 34:4 Matthew 24:29

6The Eternal One indeed has a blood-
gulping sword.
It drinks up fat and blood from the
innards
And flesh of lambs, goats, and rams—*the
sacrifice.*
And now the Eternal is coming to
sacrifice the Edomites—
A great slaughter in *their capital* Bozrah,
7And great wild cattle will be slaughtered
along with them—bulls, oxen, and
steers—
Until their land is soggy with blood and
oozes with their fat.
8For the Eternal has determined a time
for retaliation,
a time to vindicate Zion, *ravaged by
Babylon and Edom.*

► The Edomites take advantage of Judah during the Babylonian conquest. Like parasites they eat away at the land, the strength, and the resources of Judah. Edom is a place of incorrigible violence, filled with devastating evils. In a word, Edom has become like Sodom and Gomorrah. God cannot let that stand, so He comes to vindicate His covenant people. The image Isaiah paints here of Edom and its grim future is hellish. The great, bustling civilization of Edom is reduced to nothing and eventually annihilated; its land becomes a wasteland, the haunt of fearsome desert creatures.

9Edom's waters will be made *thick and
black as oily* pitch.
Its dust will turn to brimstone, and the
land will ignite with burning pitch.
10Edom's fiery judgment will burn day and
night for all time;
the smoke from it will ascend forever.
For generations to come it will be a
wasteland,
and no person will make it their
home ever again.
11Desert owls and screech owls, great owls
and ravens
will take up residence in that *bleak*
place.
When God measures the land,
desolation will be its width and
chaos will mark its length.
12*The land will be known as No Kingdom.*
No nobles are there to name a king.
Its line of princes will cease.
13Its great towers will be covered in thorns.
Nasty nettles and thistles will
overrun its strong cities.
Wild jackals will slink around the
premises,
and ostriches will make themselves
at home.
14Among the *howling and hissing* wild
creatures and demons,
Lilith herself, *demoness of the night,*
will call *Edom* her haunt,
A place to recoup and rest *between her
devastating forays.*
15Owls *of all sorts* will take up habitation
there,
nesting and laying their eggs.
They will hatch their young and cover
them beneath their wings.
Vultures and their mates will gather
there.

16You can look for it and read all about it
in the book of the Eternal One.
None of these *creatures* will be
missing and none will lack a mate
Because His voice has given the order
and His Spirit has gathered them *in
that place.*
17He has determined where they should live;
He has handed it over to them and it
will be theirs for all time.
They will live there, one generation after
the next, *forever.*

35

Imagine the wilderness
whooping for joy,
the desert's unbridled
happiness with its
spring flowers.
2*It will happen!* The deserts will come
alive *with new growth budding and*
blooming,
singing and celebrating with sheer
delight.
The glory of Lebanon's *cedars* and the
majesty of Carmel and Sharon
will spill over to the deserts.
The glory of the Eternal One will be on
full display there,
and they will revel in the majestic
splendor of our God.

3So, *with confidence and hope in this
message,*
strengthen those with feeble hands,
shore up the weak-kneed *and
weary.*

4Tell those who worry, the anxious *and fearful,*
"Take strength; have courage! *There's nothing to fear.*
Look, here—your God! Right here is your God!
The balance is shifting; God will right all wrongs.
None other than God will give you success.
He is coming to make you safe."

5Then, *such healing, such repair:* the eyes of the blind will be opened;
the ears of the deaf will be clear.
6-7The lame will leap like deer *excited*;
they will run and jump tirelessly and gracefully.
The stutterer, the stammerer, and the tongue of the mute
will sing out loud *and clear* in joyful song.
Waters will pour through the deserts;
streams will flow in godforsaken lands.
Burning sands *and hardened wastelands* will become pools, *shimmering with life;*
the thirsty ground will *drink deep from refreshing* springs.
Abandoned villages where predators once lurked will become grassy playgrounds.
Dry, arid land will turn lush and green.

8And the road to this happy renovation will be clearly signed.
People will declare the way itself to be holy—the route, "sacred."
Only those who are right with God will be able to walk its pleasant path,
And nobody—no visitor, no dimwit—will get lost along it.
9There'll be no lions lying in wait, no predators or dangers in sight.
Only those made right with God will journey there.
10Those whom the Eternal One has recalled from a punishing exile,
they will go along so easily. They will walk this path,
Come waltzing to Zion, singing their way *to that place of right relation to God.*
An aura of joy never-ending will attend them;
they will clasp gladness and joy to their hearts,
While sadness and despair evaporate into thin air.

36 After Hezekiah had been *Judah's* king for 14 years, King Sennacherib of Assyria launched an attack against Judah's fortified cities and conquered them. 2Sennacherib sent *his right-hand man* (*whom they call* the Rabshakeh) to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem along with an army *to intimidate him*. The Rabshakeh came from Lachish, *formerly a great Judean city,* and stationed himself along the highway that skirts the field where they launder the cloth, near the aqueduct for the upper pool. 3Three men *from Hezekiah's court* came down *from the palace* to meet him there. They were Hilkiah's son Eliakim, the palace administrator; Shebna, the royal secretary; and Asaph's son Joah, the recorder.

4The Rabshakeh told them to relay to Hezekiah these words of *Sennacherib,* the great king of Assyria.

Rabshakeh: How come you're so sure of yourself? 5Your strategy and strength for war seem to be limited to *diplomacy and* empty words. Now that you have rebelled against me, who are you really relying on? 6Take a look! Are you really counting on the help of a crushed reed, Egypt, *against me?* Relying on Egypt is like leaning on a splintering stick that ends up jabbing you through the palm. That's the way Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is to everyone who relies on him. 7Or maybe you'll tell me, "We are putting our trust in the Eternal One our God." *Hah! I don't think so.* Don't forget that Hezekiah went around destroying all His altars and wrecking His places of worship, insisting that Judah and Jerusalem must worship before the one altar *in Jerusalem.*

8Come on now. Make a deal with my master, the king of Assyria: I'll give you 2,000 horses if you can do your part and deliver the same number of riders. 9How can you repel even the weakest unit in my master's army when you have to look to Egypt for chariots and drivers? 10And just in case you think that I'm attacking you of my own volition, *you should know that I am not.* Your God, the Eternal, sent me. Your God said to me, "Rise up against that land *(namely you Judeans),* and destroy it."

11Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah appealed to the Rabshakeh.

Hezekiah ascends to the throne as Judah's king in 715 B.C. He may have served for a time as co-regent with his father Ahaz, so when the Assyrian army marches against him and issues its demands (apparently in 701 B.C.), Hezekiah has many years of experience. As a king of David's royal line, Hezekiah's reign is anchored to a promise God made to King David hundreds of years earlier. Indeed Judah enjoyed some success, but now all seems uncertain. Not long before Hezekiah takes the throne in Jerusalem, Israel, his northern neighbor, succumbs to invaders from Assyria. Now more than 20 years later, the Assyrians are moving against Jerusalem and her king. With bullying words and intimidating tactics, the Rabshakeh tries to force the Judean king to surrender Jerusalem and its citizens. Ironically—or perhaps providentially—the place where Isaiah met Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, with God's message turns out to be near the place where the Rabshakeh now makes his demands upon Judah.

Hezekiah's Men: Please speak to us, your servants, in a language we understand—Aramaic—not in Judah's common language, so that the people on the wall who are trying to listen in can't understand.

Rabshakeh: 12*My, my, my!* Do you think that my king sent me here to speak only to your king and to you *when those people stand just as much to lose as you*? Don't you think that these people along the wall should have a chance to hear *our negotiations*? After all, they'll be reduced with you to eating their own feces and drinking their own urine.

13So the Rabshakeh stood up and spoke even louder in the Judean language *so all could hear and understand.*

Rabshakeh: Hear the words of Great King *Sennacherib,* king of Assyria, *dominator of the world!*

14"Don't listen to Hezekiah's lies. Your king won't be able to save you. 15Don't let him convince you to trust the Eternal by saying, 'The Eternal will surely save us; God will spare Jerusalem from the king of Assyria.' 16Don't believe it *for a minute.*"

My king, *Sennacherib,* says, "Make your peace with me. *Don't fight it,* but come on out and join me. Then each of you will be able to *enjoy your home and garden,* eat your own grapes and figs, and drink the water from your own cistern 17until I come and bring you *back to my place.* Oh, it's like yours, to be sure. It has grain for bread and vineyards for new wine. 18Be careful or Hezekiah will deceive you with his *empty* claim: 'The Eternal One will *surely* save us.' *Look around.* We've defeated everyone we've fought—*every capital of every country.* And did their gods save them? *No.* 19Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad, Sepharvaim, or even *your sibling to the north,* Samaria? 20All of these are fallen—not a god *in sight* to save them. *Do you really think you're so different?* Why should the Eternal save Jerusalem from me?"

21*To their credit,* the people didn't say anything. Hezekiah had commanded them not to answer *the Rabshakeh, and indeed they just sat there silently.* 22Then *the three men who had gone for Hezekiah*—Hilkiah's son Eliakim, the palace administrator; Shebna, the royal secretary; and Asaph's son Joah, the recorder—returned to their king. *In great distress,* they tore their clothes and told him everything the Rabshakeh said.

37 When King Hezekiah heard the report, *he, too, was terribly distressed.* He tore his clothes, changed into sackcloth, and went to the Eternal's house. 2He sent Eliakim, the palace administrator, along with Shebna, the royal secretary and some senior priests—who were also covered in sackcloth—to *fetch* Isaiah the prophet (Amoz's son).

Hezekiah's Men *(to Isaiah):* 3*Hezekiah is terribly upset.* The king said, "This is a *calamitous* day. It is marked by anguish, chastisement, and disgrace. *Things are as desperate for us* as for a *pregnant* woman *weakened by labor* who cannot deliver the baby because she is physically spent from the birth pangs."

4*Hezekiah implores you, Isaiah,* "Pray for the remnant that is left here *in Jerusalem.* Maybe the Eternal One your God will notice how blasphemous the

Rabshakeh is (on orders from his master the Assyrian king) and punish them because of what the living God heard him say."

5When the men delivered their message as the king requested, Isaiah responded.

Isaiah: 6*Go back to Hezekiah,* your lord *and king,* and give him these *sure* words *of confidence and hope*: The Eternal One says, "Don't let the blasphemous threats delivered by the servants of the Assyrian king make you *doubtful or* afraid. 7Watch! I am going *to trick him,* to set a spirit against him. *Just when he is ready to attack you,* he's going to hear a rumor *that there are problems* back home *in Assyria* and he will return there. *Not only that, but* once he's back, he will die by the sword in his own land."

8Meanwhile, the Rabshakeh learned that Sennacherib had left Lachish and was already engaged in battle against *the city of* Libnah. 9Now the Assyrian king heard that Tirhakah, the king of Cush, *had allied himself with the Judeans and* was coming to fight against him. The news prompted him to send messengers to Hezekiah with another message.

Rabshakeh: 10Tell the Judean king, Hezekiah, "Don't listen to your God, whom you're counting on, when He tells you that the king of Assyria won't conquer Jerusalem. 11Look around you, and listen to the reports of what the Assyrian king has already done to the *neighboring* nations. How can he destroy them and let you get away? 12This line of Assyrian kings has demolished *all sorts of nations and peoples. Think of* Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden in Telassar. None of their gods saved them. 13*While we're at it,* what do you think happened to the kings of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? *We destroyed them. You'll not get away.*"

14When Hezekiah got the written message, he read it. Then he took it to the temple, spread it out before the Eternal One, 15and began to pray.

Hezekiah: 16Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, who sits enthroned above the winged guardians—You alone are God. Only *You are supreme* over all the *nations and* kingdoms of the earth. And only You have made the heavens *above,* the earth *below, and everything in them.* 17Please, *please* listen, Eternal One. Attend to us *here and now*; look and listen. Hear all that Sennacherib said, and all that he wrote, to ridicule *You,* the living God. 18Eternal One, he's right about how the Assyrian kings have destroyed other nations and taken over their lands. 19And *sure,* they ruined the gods of those nations, *smashed and* burned them. But those were not *real* gods, only the product of human hands, shaped of stone and wood. That is why they could be destroyed. 20I implore You, Eternal One our God, help us. Save us from *the onslaught of* these Assyrians. Make it clear to the whole world that You alone are the Eternal One, that You *alone* are God.

21-22And Hezekiah got a response. The prophet Isaiah, Amoz's son, relayed this to him:

Isaiah: The Eternal, Israel's God, the God to whom you prayed concerning the Assyrian king, has this to say against Sennacherib:

Eternal One: The virgin daughter of Zion, *lovely lady that she is,*
despises you, mocks you.
The daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head and rejects you.
23*After all,* who is the one you've taunted and insulted?
Who is the one you've slandered with untruths, ugly and dismissive?
Who is the one you shouted at and looked down upon with your arrogant eyes?
None other than the Holy One of Israel!
24By way of your servants' mouths, you have blasphemed my Lord.
Foolish, foolish Sennacherib. You have boasted,
'My impressive company of chariots has taken me up the highest mountains,
into the far reaches of the Lebanese forests.
I *myself* felled its greatest cedars, cut down the best of its cypresses.
I have been to its highest peak, and claimed its thickest forest.

25I have dug wells *wherever I wished,*
and drunk *my fill of others'* water.
I have dried up Egypt's
waterways simply by walking them.'
26*Ah, Sennacherib,* haven't you heard,
don't you know that long before *you arrived,*
way back in ancient days, I determined all of this?
I charted this course long ago, and now I bring it to pass.
This is the reason why you turn
well-fortified cities into heaps of rubble.
27Their hapless citizens *look on,*
helpless, shocked, and ashamed.
They were *temporary and fragile*
like grass in the field
or tender new growth, like grass sprouting on rooftops
Blasted by a burning wind before it can grow and become strong.
28I know *everything about you:* where you sit, when you come, where you go.
And I know your agitation against Me.
29Because of this agitation,
and because your smug sense of security has reached My ears,
I will put My hook in your nose and My bit in your mouth,
and turn you back on the road you came from.

(to Hezekiah) 30Here is a sign for you: *you'll know it's true by seeing that in three years, life will be normal again:* This year you'll live off of what grows spontaneously. Next year, you'll live off of what grows from that. In the third year, you'll do the planting and harvesting—fields and vineyards—and eat from what grows. 31And those who have survived in this land of Judah—this remnant—will strengthen their roots and become productive again.

32A small group of survivors will emerge from Jerusalem,
from Zion, the mountain *of God's choosing.*

Isaiah: The intensive passion of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will drive this to completion.

33Here is what the Eternal says concerning the Assyrian king.

Eternal One: He will not come into this city. He will not shoot an arrow at it or approach it with a shield or build a siege ramp against it *to come over its walls.* 34*Instead* he will turn around and go back the way he came. He *absolutely* will not come into this city. 35I will defend *Jerusalem.* I will save this city for My sake and the sake of David, who *reverently* served Me.

36Shortly after that, the *special* messenger of the Eternal One killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the morning came, the people could see all the dead bodies strewn around the camp. 37So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, *broke camp and* went back to live in Nineveh, *his capital in Assyria.* 38*But one day,* while he was worshiping his god Nisroch in that temple, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer attacked and killed him. They *immediately* fled to Ararat, *leaving the throne empty.* So Esarhaddon, another of Sennacherib's sons, became *Assyria's* king after him.

38 Meanwhile, *back in Judah,* Hezekiah became very sick and was about to die. *Learning of it,* Isaiah, Amoz's son, went to visit him.

► These are sad times for Judah and Isaiah. Although Isaiah has served as a court prophet for several of Judah's kings, he and King Hezekiah have gotten to know one another particularly well over the years. Now the aging king is about to die. On many occasions Hezekiah seeks Isaiah's counsel and takes it seriously. Even if he doesn't always do exactly as he should, it is clear that he is genuinely concerned about the welfare of his subjects. With Isaiah's help and perhaps a bit of his pestering, Hezekiah comes to understand that Judah's national welfare is not separate from his and his people's personal relationships with God.

Isaiah: Here is what the Eternal One has to say:

Eternal One: Get your affairs in order. You are going to die. You are not going to recover from this.

2Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and started praying.

Hezekiah: 3Eternal One, I beg you to remember how I have followed the path You set before me, and how I did so with all my heart. Remember how I have done what You wanted *with sincerity of purpose every step of the way*.

Then Hezekiah *broke down and* wept. He wept and wept. 4Then a *different* word from the Eternal came upon *the prophet* Isaiah.

Eternal One: 5Go and tell Hezekiah that the Eternal, the God of your ancestor David, says: "I have heard your prayer, and I have seen your tears. I've decided to add another 15 years to your life. 6*Not only that, but* I will also rescue you and this city and not allow you to fall under the control of the Assyrian king. I *Myself* will protect this city, *Jerusalem*. 7You'll know that I, the Eternal One, will keep My promise by this sign: 8I will make the sun's shadow—which has climbed these steps of Ahaz's stairway—go backward 10 steps."

And the shadow on the stairway moved backward 10 steps. 9When Hezekiah, king of Judah, recovered from his illness, he composed *a poem*.

Hezekiah: 10I thought for sure in the prime of my life
that I'd been brought to the gates of death,
that I'd miss out on the rest of my years.
11I thought: *That's it.* I will never again see the Eternal in the land of the living.
I will never again enjoy the company of those alive in this world.
12My time on earth is folded up and packed away like a shepherd's tent.
It's as if a weaver has snipped me off from the loom and rolled me up.
From day to night You bring my life to an end.
13I stay calm until morning arrives,
then like a lion He breaks all my bones.
From day to night You bring my life to an end.
14*Oh, how I argue and mourn for my passing life!*
Like a swallow or a crane I twitter;
like a *lonesome* dove I moan.
My eyes become bleary from looking up to the heavens *for help*.
I cry, "O Lord, *way up high,* I am oppressed; come and help me!"
15But what can I say? God has spoken to me.
Things are as He made them.
So I am determined to go slowly, make the most of my years,
even though I am bitter to the core.
16*But I so wanted to live! So I prayed,*
"Lord, by these things, people live
and my spirit is grounded in the same.
So heal me, let me live!"
17*Paradoxically,* my bitter experience was pushing me toward wholeness.
For You, *God,* have put behind all my *shortcomings and* wrongdoings.
You have rescued me from death.
You pulled me from a black hole of nothingness and held me close to You.
18*And so I join the living in giving thanks to You.*
After all, thankful voices never rise from the land of the dead.
After all, the songs of praise never soar from death's dark realm.
Those who go down into the pit—*that great black nothingness*—
They can't even begin to hope for Your faithfulness.
19But ah, the living! And I am among them today,
giving praise and thanks to You *for life,*
The old telling the young about the loyalty of Your *love*.
20The Eternal will rescue me,
and we will break out the stringed instruments.
We will sing *and make music* for the rest of our lives,
right here in the house of the Eternal.

Hezekiah becomes confident that God will restore his health and bring him back from the edge of death. Ironically, many years earlier his father Ahaz refused to ask for a sign even though God insisted that he do so. The son, it seems, has learned a valuable lesson; so he asks for a sign because he wants to know when he will be well enough to return to God's house and offer thanks to Him among the rest of his citizens. Unfortunately, with some people, it is only in the bitterness of disease and in death's dark shadow that a person learns to embrace life and live it to the fullest. Hezekiah's near-death experience embitters his soul, but it also moves him toward wholeness. What Hezekiah does not know is that the Babylonians have their eyes set on dominating the rest of the world. For years, the Assyrians and Babylonians have coexisted, but the Babylonians are not content to remain a regional power. As they build their empire—annexing lands, conquering peoples, gaining strength—they begin to take an interest in little Judah. Hezekiah doesn't account for how his actions might affect his nation. He simply isn't that shrewd.

21 Isaiah instructed *the physicians* to apply a compress of squashed figs to the boil on Hezekiah's skin to help him recover.

Hezekiah: 22 When will I know that I am well enough to go to the Eternal's house? Is there a sign *I should look for*?

39 The man who was king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan (Baladan's son), heard about Hezekiah—how he was so very sick and then got better. So he sent *envoys* to Hezekiah with letters and a gift. 2 Hezekiah was delighted *at the kind gesture from so great a king, so* he welcomed his guests and showed them the best of Judah's treasures *and talents*—silver and gold, precious spices, and oils *that wafted the smells of paradise*. He gave them a tour of his armory and showed them all of Judah's military equipment and everything they'd stashed away *for future need*. Hezekiah held nothing back from their *appreciative* eyes. He showed them everything in his house and his kingdom.

3 When Isaiah the prophet *heard about Hezekiah's tour, he hurried to the palace and* confronted Hezekiah.

Isaiah: *What in the world have you done?* Where did these people come from? And what did you talk with them about?

Hezekiah *(puzzled by Isaiah's obvious distress)*: They came from a great distance *simply to extend kind wishes for my recovery from their king!* They came from Babylon.

Isaiah: 4 *What did you show them?* What have they seen in your palace?

Hezekiah: *Well, everything.* They have seen all that I own. I put all of my treasures on display. I didn't hold back anything from them.

► During Isaiah's life, the Northern Kingdom (composed of ten Israelite tribes) flourishes and then falls, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah is battered by surrounding nations but persists. Eventually the Southern Kingdom itself falls, not to Assyria but to Babylon. Shockingly, the Babylonians destroy the capital and raze the temple where the Holy One of Israel is uniquely present with the people.

The Lord determines these events because their failings—as Isaiah described in such detail—and their refusal to correct their attitudes and behavior necessitate punishment on the order of national destruction. God's covenant people have broken their part of the agreement and become unfit to live as people of Zion.

Isaiah: 5 Listen well to what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has said: 6 "The time is coming when everything in your palace—everything *of value* kept, passed down, and stored by your ancestors to this present time—will be taken away to Babylon. *Of everything that you showed this Babylonian contingent,* nothing will be left. *Absolutely nothing will remain*

The scene has shifted. The situation has changed. The threat from Assyria now seems a distant memory. A new reality encompasses the people of God: Jerusalem and its glorious temple have been destroyed, and the key citizens of Judah have been carried off into exile by the Babylonians.

While tradition credits the entire book to Isaiah of Jerusalem, many scholars think these next 16 chapters are recorded by another prophet years later in the spirit of that great prophet of Jerusalem who proclaimed much of the previous writings. Whether this was Isaiah speaking in the future prophetically or another person used by the Spirit to continue Isaiah's ministry, the traditions and ideas of Isaiah are so closely followed by the next chapters that they have been collected and included in this large book named after Isaiah. The time and circumstances are different, so the message is a bit different too. It is equally passionate about righteousness, Zion, and the Holy One of Israel. These events occur about two centuries after Isaiah's death in the land of exile—Babylon.

here," says the Eternal One. 7"Even some of your sons yet to be born will be taken to exile. They will be castrated and forced to serve in the Babylonian royal house."

Hezekiah: 8The message you have spoken from the Eternal is good.

"At least," Hezekiah thought *to himself,* "during my lifetime things will be peaceful and secure."

40 "Comfort, comfort My people,"
says your God.
2"With gentle words, *tender and kind,*
Assure Jerusalem, *this chosen city from long ago,*
that her battles are over.
The terror, the bloodshed, the horror of My punishing work is done.
This place has paid for its guilt; iniquity is pardoned;
its term of incarceration is complete.
It has endured double the punishment it was due."

3A voice is wailing, "In the wilderness, get it ready! Prepare the way;
make it a straight shot. The Eternal would have it so.
Straighten the way in the *wandering* desert
to make the *crooked* road wide and straight for our God.*
4Where there are steep valleys, treacherous descents,
raise the highway; lift it up;
bring down the dizzying heights.
Fill in the potholes and gullies, the rough places.
Iron out the shoulders flat and wide.
5*The Lord will be, really be, among us.*
The *radiant* glory of the Lord will be revealed.
All flesh together will take it in. *Believe it. None other than God,* the Eternal, has spoken."*

► During the time of Jesus, John the Baptist wanders around Israel in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets warning the people that they need to correct their attitudes and behaviors, to bring them better in line with what God expects and desires. He declares (warns, actually) that God is coming and will set things right. During the circumstances of exile, the people don't fully understand who or what this voice in the wilderness will be; centuries later, as the early Christian community looks back over the life of Jesus and John, they recognize the anonymous voice.

6A voice says, "Declare!"
But what shall I declare?
All life is like the grass.
All of its grace and beauty fades like the *wild* flowers in a field.

7The grass withers, the flower fades
as the breath of the Eternal One blows away.
People are no different from grass.

* 40:3 Mark 1:3; John 1:23 * 40:3-5 Luke 3:4-5

8The grass withers, the flower fades;
nothing lasts except the word of our God.
It will stand forever.*

► Isaiah's message is not just doom and gloom. God determines that His people may return home to rebuild their lives! God uses the new king, Cyrus of Persia, to accomplish this glorious restoration. God does not allow His punishment to last forever.

Now, in this new time, God smoothes the rocky way between Mesopotamia and all Israel; He makes the deserts between the present place of exile and their home just east of the Mediterranean Sea burst with sweet water and bloom with beauty and good things to eat. Treacherous roads and threatening beasts yield to God's desire that they return safely.

In chapters 40–55, for the most part, the message is one of comfort and encouragement to God's down-trodden and discouraged people. Many centuries later, these words will be understood in light of the Anointed One.

9Ascend a high mountain,
you herald of good tidings, O Zion;
With a *clear,* strong voice make known to everyone
the joy *that belongs to God's chosen place,*
O, Jerusalem, You herald of good tidings!
Make the news ring out! Don't be afraid!
Say to these cities, this Judah: "Behold your God!"
10The Lord, the Eternal, comes with power, with *unstoppable* might;
He will take control *without question or delay.*
He will see to it that wages are paid,
repairs are made, *and all is set right again.*
11He will feed His fold like a shepherd;
He will gather together His lambs—
the weak and the wobbly ones—
into His arms.
He will carry them close to His bosom,
and tenderly lead like a shepherd the mother of her lambs.

12Who has *taken count and* measured out all earth's waters in a single, cupped palm
and determined heaven's expanse with an outstretched hand?
Who has counted out exactly how many grains of dirt are here on earth,
and weighed the mountains and hills on scales?

13Who has directed the Spirit of the Eternal One?
Can anyone claim to be His advisor?*
14To whom did God turn for advice or instruction?
Whom did He consult *about right and wrong*?
Who directed Him down the path of justice or imparted to Him knowledge
or taught Him the way of understanding?

15*Face it;* the nations are nothing but a drop in the bucket,
only a smidgen on the scales *by the reckoning of God.*
He can pick up *entire* islands as if they are *grains of* dirt.
16Even if we had all the resources of Lebanon—
all of its trees to burn *for fuel,* all of its animals for burnt offerings—
How could we think that we've got enough to give to God?
17All the countries of the world don't add up to anything. In the eyes of God
they are less than nothing;
they are empty wastelands.

18So would you try to find someone to compare to Him?
Can you think of anything that has a likeness to God?
19An idol? *Hardly.* They are made by human hands.
Even if they are overlaid with gold, decorated with silver,
And shaped by *the world's best* artisans,
they are subject to tarnish, tearing, and breaking.
20Those who cannot afford such an *extravagant* offering
select a choice hardwood that will not rot,

* 40:6-8 1 Peter 1:24-25 * 40:13 Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16

And seek a skilled artisan to fashion an image
that will not totter and fall.

21 Don't you know, haven't you heard or even been told
from your earliest *memories* how the earth came to be?
22 Who else *could have done it* except God, enthroned high above the earth?
From such a vantage people seem like grasshoppers to Him.
Who *else but God* could stretch out the skies as if they were a curtain,
draw them tight, suspend them over our heads like the roof of a tent?
23 God reduces the rulers and judges,
the *rich and* powerful of the earth, to nothing;

24 They scarcely are planted, take root and start growing,
before God blows a withering breath,
And storm winds carry them away like chaff.

25 The Holy One asks, "Do you really think you can find
someone *or something* to compare to Me? My equal?"
26 Look at the myriad of stars *and constellations* above you.
Who set them to burning, *each in its place?*
Who knows *those countless lights* each by name?
They obediently shine, each in its place,
because God has the great strength and strong power to make it so.

27 Why, then, do you, Jacob, *inheritors of God's promise,*
you, Israel, *chosen of God—*
Why do you say, "My *troubled* path is hidden from the Eternal;
God has lost all interest in My cause"?
28 Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The Eternal, the Everlasting God,
The Creator of the whole world, never gets tired or weary.
His wisdom is beyond understanding.
29 God strengthens the weary
and gives vitality to those worn down *by age and care.*
30 Young people will get tired;
strapping young men will stumble and fall.
31 But those who trust in the Eternal One will regain their strength.
They will soar on wings as eagles.
They will run—*never winded,* never weary.
They will walk—*never tired,* never faint.

41 **Eternal One:** Keep quiet and listen to Me, lands along the seacoast;
give the people *of the nations* a chance to regain their strength.
Let them come close, *all together,* to speak *their minds and present their case*;
let's consider the facts and make a judgment.
2 Who brought up this eastern hero?
Who called up his justice service?
He lays nations at his feet and makes an end of their kings.
With a thrust of his sword and the bend of his bow,
this hero turns kings and their armies into dust.
3 *With agility and speed unmatched,* he chases them down
and is himself unscathed, even though he is passing over unfamiliar land.
4 Who has performed *these deeds* and accomplished this purpose?
Who calls each generation into being from the first *on down*?

It is I, the Eternal One *your God.*
I am the first.
And to the very last, I am the One.

5 The lands along the seacoast have seen and are scared.
The ends of earth take to shaking and yet still they draw near.
6 They try to bolster each other up saying,
"Have courage, brother, *have courage*!"
7 *Recognizing their mutual dependence,* the artisan encourages the goldsmith;
the one who hammers the metal emboldens the one who welds,
Saying, "Looks good! *Fine job!*" and fastens the idols together with nails,
making it stand firm and stable.

► The nations fashion new idols in the hopes these new gods will be able to protect them during the coming battles against the eastern hero, Cyrus

of Persia. If powerful Babylon can fall before him and his mighty army, what chance do other nations have? But Israel has nothing to fear. For God's covenant people, Cyrus' rise to power is good news; his ascension and Babylon's defeat are God's answers to their anxious prayers. Cyrus' campaign to build his empire is not simply the will of man or a coincidence of history; it is the outworking of God's plan to redeem and restore His scattered people. It was God who sent His disobedient covenant partners into exile; it will be God who brings them back home.

Eternal One: 8But you, My servant,
Israel,
Jacob whom I have chosen and
descendant of My friend,
Abraham,
9I have reached to wherever you are
in the farthest corners of
earth,
and the most hidden places
therein.
I have called to you and said, "You
are my servant.
I have chosen you, not thrown
you away!"
10So don't be afraid. I am here, with
you;
don't be dismayed, for I am your
God.
I will strengthen you, help you.
I am here with My right hand
to make right and to hold
you up.
11Look, everyone who hated you *and*
sought to do you wrong
will be embarrassed and
confused.
Whoever challenged you *with hot-*
headed bluster
will become as if they never
were, and nevermore will be.
12You may go looking for them, but
you won't find them;
because those who tried to fight
with you will become as if
they never were.
13After all, it is I, the Eternal One
your God,
who has hold of your right hand,
Who whispers *in your ear,* "Don't be
afraid. I will help you."
14So don't be afraid, Jacob, though you are
nothing but a worm.
People of Israel, *you little bug, you*
have nothing to fear.

Eternal One: I will help you. I am One
who saves you,
the Holy One of Israel.
15I will turn you into a *formidable*
threshing sledge
with brand new sharp blades
that will mow down entire
mountains
and turn the hills into chaff.
16You will separate *value from waste,*
and a great wind
and a strong storm will take
away what is *useless and*
unimportant.
You will take joy in the Eternal.
You will glow with pride in the
Holy One of Israel.
17And when people thirst, when
those poor souls with
parched tongues
look in vain for something to
drink,
I, the Eternal, the God of Israel,
won't leave them *to suffer.* I
will respond
18By making the hard, brown hills
sparkle with streams of fresh
water
and causing valleys to come
alive with springs.
I will see that *gentle* pools wait on
the desert floor *for the weary*
traveler,
and *great* fountains bubble up
from dry ground;
19In the desert, I will plant cedars,
woody acacias,
myrtles, and olive trees.
I will establish *great* cypresses *to*
flourish in the desert *places,*
plant oaks and pine trees side
by side.

20They'll see *all this* and understand.
They'll ponder together
and come to know that it is the
power of the Eternal One that
produced this.
They will know that the Holy One of
Israel created it.

Eternal One: 21Present your case. Lay
out your arguments
and call your witnesses to appear
before the King of Jacob.

God and Israel now become judge and jury as the nations bring their idols and make the case that their handmade gods can indeed predict the future.

22-23*Come on* and bring *your idols*. Now tell
us what is to come,
and *while you're at it,* tell us what
happened before.
Can you explain to us so that we, too,
may understand?
Go ahead, tell us what the future
holds.
Surely you can, if you are truly gods. Do
good, or do bad.
Just do something—*anything*—to
amaze or frighten us.
24Sure enough, *you are not gods;* you are
nothing at all.
You have nothing to show for your
work *or yourselves*.
Fools! Only *fools* would choose you *to be
their god*. Detestable.

Eternal One: 25*I, the Lord,* I have called
up for service
one from the north, and he
comes from the rising sun
and he will invoke My name.
He will render rulers like mud
under his shoes,
trampling them down like so
much clay.
26Did any *of you gods* tell us *about this*
long ago, so we would know?
Did any of you indicate to us that
we might agree, "He is right"?
No, no one told us. No one made an
announcement, and no one
hears what you say.
27I was the first to say to Zion, "Look,
here they are!"
I sent a messenger to announce
the good news to Jerusalem.
28But I am looking, and there isn't
anyone.
I have asked around, and no one
knows, no one can tell Me.
29See here, all of these *so-called gods*
are false;
their works are nothing;
These cast-metal images are like
wind, *sheer* emptiness.

42 **Eternal One:** Look here, let Me
present My servant;
I have taken hold of him.
He is My chosen, and I
delight in him.
I have put My Spirit on him; by this
he will bring justice to the
nations.

► This poem is the first of several Servant Songs. God's special Servant is described in various ways. In this song (42:1-9), the Servant is portrayed as one who faithfully establishes justice in the world and serves as a light for the nations. In the second song (49:1-13), the Servant is called from the womb and ordained to restore the nation of Israel and take salvation to the ends of the earth. In the third song (50:4-9), the Servant is portrayed as a teacher, intimately in touch with God, yet brutally beaten and disgraced by his enemies. In the fourth song (52:13–53:12), the suffering and rejection of God's Servant takes priority over his other tasks; yet even in his suffering God is working to repair the world from the harm done by sin and evil.

Eternal One: 2He will not scream or yell,
crying out for all to hear.
3What is bruised and bent, he will
not break;
he will not blow out a
smoldering candle.
Rather, he will faithfully *turn his
attention to* doing justice.
4*And though he faces obstacles,
resistance, and great pressure,*
he will not crack; he will not give
up until things are set right.
Even the coastlands wait patiently
for his instruction.

5God, the Eternal One, who made the
starry skies,
stretched them tight *above and around*;
Who cast the *shimmering globe of* earth
and filled it with life;
who gives breath and animates the
people;
Who walks *and talks* with life-giving
spirit has this to say:

Eternal One: 6I am the Eternal One. By
righteousness I have called
you.
I will take you by the hand and
keep you safe.

You are given as a covenant *between Me and the* people:
a light for the nations, *a shining beacon to the world.*
7You will open blind eyes *so they will see again.*
You will lead prisoners, *blinking,* out *from caverns of captivity,*
from cells *pitch* black *with despair.*
8I am the Eternal One.
I Am is My name.
My beauty is unique, a weighty splendor all My own.
And nothing else—no idols could possibly gain My praise.
9Look here, what's done is done and gone.
The now is new, and *there's hope in the* not-yet.
I will tell you what's to come, even before the events are brand-new.

10*So make up a song like none other.* Sing a new song to the Eternal.
And let His praise echo *clear* across the earth.
Let those who go to sea *set sail with praise in the air.*
Let those who live along the waters' edge *sing His praise.*
11Let desert places, urban *and rural, wild and settled,* sing!
Let the settlements of Kedar and those in *the craggy cliffs of* Sela join in the celebration.
The peaks of mountains, too, raise your voices with a *great, glad* cry.
12Let them all give glory to the Eternal.
Let them praise the One *who is, was, and will be* heard along the coasts.
13As a hero *throws himself into battle,* the Eternal will take on His enemies;
with passion, shouting out a deafening roar, He will power over them.

Eternal One: 14As a woman fiercely strains to give birth, I will gasp, pant, and cry out.
I have been quiet for a long time; I have held back in the face of it all.
Well, *no more.*
15*When My power is loosed,* I will make level the heights
and render them bare.
I will dry up the rivers until *bare* islands appear,
and empty the *sweet* water from the pools.
16I will escort the blind down roads they do not know,
guide them down paths they've never seen.
I will smooth their passage and light their way.
I will indeed do it—they are abandoned no more.

17*Meanwhile,* those who put their stock in worthless images,
who worship things impotent and breakable
And say to idols, "You are our gods,"
will be turned away and mortified.

Eternal One: 18You, deaf *to the world,* hear!
You, blind *in your eyes,* look! And you will see.
19My servant is as blind as any.
Who could be more deaf than the one who goes where I direct and tells what I want told?

► The identity of the Servant is much debated. On the one hand, Isaiah often refers to God's people, Israel, as "the servant of the Eternal" (41:8-9; 42:19; 45:4; especially 49:3). Yet at other times the Servant seems to be an individual, distinct from Israel, with a special mission to and for Israel. Early Christians hear these Servant Songs and reflect on Jesus' significance; they better understand His role as the light of the world, teacher, and Suffering Servant of God. They see His life and ministry as the embodiment and representative of true Israel and therefore the fulfillment of these words. They use the prophet's poetry to formulate songs and sermons that express not only Jesus' unique relationship to God but also His unique career as the Light of the world.

Who is as blind as the one committed to do what the Eternal One wills,
the servant of the Eternal?
20The seer-of-much nevertheless doesn't get it;
privy to sound and speech and tone, he still doesn't hear.

21On account of God's *goodness,* His right
ways and deeds,
the Eternal was pleased to make the
instruction grand and glorious.
22But this people is compromised.
They've been plundered and robbed.
*They have lost—things, liberty, place,
and name.*
They are all trapped in holes and tucked
away in prisons.
They've been plundered *and depleted*
with none to the rescue.
They've been stolen away with none to
insist, "Give them back."
23*Is there anyone who understands?* Who,
out of all of you, will pay attention,
understand, and take note
concerning what's to come?

God is the one who lies behind these events. He makes it possible for His people to be defeated and taken away.

24Wasn't it the Lord, because we turned
our backs,
who gave up Jacob's *descendants,*
Israel, for robbery and plunder?
We refused to live as God would have us
live. We did not heed
the instruction that God gave us
through Moses so long ago.
25That's why God sent all fury against
Jacob
in the shape of war, and we were
burned.
We experienced all this;
Yet we didn't get it. God's people did not
take it to heart.

43 **Eternal One:** *Remember* who
created you, O Jacob?
Who shaped you, O Israel?
See, you have nothing to fear. I, *who
made you,* will take you back.
I have chosen you, named you
as My own.
2When you face *stormy* seas I will
be there with you *with
endurance and calm*;
you will not be engulfed in
raging rivers.
If *it seems like* you're walking
through fire with flames
licking at your limbs,
keep going: you won't be burned.
3Because I, the Eternal One, am your
God.
I am the Holy One of Israel, and
I will save you.
I have traded in *nations to win you
back,*
Egypt, Cush, and Seba, in
exchange for your freedom.
4Because you are special to Me and
I love you,
I *gladly* give up other peoples in
exchange for you;
They are trivial by comparison to
your weighty significance.

5-6So don't be afraid. I am here.
I will reunite you with your
children,
bringing them back from
wherever in the world they
are—East, West, North, or
South.
*No place will be able to hold you
when* I demand your release,
when I order them,
"Bring *My children*—My sons and
daughters—from far away.
7Bring the ones who are called by
My name;
the ones I made, shaped, and
created for My *profound* glory."
8*Even though they fail and seem* blind
and deaf (and not for lack of
eyes or ears),
bring them out.

9All the nations gather together; peoples
from all over *the world* assemble.
Who among them could have
foreseen this?
Let them call their witnesses to make
their case, prove they are in the
right—
that it is the truth.

Eternal One: 10You are My witnesses;
You are My proof.

You whom I chose *for special
purpose,* My servant,
in order that you would know
Me, trust Me, *be faithful to Me,*
Understand that I alone am
God; no god was formed
before Me,
and there will be no god after Me.
11I, I am the Eternal;
there is no Savior except for Me,
12I alone told *that this victory would
happen.* Then I saved you
and made it known.
No other god worked among
you—You know *the truth.*
You can testify that it is so; as I
declare, I alone am God.

13 Indeed, from day *one,* I am He. No
one can wrest another from
My hand.
I make things happen; who can
turn them around?

14 The Holy One of Israel, the Eternal One
who redeemed you, says,

Eternal One: For your good, I will send
another against Babylon
and make all of them outcasts
from their own land;
The Chaldeans will set sail and try
to escape on their celebrated
ships.
15 For I am the Eternal, your Holy
One. I am your King,
Creator of Israel, *My people.*

16 This is what the Eternal One says, *the
One who does the impossible,*
the One who makes a path through
the sea, a *smooth* road through
tumultuous waters,
17 The One who drags out chariots and
horses,
armies and warriors, *and drowns
them in the sea—*
They will go down, never to rise again;
their lives are snuffed out like a
candle wick:

► The prophet appeals to a powerful memory: the exodus. He reminds God's people—all descendants of slaves in Egypt—how God liberated them from oppression, how God devastated the powerful army that pursued them in order to take them back to the whip and lash, back to servitude in Egypt. Stories of the exodus have been told time after time for many generations; they are permanent fixtures in their minds. The prophet evokes these amazing memories to comfort them and assure them that what God is about to do is like what God did do for their ancestors centuries ago.

Eternal One: 18 Don't revel only in the
past,
or spend all your time recounting
the victories of days gone by.

19 Watch *closely:* I am preparing
something new; it's
happening now, *even as I
speak,*
and you're about to see it. I am
preparing a way through the
desert;
Waters will flow where there had
been none.
20 Wild animals in the fields will
honor Me;
the wild dogs and surly birds
will join in.
There will be water enough for My
chosen people,
trickling springs and *clear*
streams running through the
desert.
21 My people, the ones whom I *chose
and* created for My own,
will sing My praise.

22 *In truth,* you never really called
upon me, did you, Jacob, *My
people?*
So how then could you be tired
of Me, Israel, *My own?*

23 You didn't present Me with sheep
for burnt offerings
or acknowledge Me in sacrifices.
I didn't tire you by *demanding so
many* gifts of offerings and
incense.
24 No sweet cane, no money or
glorious excess have you
given to Me.
You didn't even try to satisfy
Me with the fat of your
sacrifices.
Instead, you tired Me with your
sins—*bloodshed and lies,*
crimes and offenses;
you wore Me down with all your
belligerence and faults.
25 So *let's get this clear:* it's for My own
sake *that I save you.*
I am He who wipes the slate
clean and erases your
wrongdoing.
I will not call to mind your sins
anymore.
26 Now help Me remember. Let's get
this settled.
State your case, and prove *to Me*
that you are in the right.
27 *From the very beginning* your
founding father sinned,
then your leaders defied My
laws and instructions.

28So I brought disgrace on the princes
of your sanctuary, *your*
priests.
I turned them over to barbarian
assault,
Leaving Jacob to the batterers,
Israel to humiliation.

44 **Eternal One:** Nevertheless,
listen to Me, *My people:*
Jacob, My servant; Israel,
My chosen.

2The Eternal who made you,
who formed you in the womb and
promised to help you, has this
to say:

Eternal One: Don't be afraid, My
servant Jacob,
My dear Jeshurun—My chosen.
3*Like a devoted gardener,* I will pour
sweet water on parched land,
streams on hard-packed ground;
I will pour My spirit on your
children and grandchildren—
and let My blessing flow to your
descendants.
4And they will sprout among the
grasses, *grow vibrant and tall*
like the willow trees lining a
riverbank.
5One will call out: "I belong to the
Eternal."
Another will say, "Jacob *is my*
people; Israel my honored
name."
Yet others will write "Property of
the Eternal" on their hands.

6The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies,
King of Israel, who paid their
ransom, has this to say:

Eternal One: I am at the beginning and
will be at the end.
There is no God except for Me.
7If you know any God like Me, tell
it now.
Declare and demonstrate any
who can compare to Me.
Or if you know and have announced
events before their time,
told what is to come, then speak
so now.
8Don't be afraid. *Let your minds* be
clear of fear.
Haven't I announced events and
revealed what is to come?
From the earliest days, I have done
so. You know it—you have
seen and know.
So, go ahead, My witnesses: is
there a god out there other
than Me?

Witnesses: There is no other rock *like*
God. I don't know a single
one.

► All of the nations that Israel encounters are involved in some form of idol worship. They imagine these gods and fashion these images in order to satisfy a desire—a God-given desire—to connect with something, with someone out there. Human beings know at some deep, intuitive level that God exists, life is sacred, and there are mysteries more profound than the daily grind. This is why every human civilization exhibits some form of religious life and devotion. But instead of seeking the God who is, people have a tendency to create the gods they want, gods that give them control over the complexities and problems of life. Israel is elected by God for a number of reasons. Perhaps two of the most significant are to bear witness to the one True God and to warn the nations against idolatry. According to Scripture, idol worship is not some neutral, unfortunate habit people get themselves into; it is more than just a waste of time, hope, and effort. It is a dangerous substitute—a counterfeit experience—that adversely misshapes and disorders their lives. To persist in idolatry is to give way to malevolent evils and to miss out on a relationship with the one True God.

9But whoever does make an idol is not
improved or enriched. On the contrary,
their passing fancies contribute nothing
of value *or purpose.* Those who look on *at*
such misplaced attention don't understand
what they're seeing, and the idol-makers
will end up embarrassed *at best.* 10*It's easy*
to say, "What pathetic idiocy! Who would

do such a thing—make gods that are *by definition* worthless?" [11]The people who worship them will be *shamed and* humiliated. After all, people made those gods. *Yet it happens all the time.* So, let's put *these images, these figurines* all together; stand them up—they will tremble *with terror* and be ashamed.

[12]A metalworker shapes the raw materials into tools and then uses them to make little gods by hammering, bending, heating, *and cooling the materials.* And in the process, he gets tired and hungry; without water he *soon* grows faint. [13]Likewise, the woodworker measures and marks the wood, chisels and planes it down, marks it with a compass, and carves it until it looks a bit like a human—lovely, maybe—in order to put it in a house. [14]*To take it back a bit further, perhaps* he cuts down cedars or he *carefully* selects the cypress or oak himself, *watches it,* nurtures it *until it is ready for his purpose.* Perhaps he plants a pine; with *sun and* rain, it grows *tall.* [15]*When it's time to harvest,* he uses some of the wood for fuel to stay warm, some to heat the oven and bake bread, and some to craft a god. Then the woodworker bows down and worships before the image he just made. [16-17]*Do you see the irony?* He sits around, warming himself and roasting dinner with wood from the same tree from which he crafted a god to which he bows and worships and prays—one time saying, "I am warmed by the wood fire"; another time saying, "O dear god, save me."

[18-19]*So we see again how it is that* they're blind—their eyes shut *to the truth in front of them,* their hearts and minds refusing to think and really understand *what's going on.* So without stopping to think about it, the fool says, "*Gosh,* I used half of the wood to build a fire, and baked the bread and roasted the meat over its hot coals. *After* I eat, I think I'll use the rest of it to make a repulsive god. *Maybe* I'll bow down to this leftover lumber." [20]*A fool like this* is feeding on ashes—his *addled mind and* deceived heart lead him nowhere. He can't *figure out how to* save himself, *much less see the error of his ways* and say, "Is this idol in my right hand just a lie?"

Eternal One: *Let that be a lesson to you, My people.*
[21]Don't forget it, Jacob; O Israel,
remember—you are Mine.
I made you; you are My servant;
I will not forget you.

[22]I have swept away your
wrongdoing, as *wind sweeps*
a cloud *from the sky:*
I have cleared you of your sins,
as *the sun clears* the morning
mist.
I have rescued you; come back
to Me.

[23]Sing, starry sky and every constellation,
for what the Eternal has done.
Shout for joy, dark soil underfoot and
deep caverns below;
Erupt in joyful songs, mountains and
forests, and every tree in them!
Sing joyfully, for the Eternal One has
rescued Jacob, *His people;*
The splendor of God will be revealed in
Israel.

[24]The Eternal, your rescuing hero who formed you before birth, declares,

Eternal One: I am the Eternal, Creator
of all there is *and will be.*
I alone stretched out the heavens
and spread out the *blue* earth.
[25]I confound the lying swindlers who
claim to tell the future,
and I make the fortune-tellers
look like fools.
I stop the highbrow intellectuals in
their tracks,
and I show the fault of their
reasoning.
[26]But I stand behind the words of My
servants,
and I accomplish what they
predict.
The one who says about Jerusalem,
"This place will be built up
again";
about Judah's cities, "They will
be restored":
I confirm their predictions. They
will rise from their ruins.
[27]*After all,* I am the One *who needs only* to say "Dry up" to great
waters,
and your rivers run dry.
[28]I am the one who says *of the Persian victor over Babylon,*
"Cyrus is My shepherd. He will
accomplish what I determine."
My word goes out concerning
Jerusalem:
"It will stand, *a glorious city,* again"
and of My house within it,
"Restoration will begin at
once."

45

This is what the Eternal One says to His chosen agent, Cyrus *the Persian.*

► God has a special mission for Cyrus, the Persian emperor: to lead the world and free His exiled people. The Scripture is clear: God, not kings, directs history. Kings—and sometimes their subjects—often need to be reminded of that. The Eternal, the one True God, stands above and behind human history, directing and orchestrating its events.

Eternal One: Not by his hand *alone,* but
with his in Mine,
nations are vanquished, their
leaders conquered;
Doors and gates open *without a fight*
and will not close.

(to Cyrus) 2I will go ahead of you
and smooth the way, *lower*
the heights,
break down bronze doors, and
cut through iron bars.
3I will give you hidden treasures
and wealth tucked away in
secret places;
I will reveal them to you.
Then you will know that I am
the Eternal, the God of Israel,
who calls you by name.
4For the sake of My servant Jacob,
My chosen people Israel,
I have called you by name, *made*
you who you are,
And bestowed an honorable title on
you, even though you don't
know Me.
5I am the Eternal One; there is no
other God but Me,
and even though you don't
know Me, I am preparing
you *for victory.*
6*I am doing all this* so that people all
around the world
may know that I alone am the
Eternal, the only *God.*
7I form light and create darkness;
I make what is good, happy, and
healthy, and I create woe.
I, the Eternal One, make them
one and all.

8Skies above, open up and let
the clouds rain down
righteousness!
Let the earth below sprout triumph
and justice.
For I, the Eternal, have created
them.

9How bad it will be for anyone who
disputes with the very One who
created him!
After all, a human being is nothing
more than one clay pot among
many.
Imagine the clay saying to the potter,
"What do you think you're doing?"
or "You don't have the hands for this."
10It's as idiotic as asking a mother or father,
"What are you birthing or begetting?"
11So the Eternal One, who is the Holy One
and Maker of Israel, says,

Eternal One: *Are you really going to*
question Me about what will
happen to My children,
or lecture Me about what I
should do with the ones I
made with My own hands?
12It is I who made the very ground *on*
which you stand,
I who shaped the human beings
who walk around on it.
I pulled *the sky and* the heavens
taut with My own hands,
and organized the army of stars
that march across the night sky.
13So it was perfectly right for me to
raise up Cyrus;
I will make his road ahead
straight *and level,*
So that he will rebuild *My chosen*
place, My city *Jerusalem,*
and set My exiled people free
Without exacting a price or seeking
a bribe.

So says the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: 14I, the Eternal One, say
to you things will change; the
wealthy and strong
of your world—Egyptians,
Cushites, Sabeans—will
come under your control.
Their goods and services, *their*
strongest warriors, will be yours,
deferring to you, as they follow
in chains, saying,
"God is with you. There is no other
God but yours."

Cyrus: 15You have kept yourself hidden
from others,
but You are indeed God, who
saved Israel *in the face of*
great challenges.
16Those *who worshiped others* will be
humiliated.
Those who craft idols will be
embarrassed *by their folly.*
17By contrast, Israel can stand tall.
The Eternal has given them
a salvation that will never
die, and they will never be
embarrassed or ashamed.

18*Indeed,* He who created *the universe*—
heavens and earth—gave it form
and shape.
The Eternal alone set it all in motion;
He didn't make it a disorganized
wasteland but made it a *beautiful*
and comfortable home.

Eternal One: I am the Eternal One, and
there is no other *god who*
exists.
19I didn't whisper in secret or
mumble in the darkness;
I didn't say to Jacob's children:
"Look around the desert and try
to find Me."
No, I am the Eternal One. I will
speak clearly what is right
and true.

20Come, come. Gather around, all who
survived among the nations.
They have no idea *what a real*
God is
As they coddle their wooden idols,
and pray to *worthless* images
that cannot save them.
21Go ahead, talk among yourselves.
Present your case.
Now, who declared what would
happen long ago?
Who predicted how these events
would turn out *at this time*?
Was it not I, the Eternal One?
There is no other God
but Me.
I alone am the righteous God and
Savior. There is no other.

22So turn *your back on those idols and*
your face to Me.
I will save you, *wherever you are,*
to the ends of the earth,
For I am God. There is none other.

23I make this solemn vow; I have
spoken a word—
faithful and true—and it will not
return; *it will be done.*
My words have wings; they will be
accomplished;
every knee will bow down
to Me.
Every tongue will swear allegiance
*to Me.**

24They will say of Me, "Only by the
Eternal One *shall I see things*
through.
Only by God shall I go with
integrity and strength
through life."

Those who know that God is the source of life, integrity, and strength live lives marked by confidence and a calm assurance.

Now all those who burned with anger
against God
will come to Him and be shamed.
25Through the Eternal, all the descendants
of Israel
will be vindicated and made glorious
within the world.

46 Bel and Nebo wobble and duck,
as their images
sway on the backs of oxen
and donkeys—such a
heavy burden
For the weary animals—as they are
carried about.
2These *"gods"* bow and sink together,
unable to escape *the coming*
invasion;
they march off into captivity.

The gods of the nations must have looked rather odd riding on the backs of animals. Even gods of the once-feared Babylonians, Bel and Nebo, are nothing but dead weight.

Eternal One: 3Listen, you who count
yourselves among Jacob's
descendants,
all the remnant of Israel.
It is you, *not I,* who have been carried
from before you were born.
Indeed, when you were still in
the womb, I was taking care
of you.

* 45:23 Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11

4And when you are old, I will still be
there, *carrying you.*
When your *limbs grow tired,*
your eyes are weak,
And your hair a silvery gray, I will
carry you *as I always have.*
I will carry you and save you.

5Does anyone compare to Me? Can
you find any likeness?
Who *or what* might be My equal
or even close to Me?
6*What about* those who use precious
materials for gods—
hiring artisans *to carefully* craft
gold, silver, *jewels,*
And exotic wood into a god—
then they bow down and
worship it!
7Their god is a mere object. They
have to lug it around on their
shoulders
before they can stand it up in its
proper place.
It just sits there, unmoving *until*
they pick it up again.
It never speaks, never answers.
It cannot help them, no matter
how desperate they are.
8Remember that—and don't be
tempted to conform!
Think about it, you rebels.
9Remember the old days. For I am
God; there is no other.
I am God; there are no other
gods like Me.
10From the beginning I declare how
things will end;
from times long past, I tell what
is yet to be, saying:
"My intentions will come to pass.
I will make things happen as I
determine they should."
11I am the one who called *Cyrus,* the
bird of prey from the east;
from a land far away I summoned
him to do what I intend.
My word went out, and I will see it
done.
My plan has been made, and I
will see it through.

12Listen closely, you strong-willed
people
who have veered far from the
right path.
13It won't be long until I make things
right;
My salvation is getting closer and
closer; it won't be delayed.
I am ready to rescue Zion, *My*
chosen place,
and display My *beauty and*
splendor to Israel, *My chosen*
people.

47 **Eternal One:** Ah, *pretty* virgin
daughter, *Miss* Babylon,
come down and sit in the
dust.
Sit on the ground *where you belong:*
your throne is no more,
daughter of the Chaldeans, no
longer all dainty, delicate.
2*And with those delicate fingers* grab
the *heavy* millstones and
grind the grain.
Take off your *lacy* veil, lift your
skirt, bare your legs, and
Cross the mud and muck of the river
on foot like any other slave.
3Everyone will see you naked; your
humiliation will be most
public.
I intend to make you pay, and
no one will interfere.*

Israel: 4Our Savior, *our hero*—the
Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies,
by name—is the Holy One of
Israel!
5So *you'd best* go quietly, *Babylon,*
daughter of the Chaldeans.
Slink off into the dark. No one
will ever again call you
Queen of All Lands.

Eternal One: 6*Some time ago,* I got fed
up with My people.
I left My heritage to you, let you
defeat them and take them
away.
But you showed no mercy, *abused*
and denigrated them;
you even made the elderly suffer
beneath your heavy burden.
7But You were *carried away with*
your power,
thinking you would always be in
charge.
You didn't consider your limits
or think about how all this
would end.
8You, pursuer of pleasure, resting in
the thought,
"No one exists *in the world of*
any consequence except me.
I'll never feel as a widow or suffer
the loss of my children."

* 47:3 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

9Despite all your magic and charms,
all of a sudden, in a single day,
terror and death to the highest
degree.
In the midst of it all, your children
and husband, too, will be
gone.
10In your wickedness you thought
you were immune,
so hidden away that no one
could find *your faults.*
But your *version of* wisdom and
knowledge were your
undoing; you thought,
"No one exists *in the world of
any consequence* except me."
11Evil will break upon you *full force.*
You won't be able to *hold it off or*
charm it away.
Disaster will fall and, even with all
your wealth, you won't stand
a chance.
There's no way to know what is
coming; all of a sudden,
It will ruin *all that you have and* all
that you are.
12But keep trying your spells;
your magic and charms have
brought you this far.
Maybe they'll help in some way.
Maybe they'll incite fear.
13All of your scheming has only
exhausted you.
Let the astrologers step up and
save you,
After all they chart the heavens,
read the stars,
and predict the future month
after month.
14Look, they're like dry straw that
ignites *in a flash* and is
burned away.
They cannot help you—they
cannot help themselves
From the power of the flame.
And this is not some warm
and cozy fire *shared among
friends*!
15So that's what they're worth to
you—*absolutely nothing,*
even after all these years of
working together.
They're gone. No one's left to rescue
you.

48 Listen closely, you descendants
of Jacob who are called
Israel!
Hear this, you who trace your
ancestors back to Judah,
Who take oaths in the name of the Eternal,
and call on the God of Israel,
but do so dishonestly and
inappropriately:
2Your identity is wrapped up in the holy city,
and you *claim to* rely on the God of
Israel,
The One who is called the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: 3In times long past, I
determined
and announced the things that
would come.
Then suddenly I acted, and they
indeed happened.
4Long ago, I figured that you'd resist
(after all, you are a hard-headed
and stubborn lot).
5Way back then, I told you what
would happen so that you
wouldn't claim
*that some other god was
responsible*—that some
figurine *you crafted*
From wood and molded metal
commanded and
accomplished it.
6You've heard what I foretold;
now you've seen what has
happened—
do you agree *that I'm God?*
Well, from this moment, I am
telling you new things,
secrets hidden that no one has
known.
7They are created now—brand new,
never before announced,
never before heard.
So you can't claim, "Look, I
already knew them."
8There's no way you could have
heard or known
because, even from long ago,
you have never listened.
For I've always known that you are
a conniving lot;
you've been a *troublesome* rebel
from birth.

9On account of My reputation, I hold
back my anger;
for My own weighty grandeur, I
am patient with you,
So that I don't make an absolute
break with you.
10I have refined you, but not in the
way silver is refined.
Instead, I try you in the furnace
of suffering.

For God, suffering is not an end in itself. God uses suffering and hardship to purge the bad and foster the good in His covenant people.

11 But it is all on account of Me, *not of you,* that I act,
that I retain honor, that My glory is Mine alone, and not sullied.

12 Listen to Me, O Jacob, Israel whom I've *specially named,*
specially chosen, *and not without purpose.*
I Am the first *of all things,* and I will be the last.
13 It is by *My power, My desire,* My doing that the earth was anchored.
My hand flung the skies.
I established them,
And when I call, they pay the strictest attention.

14 Come and listen, all of you! Did any of you tell *in advance*
that the Eternal's beloved would press diligently
Against Babylon's might and overcome Chaldea as He desired?

Eternal One: 15 *No, only* I, I *the Eternal One* knew this would happen.
I *was the one who* summoned him, who led him,
Who determined that he would have such victory.
16 Come even closer, and hear: from the beginning I spoke,
not *hiding away* in *hushed* secret. *I Am and will be;*
I was before anything was at all.

The Lord, the Eternal, has sent me and His Spirit.
17 The Eternal One, who rescued you, the Holy One of Israel declares,

Eternal One: I am the Eternal One your God. I have given you My instruction
for living well and right, leading you in how you should be and do.
18 If only you had listened to My instruction,
then you would have been flooded with peace;
Your righteousness *would have risen and crested* like waves on the sea.
19 Your people would have *multiplied to* become like the grains of sand,
and your children would be like grains of wheat.
And they would be forever in My mind and My presence.

20 Leave Babylon; run swiftly from Chaldea!
And let it be known
with a joyous shout, to the ends of the earth,
That the Eternal One has rescued Jacob, His servant!
21 And though He guided them through desert places, with no water in sight,
they were never thirsty.
Just as in Moses' time, God made the rocks gush water,
split the rock and made water pour streaming out.

Eternal One: 22 Ah, but the *malicious and* wicked will never be at peace.

► True peace begins with knowing God. Those who listen and live by His teachings find that wholeness and goodness flood into their lives. The wicked, however, face a different reality; they live with constant danger and problems.

49 Listen to this, everyone—near and far:
The Eternal One singled me out, even before I was born.
He called me and named me when I was still in my mother's belly.
2 *Even then,* God was preparing my mouth *to speak* like a sharp sword.
He kept my purpose quiet, kept me safe in the shadow of His hand,
He crafted me *into a* sharp-tipped arrow and tucked me away in His quiver;
3 God said to me, "You are My servant, Israel.
Through you, I will be glorified."

4I said, "I've worked hard for nothing.
I spent my strength, *and what have I accomplished*—nothing,
Yet my justice and reward are secure with my God, the Eternal One."
5And now the Eternal who *watched,* shaped, and made me His own servant
from the womb *has determined* to restore Jacob's family;
Israel will be made right with the Eternal again.
For God has counted me worthy and He has been my strength *right along.*

Eternal One: 6As My servant you will do even more than this,
even more than restoring Jacob's family to Me
And making Israel right with Me again.
I will make you a light for the nations,
And You will illumine them until My salvation reaches to the ends of the earth.*

7This is what the Eternal One, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel,
told to the one who is despised and loathed by the nation,
To the servant of national leaders.

Eternal One: At the sight of you, kings will rise and princes will bow down,
for I, the Eternal, faithful *and true,* the Holy One of Israel, have chosen you.

The Eternal has this to say:

Eternal One: 8When the time was right, I answered you;
on the day you were delivered, I was your help.*
I will watch over you, and give you as a promise, a binding covenant to the people.
Through you, My gift to the people, the land *of promise* will recover.
Ancestral ground, once deserted, will be entrusted to them.
9*Through you, My gift to the people,* I will declare to the prisoners,
"Come out. *Now you are free*";
To those who are held in darkness,
"Come out *into the light.*"
They will find sustenance *wherever they are—*
Along the roads or in the open hills—
with peace of mind, in comfort and security.
10*Wherever they are,* they will be *fine,* never hungry nor thirsty.
They will be protected from oppressive heat and the burning sun
Because the One who loves them—*as a mother loves her child*—will be their guide.
God will lead them to *restful places, rejuvenating* springs of water.
11I will *make their going easy,* level the mountain road
and smooth the path *that leads them home.*
12Look! *Even now,* they are coming from *lands* far away,
some from the north, others from the west, these from the land of Sinim.*

13Oh joy! Be glad—sky! Take joy—earth!
Burst into song—mountains!
For the Eternal, moved to compassion, has comforted and consoled His people.

► There are many kinds of love—and not enough words to tell the differences. Hebrew has a word for "love" that is related to its word for a woman's womb. English has no such word. It is too bad, for it is difficult to describe womb-love, the bearing-and-birthing love of a mother, the kind of love that the Lord has for the people of God's promise, Jacob's children. God shaped this people as His own and bound them with no ordinary promise. God loves them in the same way a mother loves the child growing in her womb. It can't be said so neatly and completely with one "love" word, but that is the idea that threads its way through this text.

* 49:6 Acts 13:47 * 49:8 2 Corinthians 6:2 * 49:12 Likely a reference to southern Egypt

Zion: [14]The Eternal One has abandoned
me. *God has walked out the*
door;
my Lord *left me alone.* He has
forgotten all about me.

Eternal One: [15]Is it possible for
a mother, *however*
disappointed,
however hurt, to forget her
nursing child?
Can she feel nothing for the baby
she carried and birthed?
Even if she could, I, *God,* will
never forget you.
[16]Look here. I have *made you a part of*
Me, written you on the palms
of My hands.
Your *city* walls are always on My
mind, *always My concern.*
[17]*Now sweet Zion* your children are
running *pell-mell* back to you
Just as fast as those who destroyed
you are leaving.
[18]*Raise your head,* lift up your eyes,
and watch *your heart's desire*
come—
All your children, gathered and
returning to you. As I live, so
I promise.
You will wear them *with pride* all
like *shining* ornaments;
you will put them on as a bride
on her wedding day.
[19]Because of all of your destroyed
land—the barren fields and
abandoned farms—
you are now too small, too
cramped for all your citizens;
And those who tried to swallow you
whole will be far, far away.
[20]The children you mourned, those
born in exile, will return and
say,
"It is too cramped and crowded
for us;
We're going to need more room if
we are to live here."
[21]You'll say to yourself, "Where in the
world did all these people
come from?
Could these really be mine?
I thought I'd been desolated, left
empty.
Where have you all been?
Where did you come from?"

[22]This is what the Lord, the Eternal, has
to say:

Eternal One: I will lift My hand and
signal every nation *that holds*
your people
And they will bring your *children*
back again:
boys bundled in their arms, girls
riding on their shoulders.
[23]Kings will tend the children of Zion,
and their queens will nurse
and nurture them.
These greats will humble
themselves before you.
They will bow and lick the dust off
your feet,
and in the course of it all, you
will remember that I am the
Eternal.
Whoever trusts in Me will never be
put to shame.

Jerusalem: [24]Can the spoil *of war* be
taken from the mighty?
Can the captives be freed from
the hand of a tyrant?

Eternal One: [25]*Hard to believe, but* it
shall be so.
The captives will be taken from
the hand of the mighty,
And the spoil *of war* will be rescued
from the tyrant.
I will *liberate them from their*
captors and contend with
your enemies.
I will save your children.
[26]I will turn your enemies' violence
back on themselves,
and they will suffer their own
atrocities:
They will feed on their own flesh
and drink their own blood
like wine.
Then every person *on earth* will
know *for certain* that I, the
Eternal, am your Savior.
I am your hero, the strong One of
Jacob *from whom you come.*
I will rescue you, *whatever the*
price.

50 **Eternal One:** *Where is* the
document of My divorce
from your mother, *Israel*?
And to whom did I turn you over
when I could no longer pay?
No, it was you who *amassed*
debt—a debt of constant
wrongdoing—
And that's why your mother was
sent away.

[2]Why is it that when I came *to visit,*
no one was there *to greet Me*;
and when I called out *for you,* no
one answered?
Do you think My reach insufficient,
My power too limited to
rescue *you*?
I need only to speak the words and
entire oceans will evaporate;
rivers will become deserts,
leaving fish to stink and die
for lack of water.
[3]I can dress the heavens with
blackness
and *trade its velvet* skies for the
scratchy clothes *of mourning*.

[4]The Lord, the Eternal, equipped me *for
this job—*
with *skilled speech, a smooth* tongue
for instruction.
I can find the words that comfort and
soothe the *downtrodden,* tired,
and despairing.
And I know when to use them.
Each morning, it is God who wakes me
and tells me what I should do,
what I should say.
[5]The Lord, the Eternal, has helped me to
listen,
and *I do as He says*. I have not been
rebellious or run away *from God's
work*.
[6]*But it's been hard.* I offered My back to
those who whipped me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out
my beard;
I did not turn away from humiliation
and spitting.

► The prophet speaks, but his words are those of the Servant of God. The Servant is in tune with God, the Master Teacher. He teaches as he has been taught, and—for the first time it seems—He understands that suffering is an integral part of the work God has for him. The reality for God's Servant and any who follow him is this: to be close with God means to be at odds with people.

[7]Because the Lord, the Eternal, helps me I
will not be disgraced;
so, I set my face like a rock, confident
that I will not be ashamed.

[8]My hero who sets things right is near.
Who would dare to challenge me?
Let's stand *and debate this* head-to-head!
Who would dare to accuse me? Let
him come near.
[9]See here, the Lord, the Eternal, helps
me—who could possibly win
against me?
All my accusers will wear out like a
ratty old moth-eaten shirt.

[10]*So,* you who are listening, do you
acknowledge the Eternal One *as
God*?
And do you take seriously what the
servant of God has to say?
If you are enveloped in darkness, with no
light *to see*,
take confidence in the name of the
Eternal One; rely on your God.
[11]*Ah, but if you've tried to go it alone,*
the light by which you go is your own
consuming fire,
And the torches you light will be your
undoing.

Eternal One: By My hand you will go down in torment.

51 Listen closely, you who
diligently work for justice
and look for the Eternal One,
for what is fair and true.
It would be good for you to look back, look
to *the place from where you came,*
the rock out of which you were
shaped and the quarry from
where you were mined.
[2]Look to *your spiritual ancestors—*
Abraham, your father, and Sarah,
who birthed you.
Abraham was only one person when I
called him.
But with generous goodness, I made
from him a numerous people.

[3]The Eternal One will relieve *the troubles
and worries of* Zion
and bring comfort to the rubble *of its
destruction.*
God will turn deserted places into a
flourishing garden like Eden *of old*;
happy voices will ring out in the
Eternal's garden;
Buoyant music and thanksgiving *will fill
the air*.

Eternal One: [4]Listen closely, you who are
Mine; lend an ear, My nation;
for My instruction will go
straight out *into all the world*

And My justice will illuminate all
people wherever they are.
5My justice is coming closer. My
rescue is on the way.
My *strong* arm will extend
justice to the nations.
Distant shores are looking to
Me with hope that I will
accomplish it.
6*Don't worry*—look up at the sky and
down at the earth.
The sky will disappear like
smoke; the earth will wear
out like a *well-used* garment;
Every last thing may *perish and*
dissolve, but My salvation is
for all time.
My justice will not end.

7Listen to Me, you who already live
out *what is true and* right,
who treasure My instruction
within your hearts:
Don't be afraid of people's scorn.
Don't let their dismissive
criticism, bitter anger, or
hatred get you down.
8*For they'll come to nothing;* they'll
be eaten up as a moth eats
a shirt;
they'll be consumed as a worm
feeds on wool.
But My justice will endure. *I will*
extend My saving action to
every generation.

► This sounds too good to be true. God's people fear He is asleep, so they attempt to rouse Him to action. They remind Him—and themselves—of when God rescued His people long ago and defeated Egypt. Rahab, a monster of mythic character, is linked to Egypt, a nation of legendary power and cruelty. The prophet assures his discouraged audience that God will come through again for His people. It will be for them like it was when God rescued the Hebrew slaves. The exiled people of God will be freed from Babylon, and God will smooth out and level off the perilous desert highway that leads from Mesopotamia to the promised land.

9Get up, *power of God!* Rise up and
strengthen Yourself, arm of God.
Get up *and do* like in the olden
days, *when You saved Your special*
people—
Like when You cut Rahab, that dragon-
monster *of chaos,* in two.
10And *remember when* You made the sea
dry up
and the waters of the deep *retreated*
for Moses and company;
Then You laid down a road right through
for the people You saved to cross
over?
11*It'll be like that for* those the Eternal One
ransomed *from captivity*
to return to Zion, *Jerusalem.* And
they'll come singing with joy.
Overwhelming, never-ending joy will
crown their heads *with* happiness
and delight
while desperation and depression
melt away.

Eternal One: 12I am the One who
comforts you *and gives you*
peace.
So why are you afraid of human
beings?
The children of men are only grass;
they'll wither and die.

13Have you forgotten Me, the One
who made you *and the whole*
world,
who stretched out the skies
and made sure the earth's
foundations?
Yet you constantly worry about
others—how they hate and
might harm you.
But their anger counts for
nothing.
14In an instant, those who cower in
fear *and trepidation* will be
free *to go in confidence;*
they won't die in chains or suffer
from hunger.
15Because I, the Eternal, am your God,
I can make the oceans roil *with*
storm and roll with great
waves.
They call Me, the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly*
armies.
16I have given you My words to speak
and protected you with the
shadow of My hand.
I am the One who pulled the
skies tight and made the
earth rock solid.

And I am the same who said to
Zion, "You are indeed Mine!"

17 Get up. Get up, *and get moving!*
Stand up, Jerusalem,
you who have experienced
firsthand the punishing
anger of God.
You have drunk that *terrible* cup to
the last gritty drop,
and it left you reeling, *drunk on*
distress.
18 *Ah, poor Jerusalem!* No one comes
to guide her along.
Of all her people, all the ones
whom the city nurtured and
raised *to adulthood,*
None take her hand now *in her*
stupor of pain.
19 Twin disasters have befallen you:
devastation and destruction,
famine and war.
Who can relieve your *anguish and*
pain?
Who is left to provide comfort?
20 Her people are lying around on
every corner,
weary and faint, like an antelope
trapped in a net.
Each is overcome with the Eternal's
anger; each suffers His rebuke.

21 But now, listen! *Listen,* you who are
miserable,
you who are intoxicated, but not on
wine.
22 The Lord, your God, the Eternal, who
pleads for His people, has this to
say:

Eternal One: Look! I have taken away
the cup that left you reeling—
the cup of My anger—
and sobered you up; I will never
make you drink it again.
23 And I will give that drink to those
who abused and oppressed
you—
who ordered you, "Get down so
we can walk all over you."
And your backs became the ground
they walked on, the streets
they passed by.

52 Wake up, *fair* Zion; dress in
your strength.
Put on your most elegant
clothes, O Jerusalem,
holy city.
Never again will *outsiders*—
uncircumcised and the unclean—
who once abused and denigrated you
move within your *elect* borders.
2 So brush off any dust *and dirt;* rise, *take*
your place of honor, Jerusalem.
Loose the chains from your neck
and raise your head in freedom,
captive children of Zion.
3 For the Eternal has this to say:

Eternal One: You were taken for
nothing,
and it's nothing for Me to get
you back.

4 For the Lord, the Eternal, has this to say:

Eternal One: My people *willingly* went
to live in Egypt long ago;
but now Assyria has oppressed
My people for no good
reason.

5 So what now? *Babylon* has assumed
it can *simply* take My people
away
with no recompense and no
respect.
Their *tyrannical* rulers jeer *and cheer*
and continually deride My name.
6 Well, *it's not over.* My people will
know My name.
At the time that I determine,
My people will see again who I am.
I will tell them, "I am here. *And I*
am ready."

7 Ah, how beautiful the feet of those on
the mountain
who declare the good news *of victory,*
of peace and liberation,*
The voice that calls to Zion, *that chosen*
place for God's promise people,
announcing to them "Your God
rules!"
8 Listen! The ones who watch *and wait* are
crying out *and laughing* for joy:
Look now, for everyone will see the
Eternal One coming back to Zion.
9 Let the rock and rubble of Jerusalem
erupt in joyful song
for the Eternal has brought comfort
to His people and redeemed
Jerusalem.
10 The Eternal has *flexed His muscles,* bared
His holy arm
for the world to see His power;

* 52:7 Romans 10:15

Every nation, every person, every place
on earth
will witness the victory of our God.

The prophet urges God's exiled people to leave Babylon, trusting in God and bringing with them the sacred vessels necessary to restore the priestly service of the temple.

11 *Servants of God,* turn away from that place;
As for those who carry the vessels for
the Eternal's *temple,*
go, without touching any *of Babylon's*
impurity, and make yourselves
pure.
12 Go *in confidence and grace*—no rushing,
no frantic escape.
There's no need to be anxious—the
Eternal One goes before *and*
behind you.
The God of Israel *paves the way with*
assurance and strength.
He watches your back.

Eternal One: 13 See here! My servant will
succeed.
He will grow *in character and*
reputation, achieving high
standing and status.
14 Just as people used to be shocked
by you,
even so his appearance was
disfigured;
His form—*once glorious*—was
marred until it hardly
seemed human.
15 Now many nations will be
astonished *at his prominence;*
world rulers will be speechless
in his presence,
For they will see what they've never
been told;
they will understand what
they've never heard.*

53 Indeed, who would ever
believe it?
Who would possibly accept
what we've been told?*
Who has witnessed the awesome
power *and plan* of the Eternal in
action?*
2 *Out of emptiness* he came, like a tender
shoot from rock-hard ground.
He didn't look like anything or anyone of
consequence—
he had no physical beauty to attract
our attention.
3 So he was despised and forsaken by men,
this man of suffering, grief's *patient*
friend.
As if he was a person to avoid, we looked
the other way;
he was despised, *forsaken,* and we
took no notice of him.
4 Yet it was our suffering he carried,
our pain and distress, our sick-to-the-*
soul-ness.
We just figured that God had rejected him,
that God was the reason he hurt so
badly.
5 But he was hurt because of us; *he*
suffered so.
Our wrongdoing *wounded and*
crushed him.
He endured the breaking that made us
whole.
The injuries he suffered became our
healing.
6 We all have wandered off, like *shepherdless*
sheep,
scattered by our aimless striving and
endless pursuits;
The Eternal One laid on him, *this silent*
sufferer,
the sins of us all.

7 And in the face of such oppression and
suffering—silence.
Not a word of protest, *not a finger*
raised to stop it.
Like a sheep to a shearing, like a lamb to
be slaughtered,
he went—oh so quietly, oh so willingly.
8 Oppressed and condemned, he was
taken away.
From this generation, who was there
to complain?
Who was there to cry "Foul"?
He was, after all, cut off from the
land of the living,
Smacked and struck, *not on his account,*
because of how my people *(my people!)*
Disregarded the lines between right and
wrong.
*They snuffed out his life.**
9 *And when he was dead,* he was buried
with the disgraced
in borrowed space (among the rich),
Even though he did no wrong by word
or deed.*

It is hard to understand why God would crush His innocent Servant. But it is in His suffering for sin that God deals decisively with sin and its harmful effects.

* 52:15 Romans 15:21 * 53:1 Romans 10:16 * 53:1 John 12:38 * 53:4 Matthew 8:17 * 53:7-8 Acts 8:33 * 53:9 1 Peter 2:22

10Yet the Eternal One planned to crush
him *all along,*
to bring him to grief, *this innocent*
servant of God.
When he puts his life in sin's *dark* place,
in the pit of wrongdoing,
this servant of God will see his
children and have his days
prolonged.
For in His servant's hand, the Eternal's
deepest desire will *come to pass*
and flourish.
11As a result of the *trials and* troubles that
wrack his soul,
God's servant will see *light* and be
content
Because He knows, *really understands,*
what it's about; as God says,
"My just servant will justify countless
others by taking on their
punishment *and bearing it away*.
12Because he exposed his very self—
laid bare his soul to the vicious
grasping of death—
And was counted among the worst, I will
count him among the best.
I will allot this one, My servant, a
share in all that is *of any value,*
Because he took on himself the sin of
many
and acted on behalf of those who
broke My law."

54 **Eternal One:** Sing, childless
woman, you who have
never given birth.
Raise a joyful shout, you who
have never gone through
labor.
You, whose husband is dead, will
bring forth much more than
the *fertile* one who has a
husband.*
2Enlarge your house. You are going
to need a bigger place;
don't underestimate the amount
of room that you'll need. So
build, build, build.
3You will increase in every direction
to fill the world.
Your offspring will take over the
nations;
Your people will revitalize long-
abandoned towns.

4Don't be afraid, for there is no one to
shame you.
Don't fear humiliation, for there is no
one to disgrace you.
The shame of your younger years and
the sorrow of your widowhood
are over.
You'll forget those days *as if they*
never happened.
5Because the One who made you will be
your husband;
the One called Commander of
heavenly armies
Will set you right again, the Holy One of
Israel.
It's not for nothing that He is called
"God of all the earth."

6For the Eternal has called you *to come*
back home,
like a young wife, once deserted and
deeply injured.
Now God is pulling you close again. *Like*
a spouse forgives,
He will take you back *and be*
reconciled.
The Eternal, your Redeemer, says this:

Eternal One: 7*Yes, I was angry* for a
moment, and I rejected you,
but My love endures, and I want
you back.
8For that moment, when I was so
mad,
I made it impossible for you to
see Me, to find Me,
But with great tenderness, I will
take you back in love.

9I think this is like the time when
Noah lived.
I promised that I would never
again destroy the world by
a flood.
So now I am promising never again
to be so angry
and punishing as I was when I
sent you away.
10Even if the mountains heave up
from their anchors,
and the hills *quiver and* shake, I
will not desert you.
You can rely on My enduring love;
My covenant of peace will stand
forever.

So says the Eternal One, whose love won't give up on you.

Eternal One: 11Ah, *Jerusalem,* so
miserable and distressed! I
will rebuild you
with floors of shimmering
mosaics, set sapphires in
your foundations.

* 54:1 Galatians 4:27

This promise stands to God's covenant people: nothing can happen to them unless God wills it and makes it so. Only if they invite it will destruction come. Throughout this time of rebellion and punishment God makes it clear that they hold their fate in their own hands. And if they haven't understood the message, God tells them who will do the nation-building—an unworldly restoration. He says that He provides the raw materials; He creates the tools and provides the skills with which the builders build. He alone is responsible for restoring the nation. And no matter what charges the adversary may concoct, God will not be put off. Even though Israel rebelled and was unfaithful at one time, that is in the past. The future is sure: God's faithfulness to His covenant, His enduring love for His people, will stand for all time. So the challenge goes out from the prophet to God's people—speaking on God's authority—to align themselves with God, accept Him as God, and they will surely win.

12 I will decorate your towers with rubies,
and your gates will sparkle with *all manner of* precious gems.
Costly jewels will adorn the entire wall that circles *your precincts.*
13 Every one of your children, *the people who call you home,*
will be students of the Eternal;
oh, they'll *be so happy and* live in peace!
14 *This time,* you will be founded and grounded
on right thought, speech, and action.
And no one will *trouble you, abuse or* oppress you;
you will know no fear and have no worries.
15 If *a nation* marches against you,
know that I am not behind it.
Anyone *foolish enough to* challenge you will fall to you.
16 I have created the blacksmith
who readies the fire and forges weapons for wars;
And I have created the destroyer to ravage and ruin.
17 But no instrument forged against you will be allowed to hurt you,
and no voice raised to condemn you will successfully prosecute you.
It's that simple; this is how it will be for the servants of the Eternal;
I will vindicate them.

55 **Eternal One:** If you are thirsty, come here;
come, there's water *for all.*
Whoever is *poor and* penniless can still
come and buy *the food I sell.*
There's no cost—here, have some food, *hearty and delicious,*
and beverages, *pure and good.*
2 I don't understand why you spend your money for things that don't nourish
or work so hard for what leaves you empty.
Attend to Me and eat what is good;
enjoy the richest, *most delectable* of things.
3 Listen closely, and come *even* closer.
My words will give life,
for I will make a covenant with you that cannot be broken, *a promise*
Of My enduring *presence and* support like I gave to David.*
4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander among the nations.
5 Now you will issue a call to nations *from all over the world—*
people whom you do not know and who do not know you.
They will come running, because of *Me,* your God
because the Eternal, the Holy One of Israel, has made you beautiful.

6 *So turn your attention and* seek the Eternal One while it is still possible;
call on Him while He is nearby.
7 Let those who are busy plotting violence and doing wrong
stop *right now,* turn, and do right.

* 55:3 Acts 13:34

Let them turn *back* to the Eternal
so they can experience His
compassion.
God will excuse our past wrongs. Our
God's forgiveness is inexhaustible.

Eternal One: [8]My intentions are not
always yours,
and I do not go about things as
you do.
[9]My thoughts and My ways are
above and beyond you,
just as heaven is far from your
reach here on earth.
[10]For as rain and snow can't go back
once they've fallen,
but soak into the ground
And nourish the plants that grow,
providing seed to the farmer
and bread for the hungry,
[11]So it is when I declare something.
My word will go out and not
return to Me empty,
But it will do what I wanted;
it will accomplish what I
determined.
[12]For you will go out in joy, be led
home in peace.
And as you go the land itself will
break out in cheers;
The mountains and the hills will
erupt in song,
and the trees of the field will
clap their hands.
[13]Prickly thorns and nasty briers will
give way
to luxurious shade trees, *sweet
and good.*
And they'll remind you of the
Eternal One
and how God can be trusted
absolutely and forever.

► The triumph of God over Israel's enemies is certain. Filled with joy and expectation, God's covenant people leave behind a strange country and begin the long, dangerous journey back to the promised land. But instead of fear and trepidation at the potential perils ahead, they are overwhelmed with a sense of peace and joy. Instead of holding dangers around every turn, the land and creation itself join in the celebration to welcome the exiles home. There is no need to worry about long, hard climbs or treacherous descents, for the mountains and the hills cheer them on. There's no need to fret about shade from the sun's blazing heat, for majestic trees grow up to cast their long, cooling shadows across the desert's arid land. The prophet's vision of the journey home is nearly complete.

56

Eternal One: *Take care that you*
do what is right and fair,
because before you know it,
I will come to save you;
Soon you will see how I rescue.
[2]God's favor rests on those who
attend to justice,
who devote themselves to doing
what is right,
Who keep the Sabbath and don't
disregard or belittle it,
who keep from doing what is
wrong: *destructive, deceitful,
or violent.*

[3]No stranger who has put trust in the
Eternal should ever say,
"*I don't count.* I'm not part of Eternal's
chosen people."
And no eunuch should ever say,
"I am all dried up, *worthless and
empty*."
[4]For this is what the Eternal has to say:

Eternal One: The eunuchs who keep
My Sabbaths,
make good choices, and follow
the terms of My covenant
will blossom with My blessing.
[5]I will give them, within My house,
an *enduring* memorial
and a name better than if they
had sons and daughters—
A name that will never be forgotten
and will continue *to inspire
and encourage* forever.
[6]And of those strangers who *are
not among the chosen people
Israel*
yet have bound themselves to
the Eternal,
Attend to God, and love all that the
Eternal is *and does;*
if they serve Him, keep the
Sabbath, *make good choices,*
and cling to the terms of the
covenant,

7I will bring them into My holy
mountain *where no foreigner is allowed*
and give them a joyful welcome
within My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will find acceptance on My altar
because My house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.*

► These words must have come as a surprise to the Hebrews. They were the called-out ones and had been commanded to keep themselves separate from their pagan neighbors. Now they hear these words of inclusion. They are told it doesn't matter who they are or where they've come from or what "imperfections" they might have. Any who have bound themselves to Israel's God—even if they're not Israel, even if they are not "whole"—belong to Him and will enjoy all the wonders that He has in store for them. One day it will be clear that they are a sign of God's goodness and mercy, that God's justice is on display through their lives. They are to live as the light of God to the neighboring countries.

8And the One who brings all Israel together, the Lord, the Eternal, declares:

Eternal One: *I am not done yet.* I will
still gather more to this
community.

9Bring in the *ravenous, vicious* beasts from
forests and fields;
bring them in to pillage Jerusalem to
rip and eat!
10Those who should be guarding *and directing the people*
are blind and ignorant *at best.*
They are no better than hounds who
can't be bothered to bark *at trouble;*
they lie around, *lost in their* dreams,
loving their sleep.
11But these dogs sure love to eat.
They can't get enough, *greedily devouring Judah.*
They are shepherds with no
understanding,
guides with no sense of direction.
So they've all scattered, each out for
himself,
trying to figure out how best to gain
advantage.
12"Come on!" they say, "I'll get the wine;
we'll get our fill of booze.
Day after day, it just keeps getting
better!"*

57 **Eternal One:** The person who
does what is right dies,
and no one cares.
Good people are carted off, and
no one understands why.
For those who are in the right are
taken away
and spared a face-to-face
encounter with evil.
2*Nevertheless,* those who go through
life with integrity and
righteousness
will rest in peace and die in
their own beds.

3But you, you *two-faced* witch's
spawn, come here.
You are adultery's children,
prostitution's offspring.
4Who is it that you mock?
Whom do you tease and taunt
with your vulgar gestures?
You are born of deceit and lies, *and nursed on violence and wrong.*
5You get all excited *by other deities and are stimulated by their rituals,*
prancing around lush trees and
sacrificing *innocent* children
In valleys and beneath cliffs, *dark and sinister.*
6You've made your choice.
You've thrown in your lot with
idols and smooth stones in
dark ravines,
Wining and dining strange gods with
offerings of drink and grain.
And you expect Me to tolerate
this?

7You've made your bed in the "sacred
places,"
given offerings, *and made prayers*
on high and lofty mountains.

* 56:7 Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46 * 56:12 Greek manuscripts omit this verse.

8*You declare your obedience to Me,*
but all hidden away—as if I
couldn't see;
behind the very door and
doorpost, you set up your
shrine.
You turned your back on Me and
snuck off to be intimate with
other deities;
you made promises to them and
bound yourself to them all
tight and close.
9You offered oils and musky
ointments to Molech, *your*
lover-god,
and sent your servants to *exotic*
places far away,
Sent them down even into the
grave
to increase your pleasure with a
variety of deities.
10And even when the journey wore
you out, your lust drove
you on.
You did not give up, thinking it
hopeless,
But you found strength and
renewed your resolve.
11Who are you afraid of?
I don't know why you lied to Me
about it;
You never seemed to care what I
thought.
Maybe I've been patient and
quiet too long—
Is that why you've lost all respect
for Me?
12I will tell the story of your
righteousness and good
deeds,
but they can't help you now.
13Not even this hodge-podge of idols
you call gods can help you.
They'll not come to your aid if
you cry for help.
They're nothing. A *gentle* breeze
could blow them away;
a breath could topple them,
But whoever stays true to Me,
whoever looks to Me for help
and support
will inherit the land and possess
My holy mountain.

14*For those who cling to the true God,* it is
said,
"Clear the way that they travel; widen
the roads and make them smooth!
Take away any difficulty so that they
may go easily!"

15For the highest God above,
who is and always will be, the *only*
One who is holy has this to say:

Eternal One: I live in the high and holy
place,
yet I am with the low, the weak,
and the humble.
I renew their vitality and revive
their strength.
16For I will not struggle against them
forever,
and I won't always be angry.
For the human spirit would grow
faint—
the breath of life I created *would*
soon grow weak.
17*Yes,* they infuriated Me with how
they profited from their
greed and violence,
so I struck them down and
turned My back on them,
And still they persisted in their
wrongdoing.
18I have seen how they act, but I will
still *bind them up and* make
them well again.
I will show them the way,
comfort and console them.
19I will create in them a desire to
praise.
"Peace, peace, to those far away.
All will be well, wherever you are."
And I will heal them.
20By contrast, the wicked are *all*
riled up
like a storm-tossed sea that
cannot be calmed.
Its *crashing* waves wash up muck
and dirt *on the shore.*
21But there will be no peace for the
wicked.

So says my God.

58 **Eternal One:** Tell My people
about their wrongdoing;
shout with a voice like a
trumpet;
Hold nothing back: say this people
of Jacob's line and heritage
have failed to do what is right.

2And yet they look for Me every day.
They *pretend to* want to learn
what I teach,
As if they are indeed a nation good
and true,
as if they hadn't really turned
their backs on My directives.

They even ask Me, *as though they care,*
about what I want them to be and do, as if they really want Me in their lives.

People: [3]Why didn't You notice how *diligently* we fasted before You?
We humbled ourselves *with pious practices* and You paid no attention.

Eternal One: *I have to tell you,* on those fasting days,
all you were *really* seeking was your own pleasure;
Besides you were busy *defrauding people and* abusing your workers.
[4]Your *kind of* fasting *is pointless, for it* only leads to *bitter* quarrels,
contentious *backbiting,* and vicious fighting.
You are not fasting today because you want Me to hear your voice.
[5]What kind of a fast do I choose? Is a true fast simply
some religious exercise for making a person feel miserable and woeful?
Is it about how you bow your head (like a *bent* reed), how you dress (in sackcloth), and where you sit (in a bed of ashes)?
Is this what you call a fast, a day the Eternal One finds good and proper?
[6]No, what I want in a fast is this:
to liberate those tied down and held back by injustice,
to lighten the load of those heavily burdened,
to free the oppressed and shatter every type of oppression.
[7]A fast *for Me* involves sharing your food with people who have none,
giving those who are homeless a space in your home,
Giving clothes to those who need them, and not neglecting your own family.

[8]Then, *oh then,* your light will break out like the *warm, golden rays of a* rising sun;
in an instant, you will be healed.
Your rightness will precede *and protect* you;
the glory of the Eternal will follow and defend you.
[9]Then when you do call out, *"My God, Where are You?"*
The Eternal One will answer, "I am here, *I am here.*"
If you remove the yoke of oppression *from the downtrodden among you,*
stop accusing others, and do away with mean and inflammatory speech,
[10]If you make sure that the hungry and oppressed have all that they need,
then your light will shine in the darkness,
And even your bleakest moments will be bright as a clear day.
[11]The Eternal One will never leave you;
He *will* lead you *in the way that you should go.*
When you feel dried up *and worthless,*
God will nourish you and give you strength.
And you will grow like a garden *lovingly* tended;
you will be like a spring whose water never runs out.
[12]*You will discover* there are people among your own
who can rebuild *this broken-down city out of* the ancient ruins;
You will firm up its ancient foundations.
And *all around,* others will call you "Repairer of Broken Down Walls" and "Rebuilder of Livable Streets."

Eternal One: [13]If because of the Sabbath you set aside your own pursuits and pleasure,
and you honor the Sabbath and sanctify that day by leaving it to and for the Eternal—
If you speak of Sabbath-delight but avoid speaking idle words,
and refuse to get *caught up and* busy with your interests *and concerns*—
[14]Then you will discover joy such as only the Eternal can give.
And I will raise you high and make your reach as wide as the earth,
And you will live on all that I promised to Jacob,
your ancestor, the *heart of Israel.*

The Eternal One said these very things.

59 The Eternal One's reach is not
so short that He cannot
save you.
His ear is not so deaf that He cannot
hear you.

► Reactions vary to the awful events that sweep over Judah in the wake of the Babylonian invasion. Some people think that the God of Israel is defeated. This is exactly what the Babylonians hope the people will think and say; it makes the job of the tyrants and their deputies that much easier. So when the prophet announces that Israel's God can and will rescue His displaced people, many reason that God may want to rescue them but cannot, for He is no match for the might of Babylon. Others are apparently wondering if God simply couldn't hear their cries for help in the first place. Is Babylon too powerful? Are the exiles too far from home to be heard? The prophet knows the fears that reside in anxious hearts; but more than that, he knows the truth.

2 Your *persistent* wrongdoing has come
between you and your God;
since you *constantly* reject and push
God away,
He had to turn aside and ignore your cries.
3 For your hands are covered with blood;
your fingers *are sticky* with *all
manner of* crimes;
Your lips drip *vicious* lies;
your tongue mutters *all manner of*
wickedness.
4 Everyone misuses the judicial system,
clogging it with *twisted accusations
and* misleading testimony.
With empty charges and *baseless* lies
they conceive trouble and give birth
to injustice.
5 *They concoct and create the most
poisonous things;*
it's as if they hatch vipers' eggs or
weave spiders' webs.
Eat their eggs and die; crush one and a
viper is hatched—
yet more poison, hurt, and distrust.
6 There is nothing of value in their
creations—
the webs they weave are not fit to
clothe or cover anyone.
The products they make are *nothing but*
trouble;
violence comes naturally to them.
7 Their feet race to do evil;
they rush to shed innocent blood;
Their thoughts are bent toward injustice;
destruction and trouble line the
roads of their lives.
8 They never travel the path of peace;*
no justice is found where they have
been.
They set a course down crooked roads;
no one who follows their lead has a
chance of knowing peace.

People: 9 That's why we can't make
things right;
good and true can't gain any
ground on us.
We look *earnestly* for a bright spot,
but there isn't
even a glimmer *of hope;* it's
darkness all around.
10 We are left to stumble along,
grabbing at whatever seems
solid,
like the blind *finding their
way down a strange and
threatening street.*
In broad daylight—*when we should
have sight*—we stumble and
fall as in the dark.
We are already like the dead
among those brimming with
health.
11 We growl like bears and moan like
doves.
We hope *that maybe, just maybe,*
it will all turn out right;
But it doesn't. We look for liberation,
but it's too far away.
12 For our wrongdoing *runs too deep*
before You.
Our sins stack up against us—
sure evidence of our guilt.
For our offenses are always with us;
*they are insidious and lasting,
as You know.*
Our guilt says it all. We know
it, too.
13 We *took You for nothing, and* did
just the opposite of Your
commands.
We broke our promises to You,
ignored and rejected You.

* 59:7-8 Romans 3:15-17

We hatched up schemes to oppress
others and rebel, to twist the
truth *for our gain*
while presenting it as honest-to-
God fact.
14When justice calls, we turn it away.
Righteousness *knows to* keep its
distance,
For truth stumbles in the public
square,
and honesty is not allowed to
enter.
15There is no truth-telling anymore,
and anyone who tries to do right
finds he is the *next* target.

It's true. The Eternal One saw *it all*
and was understandably perturbed
at the absence of justice.
16God looked *long and hard,* but there
wasn't a single person
who tried to put a stop *to the*
injustice and lies.
So God took action. His own *strong* arm
reached out and brought salvation.
His own righteousness—*good and*
pure—sustained Him.
17*But God's equipment was that of no*
ordinary warrior:
He strapped on righteousness as His
breastplate,
And put on the helmet of salvation.
Wrapped in vengeance for clothing
and passion as a cloak, *God*
prepared for war.
18*Finally, God determined* they must get
what they've earned:
fury to those who oppose Him,
vengeance against those who are
against Him.
To the ends of the known world, God
will go to render justice.
19This is how people from east to west will
come to respect the name
and honor the glory of the Eternal.
For He will come on like a torrential flood
driven by the Eternal's winds.

Eternal One: 20The Redeemer will come
to *make* Zion *right again,*
to rescue those of Jacob's *holy*
line who turn their backs on
wrongdoing.

This is what the Eternal One declares.

Eternal One: 21This is My covenant promise to them:* My Spirit, which rests on *and moves in* you, and My words, which I have placed within you, will *continue to* be spoken among you *and move you to action.* And not only you, but so it will be for your children and their children too. And so on through the generations for all time.

► Once again the scene shifts. The exile is receding in the past and the remnant of Israel—those who survived God's judgment and Babylon's cruelty—are working hard to rebuild their lives and communities. But life back in Jerusalem under Persian rule is not faring as well as they hoped. So once again a prophetic voice breaks the silence to address a discouraged population. Most people are facing terrific difficulties. Despite what their prophets have spoken, Jerusalem is a mere shadow of the great city their parents and grandparents knew. People doubt whether God is really alive, or really all that powerful, or really even cares. But the faithful know that God is powerful and does care; they are determined to convince their countrymen that He has their well-being in mind. He can make this people and this place great again, if they just trust and follow Him. Soon the whole world will be caught up in this brand new thing God is doing.

This section of Isaiah is written to a singular female as if she is the mother of the Jews. But this woman isn't just any woman—she is Jerusalem. Cities are often described as female because they are like mothers supporting a brood of children (the population). This capital city of God's special favor, of God's presence, is filled with His people of the promise and is poised to become something new and glorious.

60 Arise, shine, for your light has
broken through!
The Eternal One's brilliance
has dawned upon you.
2*See truly;* look *carefully*—darkness
blankets the earth;

* 59:20-21 Romans 11:26-27

people all over are cloaked in darkness.
But God will rise *and shine* on you;
the Eternal's bright glory will shine on you, *a light for all to see.*
3Nations *north and south, peoples east and west,* will be drawn to your light,
will find purpose and direction by your light.
In the radiance of your rising, you will enlighten the leaders of nations.

4*Don't be shy; don't be doubtful;* lift up your eyes and look around.
They have gathered all around you,
eager to come *and be close* to you.
And your children will come back to this land:
your sons from the farthest places *of wandering,*
and your daughters gently carried *home.*
5And when you see it, your face will glow;
your heart will race and be filled with joy;
For *great* ships will arrive with gifts from across the sea,
and the wealth of nations will make their way to you.
6Herd after herd of camels will cover the land,
caravans arriving *daily* from *south and southwest:* Midian, Ephah,
Even Sheba with gifts of gold and frankincense.
They will announce *for all the world to hear,* "The Eternal be praised!"
7Kedar's flocks will be gathered for you;
Nebaioth's rams will be available for sacrifices.

Eternal One: When they are offered on My altar, I will accept them.
I will make My glorious house *even* more glorious.

8Who are these sailing *to our ports* like clouds through the sky,
like doves *winging their way home* to their window sills?

9*Breezy* coastlands will wait expectantly for Me; the ships of Tarshish arrive first
to bring your children back from distant lands
Carrying in their holds the silver and gold—
to honor the name of the Eternal your God,
The Holy One of Israel who has made you beautiful.
10People will come from different countries and different cultures
to rebuild *Jerusalem's* walls *and make her strong again.*
Their kings will help you *however you need.*

Eternal One: I punished you because I was furious *with you,*
reduced you to little on account of your persistent wrongdoing;
But I will restore you, *reclaim you, and rebuild you* because I cannot help but love you.

11Now your gates will stay open to a constant *stream of gifts;*
all day and night they will not be shut
As the wealth of nations is brought to you
with their kings leading the processions.
12Any nations *that abstain,* any peoples who decline from serving you
will simply disappear;
they will be destroyed.

Eternal One: 13*Meanwhile,* the most beautiful materials will arrive from Lebanon—
cypress, box, and pine—to *rebuild and* decorate the place where I promised to be,
My house where I will rest in glory *among you.*

14And all the children of those who had *bullied you, attacked and* abused you,
all those who hated you will come crawling on their knees and bowing at your feet.
And they will address you as "city of *God, place of* the Eternal,
the Holy One of Israel's Zion, *sweet heaven on earth.*"

Eternal One: 15Although you have suffered abandonment, hatred, *and hopeless despair,*
and no one *dared to* pass through,
I will make you a place of lofty beauty for all time,
filled and overflowing with joy from generation to generation.

This Hebrew title "Messiah" is based on a verb rightly translated "to anoint." Kings and priests are "messiah-ed" during this period. But prophets like Isaiah and those who stand in the tradition of the great Hebrew prophets are also anointed. Living and working in Jerusalem in these days is much different than in earlier times. Wracked by the ages and ruined by overt destruction and covert neglect, the citizens of the holy city face disillusionment and disappointment. The people who come back after exile in Babylon do not return to a gloriously restored city and temple, but to a difficult land and contentious neighbors. The prophet is inspired by the spirit of God to restore hope, to help, and to comfort. As a spiritual guide he is compelled to convince people that God remains with them and that He still desires what is good, right, and true for and within them. Centuries later, in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus will pick up the scroll of Isaiah and read these inspiring words. He will say in no uncertain terms that the Scriptures are being fulfilled right then and there in their hearing (Luke 4:16-21). The year of jubilee will have arrived.

16 You will be enriched by the world
and its kings,
and you will know for certain
that I am the Eternal,
Your Liberator, your Redeemer, the
Strong One of Jacob.

17 I will bring you gold instead of
bronze, silver instead of iron,
bronze instead of wood, iron
instead of stone.
Your government will be founded and
grounded;
I will make peace your governor,
and righteousness your ruler.

18 You'll never hear again, *"Help! Call the*
guards!"
Violence, destruction, and ruin will
be things of the past in Jerusalem.
You will name the city walls Salvation,
and the city gates Praise.

19 You won't need the sun to brighten the day
or the moon *and lamps* to give you
light.
The Eternal One will be all the light you
ever need.
Your God will provide your glory,
brilliance for all time.
20 Your sun will never set;
your moon will never be eclipsed in
shadow,
For you'll bask in the Eternal's light *and*
silver splendor forever.
Never again will you suffer the *dark*
night *of despair and gloom* of
mourning.
21 All the people will be right with God,
and they'll stay in the land they
possess forever.

Eternal One: I will plant them there like
a *sturdy* sapling with My own
hands.
I will tend them and take pride
in their growing.
22 *Just watch,* they will develop
robustly;
from so small a beginning, they
will multiply and become a
mighty nation.
I, the Eternal One, will make it
happen soon.

61 The Spirit of the Lord, the
Eternal, is on me.
The Lord has appointed me
for a special purpose.
He has anointed me to bring good news
to the poor.
He has sent me to repair broken
hearts,
And to declare to those who are held
captive and bound in prison,
"Be free *from your imprisonment*!"
2 *He has sent me* to announce the year *of*
jubilee, the season of the Eternal's
favor:
for our enemies it will be a day of
God's wrath;
For those who mourn it will be *a time of*
comfort.*
3 As for those who grieve over Zion,
God has sent me to give them a
beautiful crown in exchange for
ashes,
To anoint them with gladness instead of
sorrow,
to wrap them in *victory, joy, and*
praise instead of depression and
sadness.

* 61:1-2 Luke 4:18-19

People will call them *magnificent, like great towering* trees
standing for what is right.
They stand to the glory of the Eternal
who planted them.

4And they will rebuild *this place from* its ancient ruins;
they will restore the ages-old, *once-splendid* structures;
They will renew *Israel's* ruined cities
from the ashes and debris that laid *untouched* for many generations.
5And people will come from all over *to serve you*:
Outsiders will tend your flocks, plough your fields, and prune your vines.
6You will be known as *the ones specially* chosen by the Eternal as priests;
people will speak of you as ministers of our God.
And the wealth of nations will come to you for your delight and enrichment.
7Many called you disgraced *and defiled* and said that shame should be your share of things.
Yet you suffered doubly and lived in disgrace;
So double will be your share, and with joy everlasting.

Eternal One: 8For I, the Eternal, love justice.
I hate stealing and *all manner of* wrongdoing.
In faithfulness to those *who do justice, I promise* they will be rewarded *for their work*;
and I will establish an everlasting covenant with them.
9Furthermore, I will promise them My support for their children,
so that all nations and everyone around
Will see that they are the children blessed by the Eternal God.

10I am filled with joy and my soul vibrates with exuberant *hope,*
because of the Eternal my God;
For He has dressed me with the garment of salvation,
wrapped me with the robe of righteousness.
It's as though I'm dressed for my wedding day,*
in the very best: a bridegroom's garland and a bride's jewels.
11The whole earth sprouts *newness and life in the springtime,*
and green shoots break through the well-seeded garden soil.
That's what it is like with the Eternal's *victory*—
the Lord will cause justice and praise to sprout up before all the nations, *for all peoples to see.*

62 I will not keep quiet for Zion's sake;
I will not remain silent
Until Jerusalem's justice shines like the light of a new day
and her liberation blazes like a torch *in the dead of night.*
2*Jerusalem,* the nations *of the world* will witness your righteousness,
the most powerful world leaders *will see* your brilliance,
And you will be called something new, *something brand new,*
a name given by *none other than* the Eternal One.
3And you will be the crowning glory of the Eternal's *power,*
a royal crown cradled in His palm and held *aloft* by your God *for all to see.*
4People won't talk about you anymore using words like "forsaken" or "empty."
Instead, you will be called "My delight" and the land around you "Married,"
because the Eternal is pleased with you and has bound Himself to your land.
5As a young man marries the woman *he loves,*
so your sons will marry you, *Jerusalem.*
As a groom takes joy in his bride,
so your God will take joy in you.

6I have stationed watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem.
Day and night, they never stop calling out.
You, *too,* must not rest *or grow silent*;
keep reminding the Eternal *to watch over Jerusalem.*
7*Tirelessly pester God*—give Him no rest—until He reestablishes Jerusalem
and makes it worthy of praise throughout the whole world.
8The Eternal has promised with all divine power and might:

* 61:10 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

A divine drama is played out with the chorus on one side, the soloist on the other. The "people" ask a question, and God rings out a response. Dramatic, to say the least. What trials and tribulations the Israelites have been through! What highs and lows! It is all God's doing in response to their faithlessness. But this is history, and now they find themselves living and working in a brand new time; a new day is coming—of restoration, peace, and glorious reputation for God's people such as they've never had before. The renewal is international in scope, without peer in the world. And this, too, is God's doing. His capacity for mercy is great. He loves His people beyond comprehension. This is why He should be recognized and appreciated by all as the one True God. He keeps saving and delivering, restoring and supporting the people, just as God has done since that moment of binding promise made so long ago.

Eternal One: I will never again turn over
your assets to your enemies,
never feed them from your grain stores
Or give them the wine you have labored to produce.
9Instead, those who harvest the grain will eat its *bounty,*
and offer praise to the Eternal;
And those who gather the grapes will drink of their *richness*
in the courtyards outside the temple.

10So *ready yourselves to* pass through the gates, *from old to new.*
Clear the way for the people;
Make it clear, easy, and straight.
Unfurl the banners *that proclaim*
these people *are renewed!*
11For *none other than* the Eternal has announced for all to hear—

Eternal One: Say to the daughter of Zion
"See, your salvation is coming;
your liberation is on the way—
God's reward is with Him: His work is by His side."

12And they will be called "The Holy People,
Redeemed by the Eternal";
Jerusalem's new name will be
"Desirable City, No Longer Forsaken."

63 Who comes with long, strong strides, marching in strength
from Edom, from Bozrah?
Who is coming, with such grand clothes, steeped in crimson and awesome to see?

Eternal One: It is I, *the Eternal,* who in righteousness declares victory.
I am coming with great power
and I'm ready to save.

2And why are all your clothes red,
as if you've been stomping *on the grapes* in the winepress?

Eternal One: 3And so I have. I have pressed by Myself.
No one was with Me. In my anger, I trampled them;
In my fury, I *alone* squashed them till their blood soaked my clothes
and stained everything I wore.
4For it was *time for Me to act,* time for Me to pay back My enemies
in response to their actions—
My time to set things right again.
5But I looked and there was no one to help.
I was amazed, but none *was ready to* offer support.
So *I had to do it alone, and I did;*
My own power brought salvation; My own wrath energized Me.
6I stomped *and squashed* them furiously.
I made them reel and stagger on *the wine of* My anger,
And I spilled their blood on the ground.

7*So* let me remind you of the Eternal's enduring love, and why we should praise Him.
Let me tell you again how the Eternal gives and gives and gives.

All God's wonders and goodness are
done for Israel's benefit
according to His great mercy and
compassion.

Eternal One: [8]Surely, these are My
people, *and they will be true
to Me*.
My children will not try to
deceive Me.

And *indeed,* God became their Savior.
[9]And when they suffered, God
suffered too;
And the messenger of His presence
acted to save them.
Out of enduring love, compassion,
and concern,
God Himself rescued them. Through all
those years long ago,
God picked them up and carried
them through.
[10]But they rebelled *and ran away*;
they turned their backs on Him and
grieved His Holy Spirit.
And then, God turned *against them,*
became their enemy,
went after them, and took them on.
[11]Then they remembered Moses and those
days long ago:
Where is the One who brought them
safely through the perils of the sea
With the shepherd of His flock leading
them?
Where is the One who sent His Holy
Spirit among the people?

[12]*Where is the God* who put His power in
Moses' right hand
and divided the waters before the
Israelites,
Making an everlasting name for Himself
as the true and living God?
[13]*Where is* the One who led them through
the sea?
Like a horse in the desert, they never
stumbled.
[14]Like cattle that move down *to find rest* in
the valley,
the Spirit of the Eternal led them to
rest.
You did that for Your people and gained
a glorious reputation *in the world.*

People: [15]Look down from heaven—
peer down from that sacred,
magnificent place where
You live.
What happened to Your passion,
love, and compassion *that
sought us out*?
Where are Your powerful actions
that used to support us?
[16]Even though Abraham would not
know us and Israel would
disown us,
You are our Father!
Nevertheless, from way back,
You, the Eternal, are our Father;
we have called You our
Redeemer from long ago.
[17]O Eternal One, why do You make
us wander off and direct our
minds
and harden our hearts, so that
we no longer respect You?
Please come back to us, for we are
Your servants;
we are the tribes that have been
Yours *through the generations.*
[18]For such a short time Your holy
people possessed Your holy
place *in Jerusalem*;
then our enemies *invaded and*
trampled all over it.
[19]We've become *like strangers to
You,*
like people You never ruled,
Like those never associated with
Your name.

64 If only You would rip open the
heavens
and come down to earth—
Its heights *and depths* would quake the
moment You appear,
[2]Like kindling when it just begins to
catch fire, or like water that's
about to boil.
If only You would come like that so
that all who *deny or* hate You
Would know who You are and *be*
terrified of Your grandeur.

► The prophet is convinced that there is no hope apart from God's decisive action. It is not enough to address God's people and the nations and urge them to do better next time. The world cannot be repaired this way; in fact, it can't be repaired from below at all. It must be made new from above. So the prophet turns to God and utters a prayer, "Rip open the heavens. Come down. Strike your enemies with terror. Do for us what You did for Your people in times past." This is what it will take

to restore God's people, illumine the nations, and repair a world desperately broken by sin.

3 *We remember that long ago* You did
amazing things *for us*
that we had never dreamed You'd do.
You came down, and the mountains
shook at Your presence.
4 Nothing like that had ever happened
before—no eye had ever seen,
and no ear had ever heard such
wonders,
But You did them then for the sake
of Your people, for those who
trusted in You.
5 You meet whoever tries with sincerity of
purpose *to do what You want*—
to do justice and follow in Your
ways.
But You became so angry when we
rebelled and committed all sorts
of wrongs;
we have continued in our sins for
a long time. So how can we be
saved?
6 We are all messed up like a person
compromised with impurity;
even all our right efforts are like
soiled rags.
We're drying up like a leaf *in autumn* and
are blown away by wrongdoing.
7 *And it's so sad because* no one calls out
to You
or even bothers to approach You
anymore.
You've been absent from us *too long*;
You left us to dissolve away in the
acrid power of our sins.
8 Still, Eternal One, You are our Father.
We are just clay, and You are the
potter.
We are the product of Your *creative*
action, shaped and formed *into
something of worth.*
9 Don't be so angry anymore, O Eternal;
don't always remember our wrongs.
Please, look around and see that we are
all Your people.
10 The places that You sanctified are
reduced to nothing.
Zion is a wasteland; Jerusalem sits in
eerie desolation.
11 Our holy and glorious temple, where our
ancestors worshiped You,
has been burned *to the ground*;
Everything we loved is ruined *by our
enemies,*
a smoking pile of ash and debris.
12 Now with all this, Eternal, will You just
stand by and watch?
will You keep silent and let us
continue to suffer?

65 **Eternal One:** I was ready and
willing to help before
anyone even asked.
I was found by people who did
not seek Me;
I *showed My face and* said, "Here I
am! I am right here!"
to a nation which did not call
on Me.*
2 I *kept extending Myself to a people
who don't care a whit.*
All day long I opened my hands
to those who constantly
work against Me,
Those busy pursuing their own
rotten path, inspired by their
own *rotten* schemes.*
3 These people continue to insult Me,
right to My face,
pursuing other gods, sacrificing
in gardens
And offering incense on altars
made of bricks.
4 They sit among the graves and spend
their nights in secret rituals;
they eat the flesh of pigs and
pollute their pots with
unclean meats.
5 They *have the gall to* say, "Oooh, not
so close! I am holier than
you!"
These *unholy* people are smoke
in My nostrils,
A fire that burns and burns all day.
6 Look and see what stands written
before Me:
"I will not remain silent *and
watch this disgrace;*
But I will pay them back for what
they have done.
I will pour their pay directly into
their laps.
7 *They will pay* for their sins and the
sins of their parents too.
For they *turned to other gods,*
burned incense on the
mountains
And insulted Me on the hillsides.
I will bring everything they
deserve back to them, to
their very core."

* 65:1 Romans 10:20 * 65:2 Romans 10:21

8This is what the Eternal has to say:

Eternal One: It's like *noticing* the
promise of new wine in a
cluster of grapes.
One will say, "Don't destroy
them all; some of them are
bound to be good."
So for the sake of My servants,
I won't destroy absolutely
everyone.
9But I will bring up children from
Jacob's line *to inherit this land.*
To *Jacob's son* Judah I will give
My mountains.
These, My chosen ones, will
inherit it;
these, My servants, will live
there *and call it home.*
10From *the plains of* Sharon to the
valley of Achor,
My people—who look to Me *and*
no other—
Will have pasture for their sheep
and safe places for their herds.
11But those of you who ignore *Me,* the
Eternal One—
who *turn away from My*
sanctuaries
And reject My holy mountain
to chase *Lady* Luck and cater to
Destiny—
12Will find *yourselves a bit unlucky and*
your destiny an early death.
You'll bow down *and be killed*
like sheep brought to the
slaughter
Because when I called you, you did
not answer;
when I spoke, you refused to
listen.
Instead you did all the wrong things
and made *terrible* choices—
what I expressly said that I hate.

13So this is what the Lord, the Eternal, has
to say:

Eternal One: My servants will eat *and*
eat well, while you go hungry;
My servants will drink *and*
be satisfied, while you are
parched with thirst;
My servants will celebrate with joy,
while you are put to shame.
14My servants will sing with
gladness in their hearts,
While you cry out in anguish *and*
despair and bemoan your
brokenness.
15And when you are gone, your name will
become a curse—
a repugnant byword—to My chosen
people;
The Eternal God will put you to death
and call His servants by a new name
altogether.
16Whoever speaks a blessing in this *special*
land
will invoke the God of truth;
Whoever takes a vow in the land *of*
promise
will make his pledge by the God of
truth.
For the *bitterness and* pain of earlier times
will nevermore come to mind;
they'll be hidden even from My eyes,
God says.

Eternal One: 17Now look here!
I am creating new heavens and
a new earth.
The *weary and painful* past will be
as if it never happened.
No one will talk or even think
about it anymore.
18So take joy and celebrate with
unending gladness
on account of what I am creating.
Look carefully! I am making
this place I've chosen, this
Jerusalem, a city of joy.
I'm making her citizens, *My*
people, a people of gladness.
19This Jerusalem, My *pride and* joy,
and her people will be a
delight to Me.
Though you listen at every corner,
You will never hear crying, never
hear despair or grief.

20Never again will a person not live a
full life,
for the young will live to be a
hundred
And any who die earlier will be
considered cursed.

21People will *confidently* build houses
and make them their homes;
they will plant vineyards and
enjoy their fruit *for years to*
come.
22They won't worry that someone
else will *come along, drive*
them out,
and take it all away.
For My people will live as long as
these age-old trees;
My chosen will use up and wear
out whatever they make.

[23]They will not work hard for what
others take away;
they will not lose children to
sudden terror and death.
For they are the offspring of those
blessed by the Eternal;
they and their descendants *will
enjoy God's blessings.*
[24]I'll anticipate their prayers and
respond before they know it;
even as they speak, I will hear.
[25]But they'll all eat together *like
friends*—wolf and lamb, lion
and ox,
and the *biting* snake will feed
on dust.
When that day arrives, there will be
no evil, no violence, *no hurt
or wrong*
in all My sacred mountain.

► The creation the prophet sees—the new earth—is radically different from the one everyone knows. At some deep level, everyone recognizes that the everyday world is not the world as God intends it; things are not the way they are supposed to be. But God will make everything new again. In that day, the painful past will recede and vanish. Unbridled joy and celebration will eclipse grief and sorrow. Jerusalem, the holy city, will become the center of the world. Long lives will be the norm. Peace will be secure without exception. God's blessing will settle over all creation. Creation itself, with all its complexities, will be made new. No predator. No prey. Just peace and harmony throughout. This is a world only God can create when He creates it anew.

66 **Eternal One:** Heaven is My
throne, and earth is
where I rest My feet.
So what kind of structure would
you build Me?
What *man-made* space could
provide Me a resting place?
[2]Everything is the product of My
hand—*My being and My
doing*—
that's how all *you see* came to
be; *I made it all.**
Nevertheless, I am interested in and
concerned about even just
one person
who is humble and
downhearted and trembles
at my word.

► If we could see things as they truly are, we'd see the universe as one giant temple founded and perfected by God's hand. But even the universe with its staggering dimensions—dimensions that stretch the imagination—cannot contain its Maker. God is greater still. So how could some house made for Him on earth ever be grand enough, glorious enough, great enough? It could not; but with all His greatness and power, God still has His eye on us. What does God want from us if not the best building we can build, and also the most and best sacrifices and rituals that we can possibly perform? Simply put, God is looking for people who are humble, broken, and ready to follow what He says.

Eternal One: [3]Whoever slaughters an
ox *without humility* is no
better
than one who kills a man;
Whoever sacrifices a lamb *without
brokenness* is no different
than one who breaks a dog's
neck;
Whoever presents a grain offering
without fear is no different
than one who offers pig's blood;
Whoever burns incense *without
obedience* is no better
than one who worships an idol.
They've made their own choices
and seem happy enough with
their detestable practices.
[4]*But I have a choice, too,* and I choose
to punish them;
I will bring on them what they
fear *most.*
For when I called, no one answered;
when I spoke, they refused to
listen.

* 66:1-2 Acts 7:49-50

Instead they did all the wrong
things and made *terrible*
choices—
what I expressly said that I hate.

► God desires to bring people like these close and make them safe, but He cannot if they refuse. His loving purpose is for them to live well, to be well, but He cannot make it so if they choose badly and do what He hates.

5So, *if* you *are one* who trembles at His
word,
listen closely to what the Eternal
One has to say:

Eternal One: *I know that some people,*
even your own family,
reject you because you
accept Me,
And they're saying, "Let the Eternal
receive the honor *He*
deserves,
so that we, *too,* can know your
joy." But they'll only know
sorrow and shame.
6*Can you hear it?* There's a
commotion in the city,
great rumbling coming from the
temple area!
Ah, it is the Eternal thundering in
to take on His foes.

7-8Have you ever heard of a woman
who gave birth before she
went into labor?
Have you ever seen a woman
who delivered a son without
feeling a thing?
Do you think it's possible for the
land to go through labor in
an instant,
or to bear a nation, to be *new*
and strong, in a single day?
Nevertheless, Zion suffered only a
moment
before she gave birth to her
children!
9Will I open the womb and not
deliver?
I have made this place labor in
terrible pain,
But do you think I won't help it give
birth?
That is what I, the Eternal One
have to say.

► The prophet reflects on the mystery of birth. Jerusalem, the mother, is about to give birth to a new nation. God, the midwife, is there to make sure the birth goes well. Throughout Isaiah's prophecy it is clear that God has initiated all the things that have happened to Israel and Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem and her glorious temple, the decades of exile in a foreign land, and now the return and restoration of Jerusalem are God's work, pure and simple. Now all of these events and judgments point to a single moment when Jerusalem will resume its place as God's chosen city and will open its gates to believing pilgrims. The prophet asks: will God prevent this new birth from happening? After having brought His people this far, it is unthinkable that God would turn back now.

Eternal One: 10So be happy for
Jerusalem;
give her hearty congratulations,
whoever holds her dear.
Take part in this joyous celebration,
especially if you remember
her grief.
11*For you are her children, and* she
is giving you the milk *of*
comfort and peace.
Drink at her comforting breasts
with satisfaction that all will
be well.
12I will rain down *prosperity on*
Jerusalem, peace abundant
on Zion,
and flood her with wealth from
all over the world.
Like a *thundering* river, *the riches*
will come down.
Like a toddler, you'll be held,
carried, nourished, and
comforted.
13As a mother soothes her child, so I
will comfort you.
And Jerusalem will *be so nice,*
feel so good and safe to you.

14When you see what I have in store,
it will *ease your mind and* lift your heart;
you will flourish like the grass!

► Now is the time for Jerusalem to rejoice. Mourning the fate of Israel and Judah has been a Jewish preoccupation for a long time. Ever since Assyria came down and took the northern territory captive, the people have been grief-stricken. But now that God has announced the good news, mourning is no longer appropriate; it indicates a lack of faith in His plans. After enduring so many years of grief and desolation, can God's covenant people now turn and trust Him to deliver this baby overnight? Trust and joy belong together. Zion is like a fertile young woman; she will have all the children that God wills and she desires. Be happy, the prophet says, and let the celebrations begin.

The Eternal's power will be *clearly* evident to His servants;
but His rage will be unleashed against His enemies.

15Look *now,* the Eternal is coming with a vengeance
that scorches *all His foes* with flames of fire;
Whooshing like a whirlwind, His chariots rush with punishing fury.
16*God comes* with fiery *anger* and *flashing* sword.
The Eternal One will execute His judgment,
And many people will die *on that day.*

Eternal One: 17Those who perform sanctifying and purifying rituals to serve false gods in gardens, and then proceed to do whatever they see the leader do—eating *impure things such as* pigs, snakes, and rats—won't live to do it again. This is My word to you.

18Because I know what and why they do what they do, the time is coming when I will bring people together from all over the world. Everyone will come *here* and *have a chance* to see *and know who I am, in all* My *weighty significance and* splendor. 19I will put a sign among them and send the survivors of My people to Tarshish, Put, and Lud (where those great archers live), *from* Tubal *east of Lud,* and Javan, *which is near it. I'll bring them here* from places so far away that they've never heard My name, much less *had a chance to* see My glory. But they'll hear about Me, far and wide among the nations. 20And they will bring the *surviving* members of your family back as if they are a grain offering from all the nations. They'll come *by every conceivable means*—on horse, camel, *donkey,* or mule, in wagons or litters—they'll come to Jerusalem, My holy mountain. They will be delivered just as the Israelites bring their grain offerings to Me in a clean container at the temple. 21And out of those who return, I will make priests and Levites. This is My word to you.

22Because just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making
will go on by My enduring will,
So your name and the people who come from you will go on as well.
23From one month to the next, on Sabbath after Sabbath,
everyone, every living thing, will come *to this holy place*
To honor Me *as God of all.*
This is My word to you.
24They'll visit the site where the people who rejected Me lie rotting *on the ground,*
crawling with worms that never die on a fire that just keeps smoldering.*
All who see it will recoil at the horrible sight.

* 66:24 Mark 9:48

JEREMIAH

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Oracles of judgment and restoration regarding Judah and Israel

The message of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet

The word of God comes to young Jeremiah in seemingly good times around 627 B.C., when King Josiah of Judah is instituting reforms and the nation is returning to God. But Jeremiah's is an age of great upheaval. The Assyrian Empire that conquered Israel is giving way to a new world power—Babylon. Many find themselves caught in the chaos of these changes, including Judah, her leaders, and her capital, Jerusalem. Because Judah compromises her devotion to God in exchange for mundane treaties with stronger, pagan nations and attractive pagan cults, her days are numbered. Such is the unpopular message Jeremiah is called to proclaim.

Jeremiah dares to speak truth to power—in his own country and beyond. He confronts kings and calls out religious leaders for their empty worship and soothing lies. He holds nothing back in his condemnation of those who abandon God for the worship of pagan idols. These prophecies are difficult to hear and hard to deliver. The strong rebukes and warnings of disaster are spoken by a man sometimes called "the weeping prophet." So vivid and personal are his messages from God that it is clear they are based on a robust, ongoing dialogue between God and His reluctant prophet. Jeremiah invites his audience into such a personal and authentic relationship with God.

The book consists of many different kinds of literature: autobiography, discourses, sermons, and historical narratives. The story does not unfold in a modern, chronological way. Instead, it flashes back and forth among Israel's past, present, and future; between local and international concerns; between declarations of doom and assurances of hope. This collection of oracles and events from the prophet's life are best understood as reflections on the turbulent times in which Jeremiah and his secretary, Baruch, lived.

As an old man, the horror of his predictions comes true before his eyes. Jerusalem falls to Babylon in 586 B.C., and God's rebellious people are scattered and taken into exile. Considered a traitor by many contemporaries, Jeremiah still has great faith that his people will survive and one day return to live in the land of promise. For this reason, Jeremiah may be best known as the prophet of the new covenant, a promise which not only comforts the exiles in his day but later inspires the followers of Jesus as amazing events unfold before their eyes.

1 1-2This is an account of the words *and deeds* of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who lived in *the village of* Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The word of the Eternal came to him *in a series of messages that started coming to the prophet* in the 13th year of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. 3These *disturbing and awesome messages* continued throughout the reign of Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, king of Judah, until Jerusalem was captured in the 5th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons, who was *also* king of Judah.

4*And now the fateful day when* the Eternal One *first* spoke to me:

Eternal One: 5Before I even formed you
in *your mother's* womb,
I knew all about you.
Before you drew your first breath, I
had already chosen you
to be *My* prophet *to speak My word* to the nations.

Jeremiah: 6Ah, Eternal Lord!
I'm too young and inexperienced
to speak *for You.*

Eternal One: 7Don't use your youth as
an excuse;
you *can and* will go wherever I
send you.
You *can and* will say whatever I
tell you to say.
8You have no reason to fear the
people you speak to,
for I am with you and will
defend you.

9Then the Eternal reached out and touched my mouth, and He gave me His *divine* message.

Eternal One: Look, I have placed My
words in you.
You will know what to say now,
for you will be My voice.
10This very day I appointed you to
speak with My authority over
nations and kingdoms.
Your word—My word—will have the power to uproot and
stamp out;
it will destroy and upend.
And then *your word—My word—*
will rebuild and plant
anew.

► Nations and empires will now hear Jeremiah's voice as God's in these days of painful change. To confirm that Jeremiah has indeed been called to speak for God, two simple visions are given to him, each with an explanation. Both speak of coming judgment and remind the young prophet of his difficult assignment.

11The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: What do you see, Jeremiah?

Jeremiah: I see the branch of an almond tree.

Eternal One: 12That's right. From this know that I am watching over My word until it is accomplished.

► Words are the tools of a prophet. The word of God comes asking the prophet what he sees. He responds that he sees something rather ordinary: an almond tree. God uses this ordinary sight to give him an extraordinary message. There is a play on words here between the Hebrew words for "almond" and "watching," which sound alike in that language. Jeremiah sees an almond, which is shaped like a person's eye, and God says He is watching. This playful and clever use of words gets Jeremiah's attention; it stirs his prophetic imagination so that he will similarly use poetry, wordplay, and object lessons to get the attention of his listeners. Just as the almond tree is usually the first sign of spring, soon the first signs of God's approaching judgment will appear.

13Then the word of the Eternal came to me a second time.

Eternal One: What do you see *this time*?

Jeremiah: I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north, *ready to spill out toward the south.*

Eternal One: 14That is because an evil out
of the north will indeed begin spilling
onto the people of this land. 15Watch
now, as I summon the clans and king-
doms of the north to march *against*
Judah, rule with power at the very gates
of Jerusalem, press in on every side, and
vanquish all the cities of Judah. 16I will
declare My sentence for their wicked
crimes. My *own* people have abandoned
Me, burning incense to other gods and
bowing down to handmade *idols.*
17Now stand with courage, and tell
the people exactly what I command.
Don't break down in front of them, or
I will break you Myself. 18*Remember,*
Jeremiah, this very day I have made you
as a fortress, a column as *strong as* iron,
a wall of bronze able to withstand the
attacks of the entire nation of Judah—
from her kings and leaders to the priests
and people. 19*Eventually, they will all give*
you trouble, but you will be safe. They
will fight you, but they will not win.
Remember, I am with you. I promise I
will always deliver you.

2 The word of the Eternal came to me
again.

With Jeremiah as God's mouthpiece, the mighty oracles begin about a loving husband (God) divorcing his unfaithful wife (Judah).

Eternal One: 2Go now, and say this loud
enough for all Jerusalem to hear. Tell
them that the Eternal speaks these words:

"I still remember the way you clung
to Me in your youth, *in the*
early days of our union.
Like a young bride, you loved
the vows you made.
As I led you from slavery in Egypt to
your freedom in Canaan, you
drew close to Me.
Even in the barren wilderness
along the way, *I filled your*
every need.
3*In those days, you,* Israel, were set
apart for *Me,* the Eternal.
You were like the first portions of
the harvest—*devoted and true.*
All who *defied this arrangement*
and ate My portion for
themselves were guilty,
and evil rained down upon
them."

4Listen to the *very* word of the Eternal,
house of Jacob and all the clans of Israel!

Eternal One: 5*What happened between*
us?
What could I have done to your
ancestors that was so wrong,
so unfair?
Why would they pull away from Me
to pursue the empty worship of
idols that has left them just
as empty?
6They didn't *think to* say, "Where is
the Eternal who rescued us
from *slavery in* Egypt?
Where is the One who led us
through the wilderness—
a land of deserts and
ravines?"
No one seems to remember how
they crossed a scorched and
lifeless land,
a darkness none had ever
crossed before, a place where
none survive.
7I am the One who delivered you
into this land of abundance
to enjoy its fruits and *many*
good things.
But you have now taken the *very*
land I gave you and defiled it.
You have done a most
disgusting thing with this gift
I reserved only for you.
8*Even then,* the priests didn't *think*
to say, "Where is the Eternal
One?"
Those who understand and
teach the law *act as if they've*
never known Me.
The rulers also have moved
against Me.
Even the *so-called* prophets
spoke in the name of Baal
and pursued worthless idols in
their *vain* attempt for greater
prosperity.

9This is the case that I bring against
you and your descendants:
10You can search from the coastlands
of Kittim *in the west*
to *the deserts of* Kedar *in the*
east, and you won't find
anything *as sickening* as
this.
11Has a nation ever exchanged its
gods *for some others,*
even if they weren't really gods
in the first place?

Israel's plan to submit herself to the authority of a stronger pagan nation in return for protection makes no sense to an objective observer, much less to God Himself. During the long history of this nation, her troubles have often resulted from a stubborn refusal to trust God. They have a habit of looking elsewhere—to anywhere or anyone but God—for relief, of turning to nations that are never constant friends. For example, when the Assyrian Empire was conquering the region 100 years earlier, the Northern Kingdom of Israel attempted to ward off the threat by making treaties with other nations. Despite their feeble plans, Israel fell in 722 B.C. to Assyrian might and cruelty. Now God points out to Judah's leaders in the Southern Kingdom how useless it is to align with either Egypt or Assyria when the punishing Babylonian army is on the horizon. It doesn't matter how powerful her allies may seem; once the covenant with God is broken, Israel must pay for her infidelity.

But My *beloved* people *have*
done just that: they have
exchanged their glory
to pursue worthless idols in
their vain attempt for greater
prosperity.
[12]Be horrified, O you heavens, at this
appalling betrayal.
Cringe in horror and be repulsed.
[13]My people are guilty of two evils:
They have abandoned Me, the
spring of living waters;
And instead, they have settled for
dead and stagnant water
from cracked, leaky cisterns of
their own making.

[14]Is Israel some *common* slave, born into
bondage?
Why has he been *carted off as if he were*
the spoil of battle?
[15]The *nations have circled him like hungry*
young lions,
roaring and growling *their war cries.*
They have left Israel a wasteland—
the cities destroyed and the people
scattered.
[16]Even *your Egyptian allies,* from Memphis
and Tahpanhes,
have stripped you of *land and* your
crowning glory.
[17]Is there anyone to blame but yourself?
Weren't you the ones who
abandoned the Eternal,
Your *True* God, even as He led you on
this journey?

Eternal One: [18]What do you hope to
accomplish by going to
Egypt
and drinking from the waters of
the Nile?
What do you think you will gain by
traveling to Assyria
and drinking from the waters of
the Euphrates?
[19]It is your wickedness that will
punish you
and your desertion of My ways
that will convict you.
See the evil and taste the bitterness
of forsaking the one True
God, the Eternal.
At the core of this evil is the sad
truth that you have forgotten
the wonder and terror of
who I am.

So says the Eternal Lord, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One *(to His people)***:** [20]A long
time ago, I broke the yoke
that weighed you down
and tore off the chains that
enslaved you;
Still you *boldly* said, "I will not serve
You!"
Instead, you bowed down like a
whore *to pagan gods* on the
high hills, under every green
tree.
[21]I am the One who planted you like
a select vine, chosen from
vintage stock.
How could you turn into such
a useless, wild *weed of a*
vine?
[22]You can scrub yourself with all the
soap you want,
but you'll never be able to wash
away the stain of what you've
done before Me.

So says the Eternal Lord.

Eternal One *(to His people)***:** [23]How can
you say, "I have not been
defiled"?

How can you reply, "I have not
run after the idols of Baal?"
You know exactly what you've done
down in the valley—
you're like a young camel
running here and there
without any direction.
24*You've acted like* a wild donkey at
home in that desert,
sniffing at the wind for any
scent of the next encounter,
unbridled in her lust.
It's not even fair to say you were
seduced by these gods.
You sought them out!
25*I warn you again:* stop running after
these rituals
till your feet are bare and your
throat is dried out.
You said, "I can't help myself, for I
love these strange gods I am
chasing after."

26Like a thief caught in the act, the
people of Israel will be put
to shame:
kings, leaders, priests, and
prophets *will be shamed.*
27They say to a piece of wood, "You
are my father";
they confess to a stone, "You
gave me birth."
They *have shunned Me, who gave
them life*—turning their backs
instead of facing Me—
But *that will change* when troubles
come.
That's when they will cry out to
Me, "Stand up for us, and
save us!"
28*O Judah,* where will your pagan
gods be then?
You know, the ones you made
yourself?
Let them stand up *on their own.*
See if they're able to save you
from your troubles.
You have as many gods as villages,
Judah. *Now let them take care
of you.*

29Why are you leveling charges
against Me?
You are the unfaithful one here.
You have all pulled away from Me.
30I tried to discipline your sons, but
it didn't work; they wouldn't
listen.
You destroyed the prophets I
sent to speak truth to you.
You devoured them as a lion *does
his prey*.

31People of this generation, consider again
the word of the Eternal.

Eternal One: Have I been a barren
wasteland to Israel *with
nothing to offer*?
Am I no more than a land
cloaked in darkness to them?
Why do My own people say *to Me,*
"We would rather wander where
we want than come to You"?
32Does a young woman ever forget
her jewelry?
Does a bride forget *to bring
along* her wedding dress?
And yet My people forgot Me long,
long ago.
33How good you've become at your
reckless loving!
You could teach even a loose
woman a thing or two.
34*The stain of* the blood of the poor
and the innocent is on your
clothes
Even though you didn't find them
breaking into your houses.
In spite of it all,
35Still you dare to say, "I am innocent;
surely God could not be angry
with me anymore."
Yet watch as I condemn you
because you *perjure yourself*
saying, "I have not sinned."
36How do you keep changing
directions,
*making a covenant with Me, then
a treaty with them?*
You will soon be disappointed by
the alliance with Egypt
just as you were by *the one with*
Assyria.
37You will leave this land *as captives,*
with your hands on your head.
Why? Because I, the Eternal
One, have rejected those you
relied on.
You will never prosper from their
help.

3 **Eternal One:** If a husband divorces
his wife and she leaves him and
marries another man, should he
ever go back to her again? *Such behavior
would violate what is right,* and the land
itself would be tainted *with sin.* Now you,
Judah, have acted like a whore and taken
on many lovers. Why are you trying to
return to Me *now*?

From the beginning, the covenant between God and His people is clear. They are to worship and trust Him alone. They are to remain true to His teachings. So when God sees His people worshiping idols made of stone and wood, when He sees them participating in demeaning sexual practices with prostitutes as part of local fertility rites, it is too much. The people of Judah have been unfaithful in nearly every way imaginable. They have witnessed what happened to the adulterous Northern Kingdom of Israel. But somehow, these stubborn people think they are special, even immune to such disaster. They think if they say the right prayers in the right ways to the right God from time to time, then all the blatant violations of God's covenant will be ignored. The prophet Jeremiah sees it all differently.

God will send out a message to the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, which He still calls Israel. For decades, those people have been scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire to the north, while their land has been under enemy occupation. But despite the tribes' faithlessness, these many years later, the God of mercy offers to restore them. In the midst of divine judgment, God utters words of hope; but this hope, this restoration, is only found in true repentance.

[2]Look up to the hilltops. Take a good look.
Is there anywhere you have not committed perverse acts *in the company of other gods*?
You sat on the side of the road, offering yourself to lovers;
like a desert nomad *you waited, patiently*.
Even the land itself is tainted by your prostitution and wickedness.
[3]That is why *I have* held back the rain,
why the spring rains have not come.
But you still look and act the part of a prostitute—
unfazed, unashamed.
[4]*But wait,* did you just now call out to Me, saying,
"My Father, You have been my friend, *my confidant* since I was young"?
[5]You ask, "Surely He won't be angry forever, will He?
Surely He won't hold this against us to the end, right?"
This is how you talk—*as if all I want are your words;*
meanwhile you continue in your *selfish and* evil ways.

[6]Then the Eternal *who rules over all of history* reminded me *of a lesson my people, Judah, should have learned from Israel a century ago. He* spoke these words *to Judah early in my career,* during the days of Josiah the king.

Eternal One: Have you not learned anything from Israel's unfaithful ways? How she *turned away from Me,* went up every high hill and under every green tree *to worship another.* She acted like a prostitute *and broke our covenant* there. [7]I thought, "After she's done all this, she'll return home to Me," but *it never happened.* She didn't come back. And her deceitful sister, Judah, saw all of this *and learned nothing.* [8]She saw that I sent unfaithful Israel away with a decree of divorce for these acts of adultery. But it didn't matter to her deceitful sister, Judah. She wasn't afraid *or moved by any of this.* She went *her own way* and played the prostitute as well. [9]*In fact,* because her own infidelity bothered her so little, she defiled the land by committing adultery, worshiping stones and trees *instead of Me.* [10]And while this was a lesson to be learned by deceitful Judah, *it was an opportunity lost—for she never learned it;* she never completely returned to Me. She only pretended to be Mine, *as if empty words would satisfy Me.*

[11](to Jeremiah) Despite her faithlessness, Israel has proven to be more righteous than her deceitful *sister,* Judah. [12]Now go and cry out these words *of hope* to those people in the north:

"Return *to Me,* faithless Israel.
I will look on you with mercy, not anger.
I will not hold this grudge against you forever.
[13]Just admit what you did—your sin *against Me.*
How you rebelled against the Eternal your God.

How you gave yourself away to
these foreign gods *in the open,* under the trees!
How you disobeyed My voice.
14Come back home, My *restless,*
faithless ones,
for I am *your master,* your
husband *(not that other god),*
And I will take you in—one from
this city, two from that clan;
I will bring you *home* to Zion.

15"Then I will give you shepherds who trust and know Me, *wise teachers* who will impart knowledge and understanding to you. 16In those days, after your people have grown and increased in the land, they will no longer talk about the covenant chest of the Eternal. They won't think about it, remember it, or even miss it. There will be no need for it to be made again. 17In this coming age, Jerusalem will be known as the throne of the Eternal. All the nations *of the world* will be drawn there to her, to honor the name of the Eternal. The days of people insisting on their own stubborn ways dictated by their own evil hearts will be gone. 18In that day, *the split between My people will be mended.* Judah and Israel will walk together *again.* From a land to the north, they will come to this land I gave only to your ancestors.

19"I thought to Myself how much
I wanted to welcome you
home as children
and bless you with a good land
and a future to be envied by
all the world.
I hoped for the day when you would
call Me 'My Father,'
and no longer pull away from
Me and My ways.
20But just as an unfaithful wife
betrays her husband,
so have you betrayed Me,
O house of Israel."

Jeremiah tells the people what could happen, if only they will repent. The prophet hopes for dialogue between Israel and the God who has never stopped loving her.

21A sound now echoes from the deserted
hills
where Israel betrayed her God.
It is the sound of bitter tears mixed with
the prayers
of the lost and rebellious people of
Israel
who have forgotten the Eternal, their
True God.

Eternal One: 22Come back to Me, My
faithless ones,
and I will heal your faithlessness.

Israel: Look! We come to You now,
because You are the Eternal our
God.
23The idols we worshiped on the hills,
the rituals *we performed* on the
mountains were *based on*
a lie.
You, the Eternal, our one True God,
are the only hope of Israel's
rescue.

24Everything our parents worked for—their livestock and even their families—has been devoured by *the worship of* the shameful god. 25Let us fall on our faces in shame, covered in our humiliation. *Ours is a legacy of rebellion,* for we and those before us have sinned against the Eternal our God. From the time we were young to this very day, we have refused to obey His voice.

4 **Eternal One:** O Israel if you turn,
turn *home* to Me.
Just turn away from the vile
worship of those things,
those idols that repulse Me.
Put them out of My sight *for good.*
Come home to Me and never
stray.
2If you make a promise *in My name,*
saying, "As the Eternal lives,"
and do so in truth, justice, and
righteousness,
Then the nations will discover true
blessing in Me
and give Me the praise *I deserve.*

3This is what the Eternal now says to the people of Judah and *the citizens of* Jerusalem.

Eternal One: Break up the hard,
untilled soil!
It is a waste to plant seeds
among thorns.
4Circumcise yourselves to Me;
cut away the foreskin of your
hearts,
men of Judah and people of
Jerusalem.

Remove all that stands between us,
and devote yourselves fully to Me,
Or the heat of My anger will burn
as an unquenchable fire
against your wicked ways.

► The warnings now climax with a vision of invasion and destruction that is almost more than the young prophet can bear. Still God instructs Jeremiah to speak these words of terror, and this prophet who loves the people he has been called to chastise struggles with his mission. In the midst of this painful vision, Jeremiah begins to wonder aloud to the very God for whom he speaks. As he proclaims, he prays. As he waits for answers, the words of devastation continue.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: [5]Cry out to
those in Jerusalem. Proclaim
to all of Judah.
Let the trumpets blare
throughout the land!
Say *to the people,* "Gather everyone
from the outlying villages,
and run toward the fortified
cities."
[6]Raise a banner toward Zion,
Jerusalem;
point everyone toward her refuge.
Don't wait, for I am releasing an
evil from the north that will
devastate *the land.*
[7]For a lion has stepped out of
the thicket;
A destroyer of nations is on the
move.
He has left his den to devour
your land;
your cities will be left in ruin,
empty *and lifeless.*"

[8]*The time of mourning is here.*
Put on your sackcloth, *and get ready*
to cry and scream.
Since we have not turned from our sin,
the blazing anger of the Eternal has
not turned away from us.

Eternal One: [9]On that *fearsome* day, even
the hearts of kings and leaders will fail.
Priests will recoil in horror. Prophets will
be shocked *into silence.*

Jeremiah: [10]But Eternal Lord, You have
misled this people and *all of* Jerusalem
when you said, "You will live in peace."
Even now the *cold blade of the* sword is
pressed against our throats.

[11]The day is coming *soon* when Jerusalem
and the people beyond will be told, "A
blistering wind will blow in from the desert
mountains toward My daughter, My people: a wind too strong to winnow *the grain*
and clean *the crops,* [12]a wind too powerful
to withstand for it comes from Me. It is My
judgment that will bear down on you."

[13]Look, *you can see* Him coming *in the*
distance, like a cloud *on the horizon.*
Like a whirlwind, His chariots *of*
destruction will descend on you.
Swifter than eagles are His horses. *At the*
sight of this, you will cry out, "Alas,
we are doomed!"

[14]*Hear me,* O Jerusalem, *for even now there*
is time.
Wash these wicked ways from your
hearts
So that you can be saved.
How long will you cling to those
wicked thoughts?
[15]From *the tribe of* Dan *in the north* comes
the *first* cry;
news of disaster arrives from the hill
country of Ephraim.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: [16]Tell the
nations *to beware.*
Announce to Jerusalem:
"Invaders are coming from a distant
land.
Their war cries will *soon* be
heard in Judah's villages."
[17]They will spread out and surround
Jerusalem on every side like
guards in a field,
all because she has acted
against Me.

(to the people) [18]You chose this path
that led to *disaster.*
Your plans and actions brought
it on.
It is your wickedness that tastes so
bitter,
your evil that pierces your heart.

[19]I've got this awful feeling in the pit of my
stomach. I'm in agony.
Every beat of my heart pounds *with*
an awful dread.

I can't stay silent, *for I know what is coming—*
oh my soul, *there it is:* the blast of the trumpet;
The battle cries *of the invading hoards.*
20Crushing defeat after crushing defeat.
That's the news.
The land is in ruins, all of it.
In an instant, *my world changed;*
in a moment, my tents destroyed, my curtains torn, *my refuge gone.*
21How long must I see the flags *of the enemy*?
How long must I *be forced to* hear the trumpets sound?

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)***:** 22My people are foolish.
They do not know Me at all.
They are reckless, senseless children.
They are clever and cunning when it comes to evil,
But inept and incapable of doing good.

23I looked at the earth and saw that it was *again* formless and empty;
I looked at the heavens and saw no light.
24I looked at the mountains and saw them quaking;
all the hills, they shuddered.
25I looked around and *saw no hint of life.*
The people were gone. The birds had fled the sky.
26I looked at *what was once* a garden and saw a desert—
the rubble of its cities torn down right in front of the Eternal and His fierce anger.

Eternal One: 27The whole land will lie in ruin,
but I will not completely destroy it.
28Because of this *devastation,*
the earth will mourn and the skies will darken—for I have spoken.
Once I have decided, I will not change My mind.
I will not turn back *from this.*

29As the horseman thunders *closer* and the archer *draws near,*
the people panic and the cities empty.
They scatter to the bushes; they scramble to the hills.
The villages are abandoned, for no one *dares* remain.

30So what are you doing, my ravaged one?
Why are you dressing up in scarlet, putting on your gold jewelry,
And painting your eyes to make them larger, more beautiful?
You're wasting your time.
Your lovers *want nothing to do with you.*
In fact, they despise you, and are looking to kill you.

31I hear a cry like a woman in labor, the distress of a first-time mother.
It is the anguish *of my people*; it is the voice of the daughter of Zion,
Gasping for breath, reaching *for help,* as she cries out,
"I am faint, and my life is in the hands of murderers!"

5 **Eternal One:** Roam the streets of Jerusalem, *and tell Me what you see, Jeremiah.*
See *if you can find anything good happening anywhere.*
Look in the *marketplaces and* open spaces *of the city.*
If you can find just one honest person who lives according to My ways,
I'll spare the city *of this horror.*
2I hear them *making oaths in My name.* "As the Eternal lives," they say.
But they know the oaths are not true.

As when Abraham pleaded with God over Sodom's fate (Genesis 18:23-32), God is willing to spare Jerusalem if the prophet can find a single person, honest and true, living there.

Jeremiah: 3O Eternal One, aren't You looking for truth *and integrity*?
You struck them, but they did not flinch.
You destroyed them, but they did not yield to Your correction.
They wouldn't change their ways.
They have set their stony faces *against You—*
defiant and determined, refusing to repent.

4And I thought to myself, "*How could they know any better?*
They are poor and senseless people, unfamiliar with the ways of the Eternal,
Unaware of what their God requires.

5So I will go to *their* leaders and share
what I see.
They will do the right thing because
they know the Eternal's ways.
Surely, they will do what their God
requires."
But to a person, *I was wrong: leaders*
were no different;
They, too, had broken the yoke, burst the
bonds,
and pulled away from God's guidance
and correction.
6Therefore, from the forest, a lion will
strike.
From the desert, a wolf will *pounce*
and destroy.
And from the shadows, a leopard now
stalks their villages,
waiting to tear apart any who dare
wander outside.
Such is the fate of all who fall away,
for their rebellion is great; their sins
are many.

Eternal One *(to His people)*: 7How can I
forgive what you've done?
You have passed on your legacy
of rebellion to your children
who also rejected Me.
They have made *unholy* oaths in the
names of so-called gods.
Why? I have fed them till they
were full, *and still they*
wanted more.
So they betrayed Me with their
adultery,
trooping off to *worship idols,*
filling up the houses of
prostitutes.
8They have everything they need,
and still they want more.
Like lusty stallions, they call for
each other's mate.
9Should I not punish them for these
atrocities?
Against this nation, should I not
avenge Myself?

(to His people's enemies) 10Walk
through the rows in her
vineyards, and destroy them.
But do not destroy them
completely.
Lop off the branches,
for they do not belong to *Me,* the
Eternal.
11Both the house of Israel and
the house of Judah have
betrayed Me.

12They spew lies about the Eternal *that*
mock My sovereign power.
They have said, "Nothing will
happen! God will not hurt us!
All this talk of war and famine is
just talk.
13As for the prophets, they are full of
hot air;
the word *of God* is not in them;
Let their words *of doom* fall on them."

14The Eternal One, Commander of *heav-*
enly armies, has this to say:

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: Because this
is the way they* speak,
I am going to turn My words in
your mouth into a fire,
A fire that will consume these
people; they are nothing but
kindling *for My fury.*

(to His people) 15O house of Israel,
I am stirring up a distant
nation to march against you.
They are an enduring people
from ancient times.
The language they speak is
unknown to you;
you will not understand them.
16Their quiver is like a gaping grave,
full of death.
They are all mighty warriors.
17They will devour your harvest and
your food.
They will devour your sons and
daughters.
They will devour your *livestock,*
flocks, and herds.
They will devour your vineyards
and orchards.
They will wield their swords
and cut down the fortified cities
you think are so safe.

(to Jeremiah) 18But even then, I will
not destroy your people completely. 19So
when they ask you, "Why has the Eter-
nal done this to us? *Why would* our one
True God *treat us this way*?" *remind them*
and speak to them *My words*: "Because
you have rejected Me and bowed down
to foreign gods in a land that was yours,
now you will bow down to a foreign
people in a land that is not yours."

20Declare *My truth* to the house of
Jacob.
Proclaim it throughout *the land*
of Judah:

* 5:14 Hebrew manuscripts read, "you."

21 Hear Me you foolish, heartless
people.
Even with eyes and ears you are
still blind and deaf *to what is
happening.*
22 *Do you not realize who I am?* Do you
not fear Me?
Do you not shake in the
presence of the Eternal, the
Creator of all things?
It is I who has drawn for all time
the boundaries of the sea.
The waves may crash and roar
against the sand,
But the waters do not cross the
lines I have drawn.
23 But with stubborn and defiant
hearts, this people
ignored Me and left *Me for
another.*
24 It never occurs to them to say,
"Let us stand in awe of the
Eternal our God,
For He sends the rain—both the
autumn and the spring rain—
and He brings the harvest at just
the right time *year after year.*"
25 It is your sins that hold back the
rain.
It is your rebellion that keeps
good things from happening
to you.
26 Lurking among My own people are
the wicked
who watch and wait, preying *on
the less fortunate.*
Like hunters who set traps for
birds,
they ensnare people *for their
own benefit.*
27 Like a cage full of *noisy* birds,
their homes are filled with
screeching lies.
This is how they have become
so rich and important—
*because others fell for their
lies.*
28 *This is how* they have grown so fat
and polished.
Their evil deeds know no
boundaries.
They do not take the side of the
orphaned to help them
prosper.
They do not seek justice for the
poor;
29 Should I not punish them *for these
atrocities*?
Against a nation like this, should
I not avenge Myself?
(to His people) 30 Something horrible
and appalling has happened
in this land *of promise.*
31 The prophets *who claim to speak
for Me*
are nothing more than false
prophets, *spewing lies and
empty predictions.*
The priests *who were to do My
bidding* have chosen to go
their own way,
and *all the while,* My people
think nothing of it.
They actually prefer it this way,
but when the end comes, *when
My justices arrives,* what will
you do then?

► God, through His prophet, speaks about the ills of a greedy people who have forgotten how much the poor and orphaned matter to Him. The stench of injustice has become unbearable. For God, it is time to act.

As the swirling clouds gather to form a storm only Jeremiah sees on the horizon, the destruction of Jerusalem seems at hand. This ancient city, this storied place, is on the brink of a disaster beyond imagination. God is raising up an army from an ancient nation, known for its power and cruelty. For the prophet of God, the minutes are blurring into seconds. There seems to be little time to run and hide as the city will soon fall into the hands of those who mean her harm.

6 **Eternal One** *(to His people)*: Run
away, people of Benjamin,
and take refuge anywhere but
Jerusalem.
You're not safe inside those walls.
From *the village of* Tekoa, blow
the trumpet, *sound the
alarm.*
Light the *warning* fires above Beth-
haccerem *across the land.*
For evil peers down; a dark army
of destruction is gathering in
the north.
2 I will destroy *Jerusalem,*
beautiful and delicate daughter
of Zion.

3As shepherds come *and surround*
her with flocks of *hungry*
sheep,
so their enemies will gather
their troops around you, set
up camp,
And feed off your land as they see
fit.
4"Get ready for the battle," they cry.
"Come on, let's attack. It's
already noon!
But *look,* the day is half over—
the shadows are growing longer.
5*So arise,* let us launch our attack at
night.
The palaces will fall *in the*
darkness!"

6This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, decrees.

Eternal One: Cut down her trees—
make *battering rams and*
siege ramps—
for Jerusalem will soon be under
attack.
Swarm over those walls, you invading
hoards,
and punish *My Jerusalem,* the
city of oppression.
7Like fresh water from a well,
fresh wickedness flows *from*
deep inside of her.
Sounds of cruelty and destruction
rumble through this city;
her wounds are always
before Me.
8*Take Me seriously,* O Jerusalem; this
warning is for you!
Listen to My words and turn
away from evil
Or I will turn away from you *in*
disgust.
I will turn you into a land so
barren that no one would
dare to live there.

9This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, decrees:

Eternal One: The enemy will pass over
the remnant of Israel again
and glean what is left,
like the worker who checks the
vine again for any missed
grapes.

10To whom should I speak and give this
warning?
Who will listen to what I say?
Their ears are closed; they cannot hear.
They're deaf *to anything about*
God.
The Eternal's word is offensive to
them. They take no delight in it.
11*But* I am welling up with His anger.
I'm too tired to try to hold it in any
longer.

Eternal One: Pour it out on children
playing in the streets,
on young men meeting together.
Husbands and wives, old and even
the very old—
let each of them know they will
be taken.
12Their homes will be seized and
lived in by others;
so, too, will their fields and
wives be taken *from them*
and given to others when I
reach out against the people
of this land.

13*Greed has corrupted this culture,*
from the least to the greatest:
all are tainted with this lust for
what they don't deserve.
The prophets and priests *are no*
better.
Their lives reek with deceit.
14To heal the brokenness of My
people,
they offer superficial words.
They say, "Peace, peace," *as if all is*
well.
But there is no peace.
15Do they feel any shame for their
disgraceful deeds?
Absolutely not. My very own
have forgotten how to blush.
And so it is that they will fall
among the fallen *and be*
defeated;
when the time comes, they will
stumble beneath the weight
of My punishment;
They will know soon enough what
they have done.

This is what the Eternal decrees:

Eternal One *(to the people)***:** 16Stand at
the crossing, and consider
the ancient path,
for it is good *and it leads to Me*.
Walk on this path, and you will find
rest for your souls.
But they have said, "We will not
walk upon this road."

17 *Even then* I sent watchmen to warn
you *of what is to come.*
"Listen for the blaring of the
trumpet," I warned.
But the people *did not listen.*
They said, "We will not pay
attention."

18 Now listen *to Me,* nations *of the earth.*
Learn, O congregation, what
is about to happen to My
people.
19 Listen, O Earth, for I am bringing
this disaster upon Judah.
This is the fruit of their own
scheming.
For My people would not listen
to My instructions;
They have rejected *My guidance—*
My law—*to go their own way.*

► Many people in Judah keep going through the motions of worship; they offer sacrifices and incense to the one True God. They speak superficial words when they think it counts, and they give Him extravagant gifts. But the prophet knows the mind of God, and God is not impressed with any of it. Empty worship is meaningless. In fact, empty worship may do more harm than good. These gifts and actions, it seems, have no meaning unless the hearts of the people are attuned to God, unless they are willing to hear and do what God asks. Obedience, you see, is better than sacrifice.

Eternal One: 20 What use do I have of
your *expensive* incense from
Sheba
or the fragrant reeds *you offer*
Me from a faraway land?
I will not accept your burnt offerings;
the aroma of these *empty*
sacrifices does not please Me.

21 And so I, the Eternal One, will place
stumbling blocks on your
path *of rebellion.*
You will stumble indeed, fathers
and sons alike.
Neighbors and friends will be wiped
out.

22 Look *in the distance,* and you will
see an army
marching *toward you* out of the
north.
A nation whose size and might *you*
can't imagine
is now awakening *and coming*
from the remote parts of the
earth.
23 They are armed with bows and
spears.
Their hearts are cruel and will
show you no mercy.
The sound *of their massive army,*
riding in on their horses, is like
the sound of an angry sea;
They are ready for battle, marching
in formation,
coming to destroy you,
O *Jerusalem,* daughter of
Zion.

► As clear as God's pronouncements have been, there must be a moment of decision. The warnings are all invitations for the people of Jerusalem to return to the God who loves them. But their fate is up to them; it is their choice. At this place of decision, *long overdue,* Jeremiah voices the fear in the hearts of those who hear of the impending attack. Speaking for the nation, he once again responds to God's awesome decree.

24 We heard the news, and our strength
vanished—anguish *and fear*
grip us.
We twist in pain like a woman giving
birth.
25 Do not go into the field *alone.*
Do not walk the streets, for our enemy
is armed *and approaching fast.*
Terror is everywhere we turn.
26 You who are my people, *weep with me for*
it is time.
Put on sackcloth and roll in ashes.
Cry as you would *for the loss* of an only
child.
The time for bitter tears has come.
The destroyer is descending upon us
quickly,
and the days of sadness will soon
begin.

One of the most important and difficult messages Jeremiah ever delivers is given at the entrance to the temple. In the seventh century, the problem isn't that people are refusing to worship, for the crowds continue to form at the temple in Jerusalem, but that they are embracing a superficial form of worship. They are acting as if their motives do not matter; their immoral behavior seems to be of little or no concern. As long as they have the temple—with its rituals and rich history—they believe they are immune to anything. As long as they have the building in their midst, they seem to think they have God—as if He could be contained in this beautiful and storied structure.

Imagine the scene as this bold prophet speaks to the crowds streaming into the temple area. Imagine how startling these words sound to people who think religious activity and merely showing up at the temple will protect them. Listen now as Jeremiah preaches strong words about the dangers of worship gone bad.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 27Put My
people to the test.
Examine their ways as a refiner
tests the ore's purity.
28They are all stubborn rebels,
lying to each other *and to Me.*
They are *nothing more than* bronze
and iron—
lesser metals, corrupt *and*
common.
29The refining fire has blazed fiercely,
My prophet;
the lead is burned away in the
fire.
But it's no use. Though the refining
fire *burns hot,*
their wickedness cannot be
removed.
30Now I, the Eternal, reject them *as*
impure—
"rejected silver" is what they will
be called.

7 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 2*Go now and* take a stand for Me at the entrance to My temple. Proclaim there My message. Tell all the people of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Eternal to *stop and* listen to the word of the Eternal. 3*Tell them* this is what I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, have to say:

"Change your ways and stop what you are doing, and I will let you live in this land. 4Do not rely on the misguided words, 'The temple of the Eternal, the temple of the Eternal, the temple of the Eternal,' *as if the temple's presence alone will protect you.* 5But if you genuinely change your ways and stop what you are doing; if you deal with each other fairly; 6if you don't oppress foreigners, orphans, and widows; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this land; *and if you* don't practice the self-destructive worship of other gods; 7then I will let you live forever in this land I promised your ancestors *long ago*.

8"*But instead,* you are clinging to lies *and illusions* that are worthless. 9Do you think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and chase after other gods *and still expect Me to protect you?* 10*Do you think all it takes is for* you to run back to Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We're safe now'? Does this somehow make it all right to do these vile things *in front of Me*? 11Do you think this house, which is called by My name, is a den of thieves?* I see what you're doing.

12"Go *and take notice of* what happened in Shiloh, the place where I first *met your ancestors in the tabernacle that* bore My name. See what I did in response to the wickedness of My people, Israel. 13Now, because of all *the evil* you have done, and because when I spoke to you time and again you never listened, and because when I called your name you never answered, 14*watch* what I will do to this house which bears My name, this *sacred* place I gave to you and your fathers. *I will do to this temple,* where you have put your trust, what I did to Shiloh *all those years ago*. 15I will throw you from My presence, just as I did to all your kinsmen *in the Northern Kingdom,* the descendants of Ephraim."

* 7:11 Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46

(to Jeremiah) 16Don't pray or plead
for these people. *No matter how badly*
you want to come to Me on their behalf,
don't bother. For I won't hear such cries
from you. 17Can't you see what's hap-
pening in the villages throughout Judah
and even in the streets of Jerusalem?
18The children gather the firewood, the
fathers tend the fire, and the mothers
bake the bread for the *so-called* queen
of heaven! The people pour out drink
offerings in honor of other gods as if to
spite Me. 19What they are doing doesn't
hurt me; it only hurts them, to their own
disgrace. 20Now hear what I, the Eternal
Lord, declare: "The heat of My anger will
pour out on this land, on man and beast,
on the trees of the field and the fruit of
the soil. My wrath will burn *through this*
place and not be quenched.

► Generally, prophets are called to speak to people on behalf of God (prophecy) and to speak to God on behalf of the people (intercession). But in this stinging message, God tells Jeremiah not to waste his breath by praying for the people because He will not hear the prophet's pleas. God is determined to right His people's wrongs with punishing fury. God's honor is at stake, and so is His people's future. The powerful and beautiful rituals God gave the Hebrews in order to shape them as individuals and as a community have become nothing more than empty rites that God cannot tolerate.

21This is what the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has
to say:

Eternal One: Treat your burnt offerings
the way you treat other sacrifices. *Go*
ahead and eat the meat yourselves. *I*
won't have any part of it. 22When I freed
your ancestors from *slavery in* Egypt,
burnt offerings and sacrifices were not
something I required of them. 23*I wanted*
them to trust Me and obey My voice. *In*
those early days, I told them, "I will be
your God, and you will be My people.
Follow Me every step of the way into a
life that is good." 24But *they didn't trust*
Me. They didn't obey *My voice*. They
refused to listen *to Me*. Instead they fol-
lowed the plans of their own stubborn
hearts. Each step was a step backward,
not forward. 25From the time your
ancestors left Egypt until now, *I have*
shown them the way to a better life. Day
after day, I sent all of My servants, the
prophets, *to speak the truth.* 26But did
any of them listen or pay attention? *Did*
they change their ways? No, they only
hardened their resolve *to go their own*
way. Each generation has done more evil
than the generation before.

(to Jeremiah) 27This is how *I want* you
to speak to the people—say it all, *don't*
hold anything back—but they won't hear
you. Your voice will call *throughout the*
land, but no one will answer you. 28And
so you will say to them, "This is the
nation that dared not obey the voice of
the Eternal, their one True God. This is
the people who would not be taught."
Truth has died and disappeared from
their very lips.

29Shave your head and throw your
hair away, *for it is time to*
mourn.
Climb the hills and grieve *for the*
darkness has gone too far.
The Eternal has rejected *His*
faithless people;
He has forsaken this generation
that has stirred up His wrath.

30For the people of Judah have done
what is plainly evil right in front of Me.
They have brought their revolting idols
into My temple! They have desecrated
this place that stands in honor of My
name. 31They have built shrines *to other*
gods at Topheth, *the garbage dump* in the
valley of Ben-hinnom, where they sacri-
fice their own sons and daughters and
burn them in the fire *to dark and pagan*
gods. I never taught them *to do such*
unspeakable evil; it never even crossed
My mind. 32But I tell you this: the days
are coming when that place will no lon-
ger be known as Topheth, or *the garbage*
dump in the valley of Ben-hinnom. *But*
it will be called the valley of Slaughter,
for they will bury the bodies *of those*
who sacrifice children there until there is
no more room. 33The remains of these
wicked people will feed the vultures of
the sky and wild animals of the earth
because no one will be there to scare
them away. 34I will silence the sounds

of laughter and joy from the villages of Judah to the streets of Jerusalem. Even the joy of a wedding *will not be heard* in this land of ruin.

8 **Eternal One:** When that *sad* day comes, *the graves of My people will be desecrated.* The remains of Judah's kings and her leaders, of priests and prophets, of the citizens of *My city* Jerusalem will be pulled from their graves. 2Their bones will be spread out over the ground, exposing them to the sun, moon, and the stars of heaven, *the heavenly hosts,* which our enemies loved, served, chased after, sought out, and worshiped. These bones will not be gathered or buried *again,* but they will be *scattered* like dung on the ground. 3As for the survivors of this wicked nation, they will prefer death to life in all the places where I have driven them.

The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has spoken!

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 4Tell *My people* that these are My words:
"When people *stumble and* fall,
don't they get up again?
When people are lost, don't they try
to find their way back?

5So why have these people turned
away *from Me*
and refused to come back?
They hang onto lies *that lead them further away*
instead of *embracing the truth and* coming home *to Me.*
6I listen intently for someone,
anyone, to speak the truth.
But it never happens. *No one corrects his lies.*
No one regrets his evil, saying,
'What have I done?'
Instead, everyone keeps running
farther down that path, *away from Me,*
Like a horse charging into a battle.
7Even the stork in the sky knows her
time to migrate.
The dove, the swallow, and the crane
All take flight when the time is right.
But not so with My people.
They do not know *or care about* the
Eternal's commands."

8How can any of you say, "We are
wise, because we have the
Eternal's law"?
How little you care about the truth!
A pen *in the hand* of your teachers
drips nothing but lies.
9*The day is coming when* these *so-called* wise teachers will be
put to shame;
their lives will be shattered
when they are captured *and taken away.*
Why will this happen? Because they
have rejected *and perverted*
My word.
Are these the works of wise men?
10This is why I will give their wives
away to intruders
and their property to invaders.
Greed has corrupted this culture,
from the least to the greatest:
everyone is tainted with this lust
for what they don't deserve.
The prophets and priests *are no better.*
Their lives reek with deceit.
11To heal the brokenness of My people,
they offer superficial words.
They say, "Peace, peace" *as if all is well,* but there is no peace.
12Do they feel any shame for their
disgraceful deeds?
Absolutely not. My very own
have forgotten how to blush.
And so it is that they will fall among
the fallen *and be defeated*:
when the time comes, they will
stumble beneath the weight
of My punishment;

13The harvest will soon be gone, *a thing of the past.*
There will be no grapes on the
vine, no figs in the tree;
Even the leaves will wither *and fall.*
For what I have given so
generously, I will now take
away.

► Some people in the land believe they know God's ways, but they don't. In fact, the ways they twist God's words and perform empty rituals only make things worse. Over and over again, prophets such as Jeremiah have attempted to describe the devastation that will result from the actions

of those who refuse to listen to and really know God. As the invading army comes across the borders, some realize that what God has said—what the prophet has spoken in His name—is all coming true. God may long to bring His people close, to forgive and restore them, but it will not happen. They have refused both His forgiveness and His final warning, and so the enemy from the north is on the move.

People: 14Why are we still sitting here,
exposed and waiting for death to come?
Let's get together and run to the walled cities and die there.
We are without hope because the Eternal our God has pronounced our judgment.
He has given us a cup* of bitter poison to drink because we have sinned against Him.
15We were counting on peace, but none came.
We waited for a time of healing, but now *all we have* is terror.
16We can hear the snorts of their warhorses *as they charge into* Dan;
at the *thunder of their hoofs and* noise of their neighs the whole land trembles.
They have come to devour us—our land and everything in it,
the city and all her citizens.

Eternal One: 17Look, I have released *an army of* serpents against you;
they slither like vipers *across the land.*
There is no hope of charming them.
There is no escape from their *deadly* bite.

Jeremiah: 18There is no cure for my grief.
My heart breaks *for what I see and hear.**
19Listen, *my Lord,* don't You hear the daughter of our people *weeping,* crying out to You from exile?
"Is the Eternal no longer in Zion?
Does her King no longer reside there?"

Eternal One: *But Jeremiah,* why have they provoked Me with their *dark and evil practices*?
Why do they worship these handcrafted idols, these worthless gods?

Jeremiah understands that the time for Judah to repent and change her ways is past. She has had her last chance, but that doesn't stop him from pleading with God.

Jeremiah: 20The harvest is over,
summer has ended,
and we are not saved.
21And because the daughter of my people is being ripped apart,
I am ripped apart.
From within, a dark *and cold* hurt arises.
From without, I am strangled by the horror of it all.
22Is there no healing medicine in Gilead, no balm *that could help my people*?
Is there no physician who can help?
Why is there no healing for the wounds inflicted on my people?

9 **Jeremiah:** O that my head were a spring of water
and my eyes a fountain of tears;
Then I could weep day and night for my *poor* people
who have been slaughtered.
2O that I had a place in the desert I could run to,
a haven for travelers.
Then I could leave my people,
for they are all an adulterous and treacherous lot.

Eternal One: 3With tongues bent like bows they *shoot their lies at one another.*
Truth does not win out in this land; deceit always seems to triumph.
One evil leads to another because they don't know who I am.
4Let everyone be careful of his neighbor,
and think twice before he trusts his brothers;

* 8:14 Literally, waters of the head; possibly, salty tears * 8:18 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

For every brother is *ready* to cheat
and deceive;
every neighbor is prepared to lie
when it suits him.
5*In this land of liars,* friends *have no*
misgivings about deceiving
one another;
no one *even thinks to* tell the
truth.
They've trained their tongues to
utter lies;
they wear themselves out with
all their sinning.
6*Jeremiah,* you live in a place where
deception is assumed;
as their lies pile up, they refuse
to acknowledge Me.

7Here is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say:

Eternal One: Watch, I will refine this
nation and put them to the
test.
What else can I do with My
people?
8Their tongues are like deadly arrows;
they speak such lies;
Each one leads his neighbor with
kind words
into a trap that was already set.
9Should I not punish them for what
they do?
Should I not repay a nation that
acts this way?

Jeremiah: 10I will weep bitterly for the
mountains *of my homeland*
and grieve for *the death of* her
wild meadows.
For they have become a *silent*
wasteland
where no one dares to travel.
Pastures once filled with the lowing
of cattle, now are empty *and*
lifeless.
All the animals have fled; even
the birds have left the sky.

Eternal One: 11I will leave Jerusalem in
ruins;
her rubble will be the haunt of
jackals.
I will wreak the same havoc on the
cities of Judah;
no person will be found there.

Jeremiah: 12Who is wise enough to take all this in? Who has heard the Eternal speak and can explain His ways to others? *Can anyone say* why this land has been ruined and left a wasteland, a desert where no one dares to travel?

Eternal One: 13*I will answer you Myself.* Because they have ignored the law I gave them *generations ago.* They haven't listened to My voice, and they refuse to walk in My ways. 14Instead, they have stubbornly followed after their own hearts. They have chosen to worship images of Baal just as their ancestors taught them. 15This is why I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, *must now take action.* Look, I will now give them bitter food to eat and poisoned water to drink. 16I *Myself* will scatter them among the nations—nations neither they nor their ancestors ever knew *existed*—and I will hunt them down with the sword and destroy them completely.

These images are too real, too vivid. Jeremiah tells of the people's judgment. He can't help but grieve for them and the land that was once a place of promise.

17The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has this to say:

Eternal One: Think this over, and
summon the mourners.
Send for the women who will
chant the dirge, that they
may come.
18Let them be quick about it: weep
and wail,
that our eyes may fill with tears
that streak down *our faces.*
19Listen to the voice of sorrow
weeping from Zion *herself*:
"We are ruined. All that remains
for us is great shame.
Now we must leave this land *that*
was ours;
they have torn down our houses."

Jeremiah: 20So listen now, women *of*
Judah, to the word of the
Eternal.
Mark His words well.
It is time to teach your daughters
how to mourn,
time to teach your neighbors
the song of lament.
21For death *has found us all.*
It has crept in through our
windows and slipped past
our defenses.

It has cut down our children in the streets,
and our young men in the public squares. *Death has found us all.*
22Tell everyone what the Eternal has said:
"The dead bodies of men will fall like dung on the open field.
Corpses will lie on the ground like grain cut in the harvest;
but on this day, there will be no one to gather *and bury the dead.*"

Eternal One: 23Let not the wise boast in their wisdom, nor the mighty in their strength, nor the rich in their wealth.
24Whoever boasts must boast in this: that he understands and knows Me.* Indeed, I am the Eternal One who acts faithfully and exercises justice and righteousness on earth. These are the things that delight Me.
25Look, the day is coming when *I will set things right with all people.* I will punish all those who are circumcised in their bodies but not *in their hearts*—26*the people of* Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, and all who live in the desert and clip the corners of their hair. All these nations are *really* uncircumcised, and all of Israel is uncircumcised *where it counts,* in the heart.

► Circumcision is supposed to be a sign of God's covenant with the people of Israel, but it has become a mark on the body that has little to no effect on how God's people live. Now God speaks a rather shocking message. Judgment is coming on all nations—those inside and those outside the covenant—whose people are not distinguished by a mark that truly matters. God calls this judgment the circumcision of the heart—a strange phrase indeed. The difference is between the inside and the outside, the superficial and the real. God has had enough, the prophet says, of those who go through the motions, confident in their wisdom, strength, and wealth. God wants a people who are truly devoted to knowing and honoring Him.

10 This message is for *all of* Israel. Listen to what the Eternal is saying to you.

Eternal One: 2Don't learn the *strange* practices *and beliefs* of other nations.
Don't be terrified by signs in the sky just because the other nations are.
3For their *traditions and* customs are useless; *there is nothing to them.*
A tree is cut down in the forest; then an artisan takes out a tool and carves *it into an image.*
4They dress it up with gold and silver *to make it more impressive.*
Then they nail it *down* so it won't fall over!
5*This is what they worship?* The idol *just stands there—*
lifeless, powerless like a scarecrow in a cucumber patch.
It cannot speak. It cannot move.
They must pick the thing up and bring it along.
Do you see why there's nothing to fear *from these dead pieces of wood*?
They cannot harm you, and they cannot help you either.

6O Eternal One, there is no comparison.
You are great; even Your name is powerful.
7Who wouldn't worship You? It is only right;
You are the King of all kingdoms.
The wise *and powerful* men of all nations in their realms
are still nothing compared to You.
8They are stupid fools for taking their cues from blocks of wood,
as if that idol could lead them anywhere.
9Beaten silver from Tarshish, and *hammered* gold from Uphaz—
materials made by artisans and goldsmiths—
Draped with *royal* blue and purple,
even with the work of craftsmen—
still a lifeless object!

* 9:24 1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17

10 *Just look at the contrast!* The Eternal is the True God:
He is the living God and eternal King, *not some lifeless idol.*
The whole earth trembles when He is angry; nations crumble beneath His wrath.

11 Say this to anyone *still worshiping idols*:
The *so-called* gods *you worship* did not make the earth and *starry* sky above it.
And one day, they will all be blotted from the earth beneath those stars.

12 *Know whom you're dealing with!*
God *alone* is powerful enough to create the earth.
He *alone* is wise enough to put the world together.
He alone understands enough to stretch out the heavens.
13 His voice thunders through the heavens, and the waters gush from the sky;
He summons the clouds to build up over the earth.
As the rain falls, the lightning flashes at His command;
the wind rushes in from where He *alone* can store it.
14 All of humanity is stupid and bankrupt of knowledge.
Those who make idols are shamed by their creations.
What they fashion out of gold are imposters—
breathless, *lifeless frauds.*
15 Their idols are worthless, the work *of their hands* an *embarrassing* mockery.
They are doomed to perish under God's judgment.
16 The portion of Jacob, *the Eternal One,* is not like any of these.
He was not fashioned out of human hands.
Instead, it is He who made all things and appointed Israel to inherit it all.
His name is the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

► These words are directed at a nation that cannot remember the beauty and power of true worship; instead, her people are always drifting toward profane and useless practices that leave them empty and far from the God who loves them so. The warnings against idolatry, no matter how many times or how loudly they are offered, always seem to fall on deaf ears. But now the judgment is close at hand. The enemy first seen in Jeremiah's visions is drawing closer. The dreaded hour of judgment is coming.

17 Pack up what you have; take what you can from the land.
You'll soon be under siege!
18 The word *I have* from the Eternal *is clear*:

Eternal One: Look, I will pitch out these people who live in the land *of promise.*
Now is the time for Me to bring hardship on them, so they may be found.

19 *When I think of what is about to happen,*
I can't begin to express my hurt; the wound is so deep, so painful.
But I keep telling *myself,*
"This sickness is mine to bear."
20 Like a tent, my *nation* has collapsed, all the ropes cut apart.
My sons are gone,
And there is no one left to help me put things back together.
So I am exposed, with no tent and no shelter.
21 The shepherds *of my people* have lost their senses;
they never thought to ask what the Eternal would have them do.
So now they are in trouble,
and all their flocks are scattered.
22 Listen! The news *we've dreaded* is finally here:
Rumblings are being heard in the north; *an army is moving into our land.*
The villages of Judah will be laid to waste;
their rubble will be the haunt of jackals.

Jeremiah: 23 O Eternal One, I know our lives are in Your hands.
It is not in us to direct our own steps—*we need You.*
24 Discipline me, Eternal One, but do so fairly.
Hold back Your wrath, or I'll be destroyed completely.
25 *O God,* pour out Your wrath on those nations that do not acknowledge You,
on those peoples who never call on Your name.

For they have ravaged *the land*
of Jacob and devoured it
completely.
They have made sure nothing is
left of our land.

11 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 2Tell the people of Judah, and *specifically* those who live in Jerusalem, to hear the terms of our covenant. 3Tell them this is what the Eternal, the God of Israel, has to say: "Cursed is anyone who ignores the terms of this covenant. 4All of this was laid out for your ancestors *long ago* when I first *delivered them from slavery,* rescued them from the fire of Egypt. I told them, 'Hear My voice, and do all that I command you. This way you will be My people, and I will be your God.' 5I wanted nothing more than to keep My promise and to bless your ancestors with a land flowing with milk and honey—*the land of promise* on which you stand today."

Jeremiah: Yes, O Eternal One! Let it be.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 6Now it is time to announce My message in the villages of Judah and on the streets of *My city,* Jerusalem. *I want them to hear this:* "Listen to the words of this covenant, and start doing what it says. 7I sternly warned your ancestors when I rescued them from Egypt, and I've repeated that warning many times, even today, saying, 'Listen to My voice, *and do as I say.*' 8But they didn't listen, and they didn't obey Me. Instead, they deliberately chased their own dark desires, *ignoring Me at every turn.* So I enforced the terms of our covenant, *including the curses that came from* refusing to do that which I had commanded them."

9The people of Jerusalem and all of Judah conspire *against Me.* 10They have gone back to the sins of their ancestors, who long ago ignored My words. They have chased after other gods and worshiped them. *Do you not see how* both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have violated the covenant I made with their ancestors? 11This is why I, the Eternal, declare that I will bring disaster upon these *rebellious* people. And they will not escape what awaits them. They will beg for My help, but I won't listen to them. 12Let the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem run to their *precious* gods *for help.* Let them burn incense and pray to their *detestable* images when trouble comes. Those *impotent idols* will not be able to save them, *no matter how many they have to choose from!* 13For you have as many gods as there are towns, people of Judah—as many altars to burn incense to Baal as there are streets in Jerusalem. 14Don't pray for these people, *Jeremiah.* Don't bother making any pleas for them, *for that time has passed.* I will not listen when they call out to Me in their time of trouble.

15What right does My beloved have coming into My temple, having done such vile things with so many? Do you really think that animal sacrifice is going to make this all go away? Will you then be able to rejoice? 16The Eternal once proclaimed you a lush olive tree, full of beautiful fruit. *But all that has changed.* With the roar of a violent storm, He will now strike that tree—leaving it *battered,* broken, and burned. 17Now the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has decreed disaster against you, the same tree He planted—all because of the evil done by the people of Israel and Judah, all because they provoked Me by worshiping and sacrificing to Baal.

► At this point in the prophecy, Jeremiah reveals a bit of his private struggles. Because he has faithfully delivered God's messages to the nation, people from his hometown are scheming against him. They would like nothing better than to silence God's mouthpiece . . . permanently. God, however, lets Jeremiah in on the plot. Wisely, Jeremiah puts his trust in God to protect and defend him.

Jeremiah: 18The Eternal revealed to me
the plans of my enemies.
Then You showed me what they
wanted to do.
19I was like an *unsuspecting* lamb led
to its slaughter.
I had no idea they were plotting
against me. They were
saying,

"Let's cut down that *lush olive* tree
and destroy all its *beautiful* fruit.*
Let's cut him off from the land
of the living.
Let's make sure no one even
remembers his name."
20But You, Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies, You who
judge fairly,
You know the heart and the
mind.
Let me see Your vengeance exacted
against them;
I am entrusting my cause, *my
future* to You.

21-22This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say regarding your men *back in* Anathoth who are threatening your life and saying, "You will die by our hands if you do not stop prophesying in the name of the Eternal."

Eternal One: Look, I will soon punish them! The young men will die in battle; their sons and daughters will starve during a famine. 23*In the end,* no one from Anathoth *who schemes against you* will remain, for I will bring disaster upon these *schemers* when the year of their reckoning arrives.

12 **Jeremiah:** Eternal, You always
do what is right
when I bring a complaint Your
way.
So now let me put a case before You:
Why do the wicked prosper so
much?
Why do all the untrustworthy
have it so easy?
2You plant them and watch them
take root;
You allow them to grow and
even bear fruit.
And yet, Your words mean
nothing to them, deep down.
3Still, You know me, Eternal One; You
see what is deep inside me.
You've examined my heart,
So why aren't they brought to justice?
Deal with them as sheep
set aside for slaughter, singled
out for death.
4How long must the land cry out in
mourning,
the grasses of the field wither
and bake in the sun?
The birds and wild animals have
simply vanished,
all because of the wicked living
here—
Because they say, "God does not see
what will become of us."

► Jeremiah's complaint is a common one; it is as old as civilization itself: Why do the wicked prosper? Why do good people have to wait for God's justice? God doesn't shrink back from such questions, and He does not punish those who dare ask them. In fact, Scripture invites us to ask God the hard questions through Jeremiah's example. The answers to hard questions are never easy. In fact, as Jeremiah will soon discover, his troubles are only beginning. God calls him again to endure.

Eternal One: 5If you are worn out after
only running with *a few* men,
how will you *one day* compete
against horses?
If you stumble on the easy terrain,
how will you manage in the
thick brush near the Jordan?
6*Jeremiah,* even your brothers and
the rest of your family
are ready to betray you.
Even they cry out for your *death*;
don't trust any of them,
no matter how nicely they speak
to your face.

7I have turned away My house,
abandoned My heritage;
I have given My deeply beloved one
over to her enemies.
8My very own people have acted
toward Me like a lion in the
wild,
roaring at Me *in defiance.* For
this, I hate her.
9Have My own people become like
colorful vultures?
Are birds of prey circling all
around them?*
Gather the wild beasts and bring
them on to devour *My
beloved.*

* 11:19 Hebrew manuscripts read, "bread." * 12:9 Meaning of the manuscripts is uncertain.

10 Many shepherds have already
destroyed My vineyard;
they have crushed My fields.
My beautiful land *of promise*
has turned into a barren
wasteland.
11 The very ground cries out to Me
in this empty and forsaken
land;
the whole land is desolate, but
no one seems to care.
12 The destroyers pour over the bare
hills in the desert
as the sword of the Eternal
devours the land from one
end to another.
There is no peace for anyone.
13 The people planted wheat, but they
will reap only thorns.
In the end, there will be nothing
to show for all their hard
work.
Shame will be their harvest because
of the Eternal's burning
anger *against them.*

Jeremiah now speaks to the nations. They, too, must trust God. His love and mercy are not for Israel alone.

The Eternal has this to say:

Eternal One: 14 As for My wicked neighbors so eager to take away the inheritance I gave My people Israel, look! *There will come a day when* I will uproot them from their lands, and I will take Judah from their midst. 15 But after I have uprooted them *from their homelands,* I will have mercy on them and restore them to their own lands and their own possessions. 16 And if they diligently learn the ways of My people and *trust in Me instead of idols,* if they swear by My name saying, "As the Eternal lives," just as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then I will establish them alongside My people. 17 As for any nation that will not listen to *and follow My ways,* I will uproot it and destroy it completely.

This is what the Eternal has declared.

13 The Eternal directed me.

Eternal One: Go and buy a linen undergarment; put it around your waist *next to your body beneath your clothes,* but do not wash it.

2 So I bought the undergarment, just as the Eternal had told me, and put it around my waist. 3 Then the Eternal spoke to me a second time.

Eternal One: 4 Now take off this undergarment you've purchased and have been wearing around your waist, and go to the Euphrates. I want you to hide it in a crevice in the rocks there.

5 So I took the undergarment to the Euphrates and hid it *in the rocks,* just as the Eternal told me. 6 After many days had passed, the Eternal spoke to me *a third time.*

Eternal One: Now go back to the Euphrates, and get the linen undergarment I told you to hide there.

7 When I went back and dug up this garment from the place where I'd hidden it, I found it had begun to rot. *This garment that was once new and clean* was now completely worthless. 8 The word of the Eternal came to me *to drive home His point.*

At times God's message given through Jeremiah must be acted out. He wants so badly for His people to understand, that mere words aren't sufficient. This is one such moment.

Eternal One: 9 Mark My words, for the same thing will happen to the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 *I will ruin* these *haughty and* wicked people who ignore My words, who follow their own stubborn hearts, who run after other gods, who bow down to *lifeless* idols. They will end up like this rotten undergarment *in your hands*—completely worthless! 11 Just as the undergarment clings to a person's waist, so did I, the Eternal One, make Israel and Judah to cling tightly to Me. They were to be My people, known by all, bringing honor and glory *to My name. That was My plan for them,* but they did not listen.

► This is the first of several symbolic actions or prophetic dramas in the book. God made Israel and Judah to stick close to Him—as close as an

undergarment—but because they disobey Him and refuse to live within the bonds of the covenant, God will bury them in exile, and they will be ruined.

Eternal One: 12Speak this word to the
people *as well*: "Listen to what the Eternal, the God of Israel, has to say: 'Every
jug will be filled with wine.' When they
respond, 'Tell us something we don't
already know, *prophet!* Don't you think
we know that every jug will be filled
with wine?' 13Go on telling them, 'This
is what the Eternal says: "I am going to
fill all who live in this land with drunkenness—the kings who sit on David's
throne, the priests, the *false* prophets,
and all the citizens of Jerusalem. 14And
then I will smash them together *in confusion and panic*—smashing fathers
against sons *in the chaos of the enemy invasion.* I will have no pity on them. My
sorrow or compassion will not keep Me
from ruining them."'"

15Listen carefully *to me*!
Stop being so smug, because the
Eternal has spoken.
16*It is time to* honor the Eternal your God
before He makes the darkness fall
and you stumble on the darkening
mountains.
You will long for the light,
but He will make the darkness
deepen as the gloom settles in.
17If you still won't listen, I will weep for
you in secret.
From the depths of my soul, I will cry
bitter tears,
Because the Eternal's own flock will be
taken captive.
18Tell the king and the queen mother:
"*Come down from your thrones,* and
take a seat in a humble place,
for your glorious crowns will be
taken from you."
19The cities in the Negev have *already* shut
their gates.
There will be no one to open them.
The people of Judah will be taken
captive,
all of them carried away into exile.

(to Jerusalem) 20*Now* look to the north and
see who is marching toward you.
Where is the beautiful flock that was
entrusted to you?
21What will you say when He appoints
your so-called allies,
the very ones you trained, to rule
over you?
Will not the pain stab at you
as it does a woman in childbirth?
22When you begin to ask yourself, "Why is
all this happening to me?"
know this: it is because of the weight
of your sins.
This is why *your enemies* will tear off your
skirts and violate your bodies.
23*And still, you will not change.*
Can the Ethiopian change his skin?
Can a leopard change its spots?
It seems just as unlikely that you will
change your ways and do good,
when you are so used to doing evil—
it has become such a part of you.

Eternal One *(to His people)***:** 24This is
why I will scatter you
like chaff driven by the desert
wind.
25This is now your fate—retribution
measured out for you from
the Eternal—
for you have forgotten Me and
trusted in the lies *of another.*
26For all this, I will be the One who
lifts your skirts over your face,
exposing you and letting others
see your disgrace.
27As for *your faithlessness,* your
adulteries and your lustful
ways,
as for the degrading way you
prostitute yourself *to other gods* out in the open, I see
it all.
For all this, your fate is sealed.
O Jerusalem—how bad it will
be for you!
How long before you are clean
again?

14 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah about the coming droughts.

A series of droughts come upon the land of Judah, making life very difficult for the people. Even the animals suffer as God holds back the rain.

Eternal One: 2Judah mourns and her
cities grow weak;
her people collapse to the
ground in grief.

The cries of Jerusalem echo
through the city.
3The nobles send their servants for
water that is not there.
They come to cisterns only to
return home with their jars
empty.
They have all been shamed,
humiliated,
so they cover their heads.
4*The fields are dry and* the ground
is cracked because there is
no rain.
The farmers suffer shame; they,
too, cover their heads.
5*Even the animals of the field struggle:*
the *devoted* doe walks away
from her newborn fawn,
all because there is no grass *to*
be found.
6The wild donkeys stand on barren
hills panting like jackals *in*
the dry heat.
With no plants to eat, *their bodies*
weaken—their eyes grow dim.

People *(to God)*: 7*We know* our guilt
cries out against us,
but O Eternal One, *step in now*
and do something!
For the sake of Your own *good*
name, *help us.*
It's true—our betrayals are
many, so much have we
sinned against You.
8But O Hope of Israel, her Savior
in times of trouble, *don't*
forget us!
Why are You *acting* like a stranger
here in Your *own* land,
Treating us like some traveler who's
only staying for the night?
9Why do You seem surprised,
like a warrior who cannot
defend us?
But *we know* You are here, among
us *even now*.
Eternal One—*we are* Your people.
You know us by name;
do not disown us!

Eternal One: 10(about His people*) All this*
is true, but they love to wander *from Me*;
they cannot control their *restless* feet—
which are constantly running after other
gods. That is why I won't accept them
and take them back. I will remember
their guilt and hold them accountable
for their sins.

11(to Jeremiah) Do not pray for this
people's well being. 12*They will try to*
impress Me again, but when they fast,
I will not hear their cry; when they
bring Me their burnt offerings and grain
offerings, I will not accept any of them.
Instead, I will offer to them their own
destruction by war, by famine, and by
disease.

Jeremiah: 13But Eternal Lord, there are
prophets *in the land* who keep telling
the people *none of this will happen. They*
claim to speak for You, saying, "No war or
famine will come to you. Instead, I will
give you peace and security in this place."

Eternal One: 14But these *so-called* proph-
ets are "prophesying" lies. *And they do so*
in My name! I have said no such thing. I
have not sent them and directed them to
speak in My name. Their prophecies are
based on false visions, faulty revelation,
and dark delusions of their own making.

15This is what the Eternal says regarding
the *false* prophets who *attempt to* speak in
His name.

Eternal One: I simply did not send them.
Those who are proclaiming *to the people,*
"No war or famine will touch this land,"
will themselves die in war and famine.
16And those *foolish enough* to listen to
their prophecies will be tossed into
the streets of Jerusalem, weakened by
famine, victims of war. *They will die,* and
there will be no one to bury them, their
wives, their sons, or their daughters
because I will pour out their own evil
upon them.

17God told me to speak these words to
them:

Jeremiah: May my eyes fill with tears
day and night.
Let me not stop crying *for what I*
see:
for my *tender* virgin daughter—
my people—
Has suffered a crushing blow.
I see her now with a serious,
gaping wound.
18If I go to the countryside, I see the
bodies of those cut down in
war;
if I walk into the city, I see
the misery brought on by
famine.

And yet the prophets and priests
go about their business *in blissful ignorance,*
unaware of what they are doing.

(to God) [19]Have You abandoned Judah completely?
Do You now hate Zion?
Why have You wounded us beyond healing?
We longed for peace, but nothing good ever came.
We hoped for healing, but only terror *came our way*.
[20]We admit our wickedness, O Eternal One.
We confess the sins of our ancestors.
We *know we, too,* have sinned against You.
[21]For the sake of Your good name, do not disown us;
do not dishonor the throne of Your glory.
O God, remember *Your people*!
Do not break Your covenant with us.
[22]Do any of the foreign idols bring the rain?
Do the showers fall from heaven by themselves?
No. They come from You, Eternal One our God.
That is why our hope is in You, for You alone do all this.

15 **Eternal One** *(to Jeremiah)*: Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me *to defend this rebellious nation,* I would not turn back to this people *right now.* Send them away from Me, *Jeremiah;* make them go! [2]And when they look to you and ask, "Where should we go?" tell them I, the Eternal, said,

For some, their destiny is deadly disease,
for others it is war,
And still others, their destiny is starvation,
and *lastly,* some are doomed to be captives *of an enemy state*.

[3]I am sending four destroyers: the sword to slaughter, the dogs to drag away *the carnage,* the birds of the sky, and the *wild* beasts of the earth to devour and destroy *what is left*. [4]What I do to this *evil nation* will horrify the watching world *for generations*. What Manasseh (son of Hezekiah), king of Judah, did in Jerusalem will not be overlooked.

[5]Who will have compassion on you, O Jerusalem?
Who will mourn for your *losses*?
Who will stop and ask how you are?
[6]You have rejected Me *time and again*.
You keep backing away from Me, so I will reach out and destroy you.
I am weary *of feeling sorry for you*;
I will not relent *this time*.
[7]*Like a farmer,* I will use my winnowing fork to remove the chaff at the city gates.
I will deprive them of their children.
I will destroy My own *because* they refuse to turn away
from their *wicked and hurtful* ways.
[8]The widows *in this land* will outnumber the grains of sand by the sea.
As for the mothers of young men,
I will send the destroyer against them at midday, *when no one is expecting*.
In the blink of an eye, I will rain down terror and anguish on them.
[9]The mother of seven suffers *in her sadness*;
gasping for breath, *she realizes* the sun has set even while it is day.
Alone and childless again, she is disgraced and ashamed.
As for those who survive *the first wave of violence,*
I will put them to the sword before their enemies.

So says the Eternal.

Jeremiah: [10]Oh, the anguish that is mine!
If only you had not given birth to me, mother;
I feel like a man who fights and struggles with the whole land.
I have not lent money or borrowed from others.
So why am I treated this way?
Everyone is *ready* to curse me.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 11*Hear me, Jeremiah:*
I will make you strong *in these trying times* to accomplish *My* good.
I will make it so your enemies ask you to pray for them in times of disaster and suffering.

12Can a man break iron that is forged in the north?
What about bronze?*
13Because you have committed so many sins throughout the land,
I will *freely* hand over your wealth and treasures *to this enemy* as plunder.
14I will incite your enemies to capture you and take you* off to a *distant* land you do not know.
I am doing this because My anger burns like a *roaring* fire that lasts forever.

► The calling of God has left Jeremiah with a loneliness he can hardly bear. The words he must deliver, the sins he continually confronts, and the future God has revealed to him—they all lead to an unbearable isolation. God has heard the lonely cry of His prophet, and He has offered encouragement and a promise to strengthen Jeremiah. At this point, Jeremiah is enduring the pain with his assignment. In fact, in this agony, he openly questions and accuses God Himself.

Jeremiah: 15O Eternal One—You know *what I am facing*;
Remember me, and pay attention to my plight.
Take my side; pay back those who persecute me.
I know You are patient, but don't *let them* take me away.
Think of the suffering I've endured for Your sake.
16When I discovered Your words, I ate them up:
they were my great joy and my heart's delight.
I am Yours, and I bear the name of the Eternal God,
Commander of *heavenly* armies.
17I never sat in the circle of jokesters, nor did I celebrate with them.
No. I *stayed to myself,* sat alone because Your hand was *heavy* on me;
You filled me with indignation *over their sins.*
18So why does my pain never end?
Why does this wound never heal?
Will you be to me as deceptive and unreliable as a *dry* stream *to a thirsty man*?

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 19If you will turn back *to Me,*
I will restore you—
and you will stand before Me.
If you will speak worthy words instead of worthless complaints,
You will be My spokesman.
Let the people come to you, but don't go to them!
20They will come at you, but I will make you like a wall of bronze *against them.*
They will not beat you, because I am with you to save and rescue you.
This will be so, for I have declared it.
21I will rescue you from the hands of the wicked
and redeem you from the grasp of the violent.

16 The word of the Eternal came to me.

► The loneliness Jeremiah has already endured is indeed painful. Surely he wants just one companion in whom he can confide; even that would be something. If only he could find solace in a loving spouse! Certainly society is composed of husbands and wives; even the worst people have families, while Jeremiah is alone. It now becomes clear that this isolation is his life's calling. He is banned not only from starting his own family, but from being with others. He cannot enter

* 15:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 15:14 Hebrew manuscripts read, "I will cause your enemies to pass over."

into the sorrow of his people's grief or enjoy any celebration in the community. To abstain from both the sorrow and joy of those around him ensures Jeremiah's isolation. But it also raises important questions with painful answers. As always, God anticipates these questions.

Eternal One: 2*Jeremiah,* you must not get
married and have children in this place,
3because this is what I, the Eternal One,
say about the sons and daughters of
this land and about their mothers and
fathers: 4They will die of deadly diseases.
There will be so many dead that no
one will bury them or grieve for them;
they will be like dung scattered on the
ground. Others will perish from war and
famine, and their corpses will feed the
vultures and *wild* beasts of the earth.

5This is what I declare *to you, My
prophet:* Do not go inside a house that
is mourning. Do not grieve with these
friends and families. Do not comfort
them because I, the Eternal One, have
taken My peace, even My loyal love and
mercy, from them. 6Death will come to
the great and small of this land, but they
will not be buried or mourned. *There
will be* no one left to cut themselves or
shave their heads *in ritual displays of
mourning.* 7No one will bring food to
comfort those in mourning or offer a
drink to console even one who has lost
a parent. 8You are not to enter a house
where they are feasting and celebrating.
Refuse to eat and drink with them. 9For
this is what the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies and God of Israel, now
declares: Before your eyes and during
your lifetime, I will silence the sounds of
laughter and joy in this place; the joy of a
wedding *will no longer be heard.*

10When you tell these people all of
this, they will ask you, "Why has the
Eternal decided to bring this horrendous
evil on us? What have we done wrong?
What sin have we committed against
the Eternal our God?" 11I want you to
answer them with My words: All this is
because your ancestors deserted Me and
followed after other gods. They served
and worshiped them, but Me they have
deserted. My instruction they have
ignored. 12As for you, you are even worse
than your ancestors because every one of
your hearts is evil and stubborn, and you
continue to ignore Me as you follow your
own *wicked* ways. 13For this reason, I will
throw you out of this land into a land you
and your ancestors have never known.
There you will *be able to* serve these
other gods *all you want*—day and night—
for I will show you no compassion.

This horrible vision of judgment is tempered with words of God's gracious restoration. Though the sentence against faithless Judah is harsh, it will not be the end of her.

(to the people) 14Look, days are coming
when *people will remember how I restored
you.* They will no longer say, "As the
Eternal lives who brought the people of
Israel out of the land of Egypt." 15Instead,
they will say, "As the Eternal lives, who
brought the people of Israel out of the
lands of the north and the countries
where He had exiled them." For I will
bring them back to their *promised* land,
the land I gave to your ancestors.

16But first, I will send for many fisher-
men who will catch them. After this, I
will summon many hunters, and they
will hunt them down on every mountain
and every hill, in every crack and crevice
of this land. 17My eyes are fixed on all
they are doing. Nothing is hidden from
Me; their sins are exposed before My
eyes. 18For their wickedness and sin—
polluting My land with the lifeless husks
of their disgusting idols, taking what is
Mine and filling it with these abomina-
ble things—I will repay them doubly.

Jeremiah: 19O Eternal One, You are my
strength,
my fortress, my sanctuary in
times of trouble.
The day will come when the nations
will come from all over the
world and admit,
"Our ancestors *were fools*! They
inherited *and clung to* empty
lies,
Worthless gods that gained them
nothing good.
20Can people make their own gods?
No, because a *man-made* idol is
not a god."

Eternal One: 21Behold, I will teach
these people.
This time, *they will learn of* My
power and strength.

I will teach them, and they will
know *and fully understand*
that I am the Eternal.

17 **Eternal One:** Judah's sin is engraved on the tablets of their hearts, inscribed on the horns of their altars with an iron tool, tipped with a diamond point. 2Their children remember their *pagan* altars and the sacred poles* *used in idol worship* beside leafy green trees on high hills. 3I will see that My mountain in the land, your *nation's* wealth, and all your treasures will be handed over as plunder *to your enemies. I will even give* your *pagan* high places *to pay the cost* for the sins you committed all over Judah. 4You'll let this inheritance I gave you slip through your fingers. I will make you slaves to your enemies in a land you have never known because you have stirred My anger into a *roaring* fire that will last forever.

5Cursed is the one who trusts in
human strength and the
abilities of mere mortals.
His *very* heart strays from the
Eternal.
6He is like a *little* shrub in the desert
that never grows;
he will see no good thing come
his way.
He will live in a desert wasteland,
a barren land of salt where no
one lives.
7But blessed is the one who trusts in
Me *alone*;
the Eternal will be his
confidence.
8He is like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots beside the
stream.
It does not fear the heat or even
drought.
Its leaves stay green and its fruit
is dependable, *no matter
what it faces.*

The choices and consequences are clear. Rely on people alone, and life will be tough and brutish. Rely on the one True God, and life will be rich and productive.

9The heart is most devious and
incurably sick.
Who can understand it?
10It is I, the Eternal One, who probes
the *innermost* heart
and examines the *innermost
thoughts.*
I will compensate each person *justly,*
according to his ways and by
what his actions deserve.
11Like a partridge that hatches eggs
that are not hers,
so is the person who gains
wealth unfairly.
In the middle of his life *a fool's
money* will abandon him.
In the end he, *too,* will be shown
for *what he is*—a fool.

Jeremiah *(to God)*: 12But from the
beginning, Your throne of
glory,
our holy place, has always been
exalted.
13O Eternal One, the hope of Israel,
all who forsake You will be put
to shame.
Those who turn their backs on You
will be written in the dirt,
because they have forsaken You,
the spring of living water.
14Heal me, O Eternal One, and I will
be healed.
You alone can save me; to You
alone do I sing my praise.
15The scoffers keep *mocking* me,
saying,
"Where is the word of the Eternal
you keep talking about?
Why haven't His words come to
pass?"
16*You know* I have not run *from my
calling*—
I have been a shepherd *to Your
people* as You commanded.
I have not *secretly* desired the
day of *disaster and* sorrow.
You know everything I've spoken *to
these people,*
because it was the task You'd set
before me.
17Do not turn and terrify me.
Be my refuge when the dreaded
day of reckoning comes.
18Bring shame on those who
persecute me, but save me
from that shame.
Bring terror on them, but save
me from that terror.
Bring them to the day of disaster;
shatter them, *destroy them*
with double the destruction.

* 17:2 Hebrew, *Asherim*

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 19Go, stand at the public gate of Jerusalem, the one through which the kings of Judah come and go; then take up your post at the other gates around the city. 20Say to them, *Listen,* you kings of Judah, you people of Judah, you citizens of Jerusalem, and any who pass through these gates. Listen to the words of the Eternal; 21this is what He says: "*For the welfare of your lives and the good of this city,* be careful! Stop *violating My Sabbaths by* carrying your loads through Jerusalem's gates on the Sabbath day. 22Do not bring your loads out of the house on that day—do not work at all on the Sabbath. Keep the Sabbath day holy as I commanded your ancestors *all those years ago.** 23But even then, they did not listen or pay attention *to Me*; instead, they stiffened their resolve not to listen or accept any instruction *from Me.*

24"But if you will listen *to My words* and obey Me by not carrying your loads through these city gates on the Sabbath, if you will live differently on the Sabbath, *differently from the rest of your week* by not working on it, *I promise Jerusalem will be your home forever.* 25The family of David will always reign on his throne here. The kings and rulers of this land will pass through these gates in chariots and on horses. As for their officers, the people of Judah, and the citizens of Jerusalem, they will live *securely* in this city forever. 26People will come from Jerusalem's surrounding villages and the towns and the regions in Judah. *They will come* from the territory of Benjamin, from the rolling hills *in the west,* from the hill country, and from the Negev *wilderness.* They will bring their burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense, and freewill offerings to the Eternal's temple. 27But if you refuse to obey Me—*if you continue to* bring your loads though the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath even though I've separated that day *as a time of rest—you will be punished.* I will kindle a fire to these very gates that cannot be quenched, and *all* Jerusalem will burn—even her palaces."

18 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Now God's message comes through another prophetic drama played out in a potter's shop somewhere in the city. The prophet sees an ordinary event but receives an extraordinary message.

Eternal One: 2Go down to the potter's shop *in the city,* and wait for My word.

3So I went down to the potter's shop and found him making something on his wheel. 4And *as I watched,* the clay vessel in his hands became flawed *and unusable.* So the potter started again with the same clay. He *crushed and squeezed and* shaped it into another vessel that was to his liking. 5In that moment, I heard *again* God's word *for His rebellious people.*

Eternal One: 6O people of Israel, can I not do the same to you as this potter has done? You are like clay in My hands—I will mold you *as I see fit.* 7If I declare that I am going to uproot, stamp out, or destroy a nation or kingdom *because of its wicked ways,* and 8then that same nation *I warned* turns away from its evil, then I will change My plans. *In My compassion,* I will not destroy it. 9If at some other time I declare that I am going to build up and establish a nation, 10but then it ignores My voice, thus committing evil right in front of Me, I will hold back the good I had planned for them.

(to Jeremiah) 11Now, *prophet,* say to the people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem these words from the Eternal: "Look! I am planning and shaping disaster against you. *Like clay on a wheel, I will shape you and your destiny.* Turn back from your evil ways—all of you—*before it is too late.* Do what is right and good." 12But they will tell you, "It's no use *trying to persuade us.* We have our own thoughts about how we should live, and each of us is firmly committed to our own way, evil *or not.*"

13Who has heard of such *betrayal* as this? Ask the nations around you.
Even they won't believe this dreadful thing the virgin Israel has done to Me.
14Does the snow ever melt on the peaks of Lebanon's mountains?

* 17:22 Exodus 20:8

Does the cool water of those
mountain streams ever run
dry?*
15They have forgotten Me. *Instead,*
My people offer incense to
worthless gods,
worshiping them *as though they*
are real.
They have lost their way, stumbling
from the ancient path *of*
blessing.
Now they walk in the ruts *of*
rebellion instead of taking
the high road *of obedience.*
16*Because of their forgetfulness,* their
homeland will become a
wasteland;
those who pass by will hiss *and*
whistle;
Disturbed at the sight of this eerie
desolation,
they will shake their heads *in*
horror.
17As the *strong* east wind *off the desert*
scatters the dust,
so I will scatter My people
before their enemies.
Just as they turned from Me, now I
will turn from them.
I will not even look their way on
the day of their disaster.

► The strong words of Jeremiah and the warnings from God are difficult to hear. But it seems when evil is entrenched in a life, when people stubbornly persist in their wicked ways, such words are not just difficult, they are infuriating. The people of Judah now conspire again to silence this outspoken prophet.

People of Judah *(to one another)*: 18Come on. Let's devise a plan against Jeremiah, for there is no way the teaching of our priests, the wisdom of our elders, or the words of our prophets are going to be lost *and proven wrong. Do we really need to hear any more from him?* Let's attack his reputation, ruin his standing among us, and ignore everything he has to say.

Jeremiah: 19O Eternal *my God,* please
listen to me.
Do You hear what my enemies
are saying?
20Should good be repaid with *such*
evil?
They have set a trap for me.
Remember how I stood before You
in prayer,
begging You to do them good,
Pleading for You to turn Your anger
away from them,
and this is how they repay me!
21Well then. Let their children starve!
Let their *young* warriors fall in
battle!
Let their wives become childless
widows!
Let their husbands be struck
down and killed
and their young men die in battle!
22Let them scream from their houses
when You suddenly release the
attackers on them.
Why? Because they have set a trap
for me;
they have hidden snares along
the way to trip me up.
23Yet, You knew this already, Eternal.
You know of their plans to
kill me.
That's why I am asking You not to
forgive them,
not to forget their sins *or erase*
their crimes from Your sight.
Let them be overthrown and killed
before Your eyes.
Deal with them while Your
anger is still hot.

19 **Eternal One** *(to Jeremiah)*: Go *again* to a potter, *but this time* buy a clay jar from him. Then invite some community leaders and some of the head priests *to walk with you.* 2Take them out *of the city* through the potsherd gate into the valley of Ben-hinnom, *where the city dumps its trash.* Once you're there, cry out *for all to hear* the words I will give you. 3Start out saying, "Hear the word of the Eternal, O kings of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem! This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has to say."

► Jeremiah now performs yet another symbolic act. The prophet's words and sermons are sometimes forgettable;

* 18:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

but people cannot forget what they see, hear, smell, and taste. The message registers loud and clear. Standing with community and religious leaders amid the broken pottery shards (that's what "potsherd" means), God has a strong word for these people. The time of being shaped and re-formed on the potter's wheel has passed. Like the clay jar Jeremiah is holding, the people's hearts are hardened. A more drastic measure will now be taken. It is no coincidence that God leads them to stand in this valley of refuse—this place sometimes called Topheth. It is where the horrors of human sacrifice occurred. It is where God's vengeance would be remembered.

Eternal One: *Tell the leaders,* I am certainly bringing on this city a *dreadful* disaster that will echo in the ears of those who hear about it. 4*Why is this happening?* Because the people have abandoned Me and defiled this place *where you now stand* by making sacrifices to foreign gods. They have burned offerings to other gods—*idols* never before worshiped by My people, their ancestors, or all the kings of Judah. The blood of innocent people has been spilled in this valley—*human sacrifices in the shadow of Jerusalem.* 5They have built high places *and altars* to Baal where they have sacrificed their own children as burnt offerings to this *dark and pagan* god. *How could this be My people?* I never taught them to do such *unspeakable evil.* It never even crossed My mind. 6So beware: The days are soon coming when this place will not be known as Topheth or even the valley of Ben-hinnom. Soon it will be called the valley of Slaughter. 7I will spoil the plans of Judah and Jerusalem *to defend* this city *against Babylon.* I will cause their people to be killed by enemies in battle and by those who hunt them down to take their lives. *No one will bury them;* I will feed their dead bodies to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the land. 8I will destroy this city, making their homeland a wasteland, a place of scorn. Those who pass by *and see this desolation* will shake their heads in horror. 9As the enemy lays siege to the city and closes in around them, *food will run out and those inside the city walls will become desperate.* Then they will turn on each other, eating one another and even their own children to stay alive.

10At this point, *Jeremiah,* smash the clay jar in front of your companions, 11and say to those leaders, "This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say: 'Take a good look at this shattered jar! Is there any hope of these fragments being pieced together again? So, too, will you be without hope of repair when I smash this nation and this city. Topheth will be used as a burial site until there is no room. 12Then I will make Jerusalem and all its citizens *as unclean* as Topheth itself. 13As for the houses of Jerusalem and the palaces of the kings of Judah, they will be defiled like the wasteland of Topheth because people have done *shameful* things on their rooftops—burning sacrifices to the starry hosts and pouring drink offerings to other gods *in My city*!'"

14Jeremiah returned *to the city* from Topheth where the Eternal sent him to deliver this *disturbing* message. He stood in the court of the Eternal's temple and proclaimed *the same sermon* to all its citizens *who came there to worship.*

Jeremiah: 15This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has to say: "Watch as I bring every disaster I have promised onto Jerusalem and all the towns and villages *of Judah,* because they are a stiff-necked, *stubborn* people who refuse to listen to what I say."

► The people take these words and actions seriously because they understand something about the power of words and actions. In other words, Jeremiah isn't just acting out another object lesson for the people; this is God's declaration that the time has truly come for judgment to begin. God's words, when spoken by His prophet, create this new reality. When the clay cannot be reworked, more drastic measures are taken. Judah will now be broken.

20 When the priest Pashhur (son
of Immer, chief officer of the
temple *guard*) heard what
Jeremiah was prophesying, 2he had the
prophet beaten and put in the stocks* at
the upper Benjamin gate near the temple,
*a place where everyone in the city could see
this painful and embarrassing spectacle.*
3The next morning, Pashhur released
him from the stocks, *hoping Jeremiah had
learned his lesson. Instead, this is what he
heard from the prophet:*

Jeremiah: The Eternal no longer knows
you by the name Pashhur. He has
renamed you Magor-missabib, *which
means "terror on every side."* 4And these
are the words the Eternal has spoken *of
you*: "Certainly I am going to make you
a *symbol of* terror—to yourself and to all
your loved ones. You will see those *close
to you* die in battle against the enemy.
I will give all of Judah over to the king
of Babylon, who will make them either
casualties of war or prisoners of war.
5I will also give the wealth *of Jerusalem*
over as plunder to this enemy. The
resources and treasures of this city and
Judah's kings will be taken and carted
off to Babylon. 6And you Pashhur, along
with your entire household, will be taken
to Babylon and become exiles. You and
your friends who have heard your lies
will never see home again; you will all die
in exile in Babylon and be buried there."

7O Eternal, You deceived me *into
being Your prophet,*
and I went along and allowed it
to happen!
Your strength is too much for me,
and so You win; *I speak Your
words.*
Just look at what I have become: a
laughingstock;
all day long people mock me.
8The only words coming out of my
mouth
are loud cries of "Violence and
destruction!"
It is the Eternal's words—*Your
words*—
that bring me insults and jokes
all day long.
9But when I tell myself, I'll never
mention Your name
or speak for You again, *it's no
use.*
The word of God burns in my heart;
it is like fire in my bones.
I try to hold it all in, but I cannot.
10I hear the crowds whispering
*behind my back and mocking
my prophecies*:
" 'Terror is everywhere we turn,'
he says. Let's report him *for
breaking some law.*"
Even my trusted friends are waiting
for me to make a mistake:
"Maybe he will be deceived,
and then we'll win, take control,
and have our revenge on him."
11*But I am not alone.* The Eternal is
here with me.
He stands beside me, as a
dreaded warrior.
That is why my tormentors will fail
so miserably. *They cannot win.*
Their humiliation and
permanent dishonor will be
remembered for all time.
12Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, You test the righteous;
You see my deepest thoughts;
You know my heart.
Let me see Your vengeance exacted
against these people.
for I am trusting my cause, *my
future* to You.
13Sing to the Eternal God!
Praise the Eternal *now for what
He will soon do.*
For a troubled soul is snatched
from the hands of the
wicked.

14Cursed be the day I was born—
cursed, not blessed is the day my
mother gave birth to me.
15Cursed be the man who told my
overjoyed father,
"You have a son."
16May he be as *cursed as* the towns of
Sodom and Gomorrah,
which the Eternal decimated
without a care.
Let him hear cries *for help* in the
morning.
Let him recoil at the shouts of
war at noon,
17For he did not kill me before I was
born
so my mother's womb would
become my grave—
my mother's womb forever
enlarged.

* 20:2 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

How wild and raw are the emotions of Jeremiah in these days of anticipation! The pain and embarrassment of being publicly punished, the betrayal of his friends, and the ridicule of so many lead to an honest longing for vindication. But there are moments when God's sustaining love fills the prophet with joy. His are not the rants of a madman. He expects to be vindicated. God has called him to speak truth to powerful people, and those words are becoming reality. To this promise, Jeremiah clings.

But as emotions often do, this sense of resolve again evaporates, leaving the painful awareness of his calling. He must continue to speak hard and frightening words to a people he still loves. He will soon witness the destruction of a country and city he still loves. At times, his task is almost unbearable; but as always, Jeremiah remains honest in his dealings with God who calls him into this role. Sometimes, pouring his heart out is all he can do.

18 Why was I ever born? To watch
such tragedy?
To *feel such* sorrow? To live my
days in *utter* shame?

21 *It was during this ironic turn of events that* the word of the Eternal came again to *the prophet,* Jeremiah. King Zedekiah sent Pashhur (*not the son of Immer mentioned previously, but the* son of Malchijah) and the priest Zephaniah (son of Maaseiah) to speak with Jeremiah.

► How time changes things! Jeremiah, the rejected prophet, is now being petitioned by those in power. The same man who has been arrested and abused for prophesying God's judgment is sent a request from the king himself because the words of Jeremiah are indeed coming true before the people's eyes. Jerusalem now faces certain siege by the Babylonian king. Out of desperation, the same leaders who tried to silence the prophet are now asking him to speak up for them—to God!

King's Messengers: 2 Please speak to the Eternal on our behalf. *We desperately need your help* because Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is attacking Judah *and is about to lay siege to Jerusalem.* Perhaps the Eternal will *respond to you,* perform a miracle, and cause this *dreaded king* to withdraw his forces *and leave us alone.*

Jeremiah: 3 Tell King Zedekiah that 4 this is what the Eternal, the God of Israel, has to say: "I will *indeed rise up and* turn back the weapons of war you hold in your hands, the very weapons you *plan to* use against *the approaching enemy*—the king of Babylon and his army from Chaldea that now surrounds your city walls. I will bring that enemy *inside your walls,* into the city itself. 5 With My strong hand and powerful arm I will rise up and fight against you, fueled by My great wrath, anger, and fury. *Do you think I will fight beside you? You misunderstand.* 6 I will strike those who live in this city with a plague: both man and beast will die. 7 After that," says the Eternal, "I will hand over King Zedekiah of Judah, his advisors, and the citizens *of Jerusalem* who survive the plague, the war, and the famine to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, their enemy, and those who seek their lives. *In that dreadful day,* he will slaughter them without mercy. He* will neither pity nor have compassion for them.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 8 Tell the people that I said, "I will give you the choice of life or death. 9 Stay in the city, and you will die by war, famine, or plague. But walk outside the city walls and surrender to the Chaldean army about to lay siege *to your city,* and you will live. *You will be prisoners of war,* but you'll be rewarded with life. 10 For I have turned My back on this city, purposing evil instead of good. The city will be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon, who will burn it to *the ground*."

* 21:7 Greek manuscripts read, "I."

11To the royal household of Judah say,
"Hear the word of the Eternal. 12O house
of David, this is what He has to say to you:

Administer justice each morning;
save the victim from the hand of
the thief.
If you do not, My anger will burn
and no one will be able to
put it out
because they themselves have
done evil.
13I am against you, *Jerusalem,*
enthroned high above the
valley,
O rock of the plain,
You who boast, "Who will come
down *to fight* against us,
and who will enter our homes?"
14I will *visit you, Jerusalem, and* punish
you for your *wicked* deeds.
I will start a fire in your forests
that will surround you and
consume everything.

So says the Eternal.

22 **Eternal One** *(to Jeremiah)***:** Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and say to him, 2"Hear the word of the Eternal. *Listen,* O king of Judah, who sits on David's throne. *Listen,* you advisors of the king. *Listen,* you people who walk through these *city* gates. 3This is what the Eternal has to say: 'Do what is just and right. Rescue those *poor ones* being robbed by the extortionists. Protect the outsiders, orphans, and widows *in your land* from any oppression, *for they have no one.* Stop the violence and the shedding of innocent blood in this place. 4If you do what I say, there will always be a king on the throne *in Jerusalem.* The descendants of David will ride through these gates leading *a great processional of* chariots and horses, of advisors and subjects. 5But if you refuse My words *of warning,* I swear by My name *and all that I am* that this palace *of yours* will be laid to waste.'"

6This is what the Eternal says concerning the king of Judah and his household.

Eternal One: You are *as precious* to Me
as *the lush forests of* Gilead;
you are like *the cedars on* the
summit of Lebanon.
But I swear I will make you into a
wilderness—*stripped of trees*—
with cities that lie empty and
lifeless.
7I will unleash destroyers against
you—
ruthless men with *fearful*
weapons.
They will cut down your best trees
and throw them on the fire.

8When other nations pass by the ruins *of Jerusalem,* they will ask each other, "Why did the Eternal destroy this great city?" 9The answer they will hear *is the one you already know*: "Because these people violated the covenant they had made with the Eternal their God by worshiping and serving other gods."

10Do not cry for the one who is dead; do
not mourn for him.
Cry instead for the *living* one going
into exile
For he will not come back again,
he will never see his home again.

11This is a word of the Eternal for Shallum (son of Josiah), who succeeded his father as king of Judah and went from this place *into exile*:

Eternal One: He will never return, 12and he will die in that land of captivity, never to see this place again.

13Woe to the one* who builds his
palace on *the proceeds of*
unrighteousness,
who adds upper rooms on *the*
gains of injustice,
Who forces his *own* people to labor
for nothing,
who refuses to pay them for all
their *hard* work.
14He thinks to himself, "I will build a
huge palace
with a large second story and
many windows.
I will panel the walls with *the best*
cedar
and paint it red *to impress*
everyone."
15Do you become king because
you have more cedar than
another?
Your father, *so different from you,*
had plenty to eat, plenty to
drink.

* 22:13 A reference to Jehoiakim

Didn't he live his life as a righteous
and fair man?
And *look* how well he did.
16He stood up for the poor and needy;
then things went well *for him*
and the people.
Isn't this what it means to know Me?
17But *you are so different:* your eyes
are focused and your heart
is set
on *one goal*: deceitful personal
gain.
You make the innocent pay with
their blood;
you *violently* oppress them and
take what is not yours.

18So this is what the Eternal says
regarding Jehoiakim (son of Josiah),
king of Judah:

Eternal One: *Upon his death,* no one in
his family will weep and say,
"Oh my brother, oh my sister—
our loved one is gone."
Nor will *any of* his subjects weep
and say,
"Our leader is gone; our great
king is gone."
19*No,* he will be buried like a dead
donkey—*his body* dragged
away
and dumped outside Jerusalem's
gates *in the trash heap.*

(to Jerusalem) 20Go to *the mountains*
of Lebanon and cry out.
Run to Bashan and *the peaks of*
Abarim, and cry out *loudly*
Because all of your lovers have been
destroyed.
21I warned you when things were
going well,
but you said *to Me,* "I will not
listen."
You have treated Me this way since
the days of your youth;
you have never listened to My
voice.
22All your shepherds will be driven
away by the wind,
and your lovers will be led into
captivity.
In that moment, you will be
covered with shame,
humiliated because of your evil
ways.
23You who live in Lebanon,
safe and nestled among the
cedars—
How you will cry in anguish when
the judgment comes,
like the anguish and pain of a
woman giving birth.

24As *surely as* I live, I declare the following about Coniah (son of Jehoiakim), king of Judah: Even though you were a signet ring on My right hand, I have torn you away. 25I will drop you into the hands of those who want you dead, those you fear—Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) and his Chaldean army. 26I will cast you and your mother into another country, where you were not born. It will be there, *in that foreign land,* where you will die. 27Though they will long to come back to this land *you call home,* they will never return.

28Is this man, Coniah, a broken and
worthless pot?
Is he like something *tossed on the*
garbage heap that no one wants?
Why are he and his children being
thrown out—
no, hurled out into a foreign land?
29O land, land, land!
You must hear the word of the
Eternal!

Eternal One: 30Write *in the record* that
this man is childless *and*
disgraced.
As long as he lives, none of his
children will succeed him
And sit on the throne of David
and rule over Judah again.

23 **Eternal One:** Woe to the shepherds who slaughter and scatter the sheep of My pasture!
2This is what I, the Eternal God of Israel, have to say about the shepherds tending My people:

You have scattered My flock, driven them far away, and failed *miserably* at being their caregivers. So look! I will punish you *for your negligence,* for the *careless* evil you've done. 3I will personally gather the remnant of My sheep from the lands where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their home pasture where they will be fruitful and multiply. 4I will appoint *new, responsible* shepherds to take care of them, and My sheep will no longer have to be afraid. *These new, responsible shepherds will make sure* that none of My sheep go missing.

The shepherd-leaders and shepherd-teachers of God's people have misled them, and the results have been disastrous. Now God intervenes. God Himself, personally, gathers His exiles from wherever He scattered them and places them under the guidance and tutelage of new shepherds, responsible leaders who will bring them home once again safe and secure. As if that is not enough, God will fulfill the covenant He made with King David hundreds of years earlier and establish a righteous branch of David to reign from Jerusalem. This king will be everything the earlier kings of Judah were not: just, fair, and wise. The restoration of God's exiles and the installation of this new king—God's anointed—will be so glorious, so momentous that it will change the course of history. It will surpass God's rescue of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt.

Jeremiah's prophecy of this coming king inspires many to look and long for God's Anointed One, His Messiah, from among the sons of David. Indeed, some of the earliest followers of Jesus will find in Him the fulfillment of these hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

5Watch! The days are coming when
I will raise up a righteous Branch of
David—*an heir of his royal line*—who will
rule justly, act wisely and make things
right again in the land. 6During His
reign, Judah will be redeemed and Israel
will be a safe place again. The name he
is called *will tell the story*: The Eternal Is
Our Righteousness!
7So *be ready and* watch carefully.
The days are coming when no one will
say any longer, "As the Eternal lives,
who brought the people of Israel out of
slavery in the land of Egypt." 8Instead,
they will say, "As the Eternal lives, who
brought the people of Israel out of exile
in the lands of the north and out of all
other countries where He had scat-
tered them." Then the Israelites will live
securely in their own land.

9As for the *false* prophets:
Deep in my chest, my heart is broken.
I am shaken to the core, like a man who
is drunk,
overcome by too much wine
All because of the Eternal,
all because of His holy words.

Eternal One: 10The land is full of
adulterers;
surely the curse is in effect and
the land mourns.
The pastures in the wilderness are
all dried up,
for they have set an evil course,
and their might is not right.
11For even the prophets and priests
are ungodly;
I have witnessed them perform
wicked acts in My temple.

12Now this path they are on will
become *treacherous, and*
they will slip and slide;
they will *stumble and* fall into
the darkness, driven into the
gloom.
For in the year of their punishment,
I will bring them to ruin.

13I saw something repulsive
among the prophets of Samaria:
They prophesied in the name of Baal
and led My people, Israel, away
from Me.
14I have seen something horrible
among the prophets of
Jerusalem:
worship that is adulterous and
deceitful.
They *inspire and* encourage people
to even more evil;
now no one turns back from
his sin.
The citizens *of Jerusalem* remind
Me of the *wicked* people
who once lived in Sodom and
Gomorrah.

15So this is what the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, has to say about those
prophets:

Eternal One: Watch, I will give them
bitter food to eat and
poisoned water to drink,
because the prophets of
Jerusalem have released *their*
ungodliness
And it has spread into all the land.

16These are the words of the Eternal, Commander of heavenly armies.

Eternal One: When these prophets "prophesy" to you, filling you with empty hopes, do not listen to one word! They do not speak for Me. They speak of visions they have only imagined. 17They keep saying to those who *openly* reject My word, "*Don't worry,* the Eternal has promised you peace." And to those stubborn souls who go their own way, they say, "*Don't worry,* nothing bad will happen to you."

18Which one of these *false prophets* has
stood in the presence of the Eternal
and heard His voice or seen His plan?
Who *of them* has paid attention to His
word and *truly* listened?
19Behold, the storm of the Eternal's wrath
will now break open,
swirling down *out of the sky* like a
whirlwind onto the heads of the
wicked.
20The Eternal's anger will not relent until
He has carried out His most
fervent plans.
You will understand all of this in the
days to come.

Eternal One: 21I did not send these *so-called* prophets,
but they have run *to you with their empty words.*
I did not speak to them,
but they claim to speak for Me.
22If only they had stood in My
presence *and heard My voice,*
then they would have spoken
My words to My people!
They would have turned *this nation*
back from its evil ways and
evil deeds.

23Am I *only* a God who is close by,
and not a God of the farthest reaches?
24*Am I a God* anyone can hide from?
Do I not see what happens in secret?
Am I not *everywhere,* filling heaven and
earth? 25I have heard these prophets
who speak lies in My name. They say, "I
had a dream, I had a dream," *and claim it
was Me speaking to them!* 26How long *will
this go on*? Will the hearts of these lying
prophets ever change? *How long* will they
deceive themselves *and all who listen
to them*? 27They think they can make
My people forget My name with all this
talk of dreams—just as their ancestors
forgot My name as they worshiped Baal.
28If a prophet has a dream, he should
tell others of that dream. But the one
who has My word should speak it with
unshakable faith. For what is straw *worth,*
when compared to grain? 29Does not My
word *burn* like fire? Does it not shatter
rock like a *strong* hammer? 30Look, this is
why I oppose the prophets who steal My
word from others *and offer it as their own.*
31I oppose the prophets whose tongues
"declare" something, as if I, the Eternal,
have declared it. 32I oppose *the prophets*
who prophesy with lying dreams. They
lead My people astray with their reckless
lies. But I did not send these prophets or
direct them to speak *in My name,* so they
are of no use to My people.

This is what the Eternal declares.

► Prophets stretch the meanings of words in order to instruct and challenge their audiences. Although it's difficult to appreciate in translation, in the following passage Jeremiah uses an important Hebrew word that has a double meaning. It means "message," as in the message from God that he is about to declare, but it also means "burden"; therefore, the "message" he receives from God—the "message" he must now declare—is a "burden" both to hear and deliver. As the message goes out of Jeremiah, others use this word to ridicule him and minimize what God is saying. In this passage, God makes it quite clear what He thinks of these mocking and sinful people.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)*: 33When someone, some prophet or some priest, asks, "What is the message the Eternal burdened you with *today, Jeremiah?*" Simply answer, "[You are the burden, and]* the Eternal declares, 'I will cast you aside.'" 34If a prophet or priest or any of these people claim, "This is the burden of the Eternal," *let them be warned,* I will punish that person and his family.

(to the people) 35*Instead of making light of My declarations, from now on* you should say to your friends and family, "What is the Eternal's answer *to you*?" or

* 23:33 Hebrew manuscripts read, "What burden?"

"What is the Eternal saying *to us*?" [36]Do not use the phrase "the burden of the Eternal" again. *It means nothing to you.* All people say they have a message from Me *when they don't.* You are twisting the words of the living God, our God, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. [37]You should say to the prophet, "What answer is the Eternal giving to you?" or "What is the Eternal saying *to us*?" [38]But if you *keep* saying, "This is the burden of the Eternal," expect Me to declare this: "You continued to use the phrase 'the burden of the Eternal,' even though I warned you not to use it. [39]That is why I will forget you and cast you out of My presence, both you and the city I gave you and your ancestors. [40]I will bring endless disgrace upon you—an enduring shame that no one will forget."

24 *The day came* when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took Jeconiah (son of Jehoiakim), king of Judah, into exile along with the princes of Judah and the artisans and skilled laborers from Jerusalem. *Sometime after* they arrived in Babylon, the Eternal showed me *a vision: I looked and saw* two baskets of figs placed in front of His temple. [2]One basket was filled with very good figs, freshly ripened, while the other was filled with very bad figs, too rotten to eat.

► In 597 B.C. the dreaded King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has Jehoiachin, king of Judah, deported to Babylon. Along with the king, he takes many skilled laborers and craftsmen to help with the great building projects of his empire. While the loss of powerful and talented men is a tragedy, it will not be the end of Judah's troubles. The prevailing thought of those who remain in Jerusalem is that they have indeed avoided God's judgment while those in exile are being punished. This shortsighted perspective is corrected by a vision given to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: [3]Jeremiah, what do you see?

Jeremiah: Figs, both good and bad. The good ones are very good, but the bad ones are so rotten they cannot be eaten.

[4]At this, the word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: [5]This is what the Eternal God of Israel says: "These good figs are like those who have been taken into exile from Judah, the ones I have sent to Chaldea. [6]*And even though they are in captivity,* I will watch over them. I will look out for their good. And *one day,* I will bring them home. Then I will rebuild them and not tear them down; I will plant them *anew* and not uproot them. [7]I will give them a *new,* intense desire to know Me because I am the Eternal One. They will be My people, and I will be their God because they will return to Me completely.

[8]"But the bad figs that are so rotten they cannot be eaten are like King Zedekiah of Judah, his leaders, and the citizens of Jerusalem—those who are left behind in Judah and those *who escaped* to Egypt. So I, the Eternal One, will deal with them *like the rotten figs they are.* [9]I will make them a horror to the watching world, a disgrace and a lesson *for all to learn,* an object of scorn and cursing wherever I scatter them. [10]I will send war, famine, and disease against them until they are *completely* destroyed in the very land I gave to them and their ancestors."

25 The word *of God* concerning all of Judah *again* came to Jeremiah when Jehoiakim (son of Josiah), king of Judah, had reigned for four years. Meanwhile, *the dreaded* Nebuchadnezzar was in his first year as king of Babylon. [2]*During these ominous days* the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the citizens of Jerusalem and the people of Judah.

Jeremiah: [3]*I have been warning you since* the word of the Eternal started coming to me in the 13th year of King Josiah (son of Amon), ruler of Judah. For these last 23 years, I have been telling you again and again *what was coming,* but you never listened. [4]*It wasn't just me whom* the Eternal sent. He sent you His servants, the prophets, again and again, but you never paid attention to them. You never listened as [5]they said, "Turn back from your evil ways and actions so you can live forever in this land the Eternal gave to you and your ancestors. [6]I will not harm you if you do not chase after other gods to serve and worship

them or provoke Me to anger with *the little idols* your hands have made."

Eternal One: [7]But you did not listen to Me *or My prophets*! Now I, the Eternal One, declare that you have stirred up My anger with *the little idols* your hands have made, and you have brought this harm upon yourselves. [8]Therefore, I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, declare that since you have not *heard or* obeyed My words, [9]I am about to summon the clans of the north along with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who serves Me. I will use them to punish this land and those of you who live in it. *I will* also *use them* against all the surrounding nations *of Judah*. I will destroy them completely, making them a place of horror, an object of scorn, a land of everlasting ruin. [10]I will silence any hint of laughter and joy, the sweet words of the bride and bridegroom *at a wedding,* the milling *of grain* and the lighting of a lamp. [11]*It will all end,* and this place will be a horrific wasteland. And these nations will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.

► The judgment of God is drawing near. Although Babylon is His instrument of judgment, this empire is not immune to His justice; she, too, will answer to God for her brutal treatment of God's people. And so the focus of the prophecy shifts from Judah's pain to the destruction of this now-emerging world power.

Eternal One *(to Babylon)***:** [12]When the 70 years *of servitude* are complete, I will then punish the king of Babylon, his people, and the land of Chaldea for their guilt. I, the Eternal, will make it a land of everlasting ruin. [13]All that I warned would happen to that land—all that Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations and is now written in this book—I will do. [14]For the *mighty* Babylonians will be turned into slaves for many nations and powerful kings; I will repay them according to what they have done and how they have treated *My people.*

[15]This is what the Eternal God of Israel said to me.

Eternal One: Take this cup from My hand and offer it to every nation where I send you. Make them drink *deeply* from it, for the cup is brimming with My anger. [16]When they drink, they will stumble and lose their minds because I am sending the sword against them.

[17]So I took the cup from the Eternal's hand *and did just as He said*—I went to the nations where He sent me and made them drink it: [18]Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, her kings and leaders *drank from the cup and* became *a wasteland,* an *object of* hissing, scorn, and cursing, a *land of* ruin; [19]*then* Pharaoh (king of Egypt), his advisors, his officers, and the entire nation, [20]including the foreigners living there; all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the Philistine kings in *the cities of* Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and what was left of Ashdod; [21]Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; [22]all the kings of Tyre, Sidon, and the other coastlands across the sea; [23]Dedan, Tema, Buz, and the nations who clip the corners of their hair; [24]all the kings of Arabia, the kings of the various desert nomadic tribes; [25]all the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media; [26]all the kings of the north, both near and far. I went from one kingdom to another until every one of them on the face of the earth *had drunk it.* And then finally, the king of Sheshach[, that is, Babylon,]* will drink from this cup.

[27]Then He told me what to say to each *of these nations and rulers.*

Eternal One: This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says: "Drink until you are drunk enough to vomit; *stagger and* fall *to the ground,* and rise no more because I am sending the sword against you." [28]If they refuse to drink from the cup you offer to them, tell them, "This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says: 'You must drink it! [29]Do you think I will bring disaster to the city that is named after Me, but let you escape? You will not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword *of judgment* against all who live on the earth.'"

So declares the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

* 25:26 Most manuscripts omit this portion. Compare to 51:41.

Eternal One: 30*Jeremiah,* now prophesy
against the nations. Speak to them these
words:

The Eternal roars from on high;
from His holy place above, His
voice thunders.
Like a lion, He will roar against His
land
and shout, like those who tread
the grapes,
against those living on the earth.
31The uproar will echo to ends of the
earth
because the Eternal brings His
charge against the nations.
He will judge all humanity and
punish the wicked in battle.

So says the Eternal.
32This is what the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, has to say:

Eternal One: Look *what is happening*!
Disaster is spreading *across the
earth,*
From nation to nation;
a mighty storm is gathering
from the ends of the earth!

Coming in the wake of that fateful storm, the death and destruction are unimaginable.

33Those killed by the Eternal in that
day will blanket the earth from one end
to the other. *So great is their number that*
no one will gather the dead and bury
them. No one will be there to mourn
them. They will lie like dung upon the
face of the earth.

34Cry out, you shepherds, and weep;
wallow in the dust—roll in ashes,
you leaders of the flock.
For the time has come for you to
be slaughtered and scattered
abroad.
You will fall *and shatter* like a
treasured vessel.
35As for the shepherds, they will have
nowhere to hide;
as for the leaders, they will not
escape *My punishment.*
36Listen to the sound—the cry of the
shepherds,
the wailing of the leaders of the
flock!
The Eternal is ruining their *pleasant*
pastures.
37Their peaceful meadows are now
deathly silent,
for the fierce anger of the
Eternal *has blown through.*
38Like a lion leaving his lair, so He has
left His,
for their land has become a
horror—
Kindled by the enemy's hot anger
and the burning fury of the
Eternal.

26 The word of the Eternal came
to Jeremiah not long after
Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) began
his reign as king of Judah.

Eternal One: 2Stand in the court of My
temple, and speak to the crowds who
have come to worship from all the
towns of Judah. Give them all of My
words, *Jeremiah;* don't leave out a single
one. 3Maybe they will listen *this time,*
and each one of them will stop the evil
actions *and return to My path.* Then I,
too, will stop the impending disaster I
have planned for them because of all the
evil things they do. 4Tell them what the
Eternal says: "If you will not listen to Me
or obey My law that I have already given
you, 5and if you will not listen to what
My servants the prophets have to say
even after I've sent them to you again
and again, 6then I will deal with this
temple as I did Shiloh. But *this time* I will
also make this very city a curse for all
the nations of the earth."

7The priests and the *so-called* prophets and
the crowds heard the message Jeremiah
delivered in the temple of the Eternal. 8As
soon as Jeremiah finished saying all the
Eternal directed him to say, the priests, the
prophets, and those who stopped to listen
grabbed him *and began to shout.*

Temple Audience: You deserve to die!
9Why have you uttered such prophecies
in the name of the Eternal declaring that
this temple will be *destroyed* like Shiloh
and Jerusalem will be empty and lifeless?

Jeremiah has a lot of nerve. To speak against Jerusalem and the temple—God's holy place on earth—is tantamount to blasphemy, and blasphemers deserve death.

At this point, *a large mob of* people gathered
around Jeremiah in the Eternal's temple.

10When some officials of Judah heard what was happening, they left the palace and hurried to take their seats at the entryway of the new gate leading to the Eternal's temple. 11The priests and *so-called* prophets brought charges *against Jeremiah* to these officials as the crowd looked on.

Priests and Prophets: This man should be sentenced to death! You heard with your own ears how he prophesied against our city.

Jeremiah *(to the officials and the crowd)*: 12The Eternal sent me to prophesy against the temple and this city—every word you heard *came from Him*. 13If you stop your *evil* actions and obey the Eternal your God, then He will stop the impending disaster He has planned for you. 14As for me, my fate is in your hands. Do with me what you think is right and fair. 15But know this: if you execute me, innocent blood will be on your hands and on this city and on all who live here, because the Eternal *truly* did send me to speak each and every word you heard.

Officials and the Crowd *(to the priests and prophets)*: 16This man should not be sentenced to death because he has spoken to us in the name of the Eternal our God.

17*At this point,* some of the elders, *who were leaders* of other communities, stood and *supported the verdict,* speaking to the entire crowd.

Elders: 18*Remember* the prophet Micah of Moresheth in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah. It was he who said to the people of Judah, "This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say:

> Zion will be plowed under like a field,
> Jerusalem will be left in ruins,
> And the hill on which the temple stands
> will be overgrown with a forest."*

19*As difficult as those words were to hear,* did King Hezekiah or anyone else in Judah demand Micah's death? No, he humbly worshiped the Eternal and asked for mercy, and *what happened then*? The Eternal stopped the impending disaster he had planned for them *and turned back the Assyrian army. Now it is our turn to listen to the prophet of God,* but *instead,* we are about to bring this terrible disaster upon ourselves *by ignoring Him again*!

20Uriah (son of Shemaiah) from Kiriath-jearim had prophesied in the name of the Eternal with essentially the same message as Jeremiah against this city and nation. 21When King Jehoiakim, his soldiers, and his officials heard what Uriah had been saying, they decided to kill him. When Uriah became aware of these plans, he was afraid and escaped to Egypt. 22Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan (son of Achbor) to Egypt along with others *to bring Uriah back*. 23*Once they found him,* they brought him back from Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him executed by a sword and then buried in a commoner's grave.

24Ahikam (son of Shaphan) used his influence to help Jeremiah. As a result, the prophet was not handed over to the people to be put to death.

27 Early in the reign of Zedekiah (son of Josiah), king of Judah, the word from the Eternal came to Jeremiah. 2This is what He said to me.

Eternal One: Make a yoke out of *leather* straps and *wooden* bars, and place it upon your neck *as you would upon an ox*. 3Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon through the *royal* envoys they sent to Jerusalem to King Zedekiah of Judah. 4*Intercept them, and* give them a message for their masters: "This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says to your masters: 5'By My great power and with My outstretched arm, I made the earth, along with all the people and animals that live on it. *I am the ruler of all creation,* and I give it to anyone I choose. 6*Watch* now, as I have given all these lands over to Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon), who does My bidding. I will make even the wild animals serve him. 7All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson until that empire's

* 26:18 Micah 3:12

The next three chapters are a collection of stories and prophetic sayings from the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, who suffers from the same weaknesses and mistakes as his predecessors. These are challenging times for Judah: Jerusalem has already been invaded once by Nebuchadnezzar. It was then that the previous king was deported, along with thousands of necessary leaders, to Babylon. The people long for freedom from this empire and yearn for the day when the exiles will return home. But this new king, Zedekiah, does not lead his people back to God as they live through this time of judgment. Rather, he listens to false prophets and is eventually convinced by the surrounding nations to join a coalition that will attempt to revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. This mistake will lead to the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and to the destruction of the city itself in 586 B.C. During these restless years leading up to that revolt, Jeremiah continues to take the unpopular side on this very public debate. Now that Babylon is a part of God's plan for Judah, it is critical for the king and his people not to revolt against the empire.

time is up. *Only* then will many nations
and great kings *rise up* and make Babylon
their slave. 8Any nation or kingdom that
refuses to serve King Nebuchadnezzar of
Babylon or put its neck under his yoke
will be punished with war, famine, and
disease. *I promise you* I will destroy it,
and My weapon will be the conquering
hand of Nebuchadnezzar himself. 9So do
not listen to your *false* prophets, your
fortunetellers, your dreamers, your medi-
ums, or your sorcerers who tell you, "*Do
not worry,* for you will never *have to* serve
the king of Babylon." 10Their prophecies
are lies that will only separate you from
your lands, *for I will* take you far from
your home—I will drive you out, and you
will die there. 11However, any nation that
will put its neck under the yoke of Bab-
ylon's king and serve him will remain in
their land. I will allow them to live there
and to farm the land.'"

So declares the Eternal.

12I delivered a similar message to
King Zedekiah of Judah.

Jeremiah: Put your neck under the yoke
of Babylon's king. Serve him and his
people so you *and your people* can live!
13Why do you and your people insist on
dying by war, famine, and disease? *Do
you not realize* the Eternal has threat-
ened any nation that refuses to serve the
king of Babylon? 14So do not listen to
the *false* prophets who tell you, "*Do not
worry,* you will never serve the king of
Babylon." Their prophecies are lies! 15The
Eternal declares, "I did not send these
prophets *to you.* They are telling lies in
My name. Therefore, I will drive you out
and you will die—you *who believe these
lies* and the prophets who speak them
to you."

16(to the priests and people) This is
what the Eternal says: "Do not listen to
the prophets who are trying to reassure
you by saying, 'It won't be long before
the articles stolen from the temple will
be brought back from Babylon.' They are
lying to you! 17Do not listen to them.
Serve the king of Babylon, and you will
survive. *Why would you sacrifice* this city
because you won't listen? Why should it
become a ruin *to the destructive forces of
your pride*? 18If they are *truly* My proph-
ets and have My word, let them pray to
the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, that what treasures are left in
the temple and in the palace of Judah's
king will stay in Jerusalem and not be
taken to Babylon." 19-21For this is surely
what the Eternal, Commander of *heav-
enly* armies, declares about the *bronze*
pillars *of the temple,* the *bronze* sea, the
bronze stands, and all the other *treasured*
items King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
did not take from Jerusalem when he
took Jeconiah (son of Jehoiakim), king of
Judah, *into exile* away *from Jerusalem* and
into Babylon, along with the nobles of
Judah and Jerusalem: 22"They will all be
carried away to Babylon and will stay
there until the day I come for them. This
is what I, the Eternal One, promise. But
the day will come when I will bring all
these treasures back and restore them to
this place."

28 *One day* in the fifth month of
the same year (this was early
in the reign of King Zedekiah
of Judah, the fourth year), a prophet from
Gibeon named Hananiah (son of Azzur)

contradicted me in front of the priests and all the people *who had come to worship* in the temple of the Eternal.

Hananiah: [2]This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says: "I will break the yoke Babylon's king *has placed upon you.* [3]Within two years, I will bring back the items King Nebuchadnezzar took from My temple and carried away to Babylon. [4]I will also bring back Jeconiah (son of Jehoiakim), king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah taken with him to Babylon. This is what I, the Eternal One, declare: 'I will break the yoke that Babylon's king has placed *upon you*!' "

[5]Then Jeremiah the prophet addressed Hananiah the prophet in front of the priests and all the people who had come *to worship* in the temple of the Eternal.

Jeremiah: [6]May it be so! May the Eternal do just as you said. May He confirm that your prophecy is true by bringing back the items *stolen* from the temple. *Better yet,* may He bring all of the exiles home from Babylon.

[7]But now hear what I have to say to you and to all these people listening to us: [8]Long before either of us was here, in the days of old, there were prophets who spoke *strong words* against many nations and kingdoms. They, *too,* predicted war, famine, and disease; *and they have been proven right.* [9]Now, as for the prophet who prophecies peace, *how are we to know* whether he is a true prophet sent by the Eternal? Only when that prediction comes true.

[10]At this point, the prophet Hananiah grabbed the yoke from around Jeremiah's neck and broke it. [11]He then turned to the people and said:

Hananiah: This is what the Eternal says: "This is how I will break the yoke King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon forced *you and* all the nations to wear. I will remove it from your neck within two years."

And with that, the prophet Jeremiah walked away.

[12]*Not long* after Hananiah had broken the yoke off Jeremiah's neck, the word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: [13]Go to Hananiah and tell him, "This is what the Eternal says: 'You may have broken a wooden yoke, but now you will get a yoke of iron *that you could never break.*' [14]For this is what the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, declares: 'I have put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations, and they will serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Even the *wild* animals of the field will obey Him.' "

Jeremiah *(to Hananiah)***:** [15]Listen, Hananiah! The Eternal has not sent you, but *still* the people *of this nation* have believed your lies. [16]So the Eternal now says this to you: "Pay attention. I am about to wipe you from the face of the earth. Because you have *stirred up* rebellion against Me with your words, you will die this year."

[17]Later that year, in the seventh month, Hananiah the prophet died.

29 The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the rest who had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. [2](This was after King Jeconiah *of Judah* and his mother had been taken into exile, along with servants of the court, officials of Judah and Jerusalem, and *many of* the craftsmen and artisans.)* [3]The letter was hand-carried by Elasah (son of Shaphan) and Gemariah (son of Hilkiah), whom Zedekiah king of Judah dispatched to Babylon *on a diplomatic mission* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

Jeremiah's Letter: [4]This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says to those He exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: [5]"Build houses—make homes *for your families because you are not coming back to Judah anytime soon.* Plant gardens, and eat the food you grow there. [6]Marry and have children; find wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, so that they can have children. *During these years of captivity,* let your families grow and not die out. [7]Pursue the *peace and* welfare of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to *Me,* the Eternal, for Babylon because if it has peace, you will live in peace."

* 29:2 2 Kings 24:12-15

These are indeed difficult days for Judah. In 598 B.C. her king was deported to Babylon along with thousands of Jerusalem's key citizens; their capture tore the nation apart. But God has not forgotten those in exile. It is during this period of separation that Jeremiah writes a letter to those who were taken to this foreign land.

For many reasons, relations between Judah's new king, Zedekiah, and the ruler of Babylon are strained; so messengers are sent back and forth in an effort of diplomacy. It is through these men that the prophet of God is able to communicate with those held captive in Babylon. Jeremiah's message to them is the same as to those remaining in Judah: do not revolt against Babylon, for this season of judgment will be longer than others are telling you. In the midst of the struggle, he calls those who are far from home to trust God and His timing. Unfortunately, such words are received no better by those in exile than by those who hear them in Judah.

8This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says to you: "Do not be fooled by the *false* prophets and fortune-tellers among you. Do not listen to dreamers or their *interpretations of* dreams, 9for I did not send them to you. They are prophesying lies in My name!" So says the Eternal. 10*If you want the truth,* this is what the Eternal has to say: "You will remain in Babylon for 70 years. When that time is over, I will come to you, and I will keep My promise of bringing you back home. 11For I know the plans I have for you," says the Eternal, "plans for peace, not evil, to give you a future and hope—*never forget that.* 12At that time, you will call out for Me, *and I will hear*. You will pray, and I will listen. 13You will look for Me intently, and you will find Me. 14*Yes,* I will be found by you," says the Eternal, "and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations *where you've been scattered*—all the places where I have driven you. I will bring you back to the land that is your *rightful* home."

15Now you might say, "The Eternal has raised up prophets *here* in Babylon who tell us *other things*." 16-17This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say about the king who *currently* sits on David's throne and all those who remain in Jerusalem and were not taken into exile: "Watch, for I will send war, famine, and disease on them. I will make them like figs so rotten they cannot be eaten. 18I will pursue them with war, famine, and disease. I will make them a horror to the watching world, an object of cursing and terror, of scorn and blame wherever I scatter them 19because they have not listened to Me," says the Eternal. "They ignored the warnings I sent to them again and again through My servants, the prophets. And you *who are in exile are no better, for you* have not listened either." 20Therefore, hear now the word of the Eternal, all you who have been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon. 21This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says about your *so-called* prophets, Ahab (son of Kolaiah) and Zedekiah (son of Maaseiah), who are telling lies in My name: "Watch, for I will hand them over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and he will execute them right in front of you. 22Even their names will be used as a curse by those in exile from Judah when they say, 'May the Eternal treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab who were burned alive by Babylon's king.' 23These men have engaged in disgraceful acts among *My people* Israel. They have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and told lies in My name, prophesying when I never gave them a message. I know this because I am a witness *to all they have done,*" so says the Eternal.

► Jeremiah's letter is not well received by those in exile. They choose instead to listen to the empty promises of false prophets. One such prophet, Shemaiah, becomes so angry with Jeremiah's correspondence that he writes back to the priest Zephaniah in Jerusalem. In this letter, he complains of Jeremiah's prediction of a long

captivity and urges the priest to punish the prophet. Hopefully this embarrassment will silence him. While Zephaniah does not place Jeremiah in shackles, he does read Shemaiah's letter aloud to Jeremiah (and no doubt to others) in Jerusalem.

24Say this to Shemaiah the Nehelamite:

Jeremiah's Letter: 25This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says *about you*: "*I know that* you sent letters on your own authority to the people in Jerusalem, to the priests, and specifically to the priest Zephaniah (son of Maaseiah). *In that letter* to Zephaniah, you said, 26'The Eternal has appointed you as the priest in charge of the temple to replace Jehoiada. When a madman tries to speak like a prophet, you must *take action by* putting him in shackles and in the stocks.* 27So why haven't you put a stop to Jeremiah of Anathoth who poses among you as a prophet *of God*? 28He sent *a letter* to those of us in Babylon predicting that our exile will be a long one. He actually said we should *settle in this place*—building homes and planting gardens of food *that we can enjoy for many years*.'"

29When Zephaniah the priest *received* this letter, he read it to Jeremiah the prophet. 30It was then that a message came to Jeremiah from the Eternal *concerning all of this*.

Eternal One: 31Write back to all the exiles and tell them, "This is what the Eternal says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: 'Because Shemaiah has acted like a prophet when I did not send him, and because he has misled you with lies, 32watch! I will now punish him and his descendants. None of his family will live here *long enough* to see the good I will do for My people *in the coming years* because his words stirred rebellion against Me,' so says the Eternal."

► The words of Jeremiah are often dark prophecies of destruction, for Judah willingly betrayed and disobeyed God. Clearly, a major aspect of his call is foreshadowing the coming judgment of God. But in the following oracles, Jeremiah delivers a strong message of hope to those in exile. The next three chapters are often called the "Book of Consolation." Tucked in the middle of vivid declarations of God's punishment of the unjust, these promises speak of hope and restoration. These, too, are part of the prophet's message.

30 The word of the Eternal *again* came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 2Write in a book all the words I, the Eternal, the God of Israel, have said to you. 3Look! the days are coming when I will restore the fortunes of My people—both Israel and Judah. I will bring them home to the land I gave their ancestors, and they will again possess it.

4So says the Eternal in a message about Israel and Judah.

Eternal One: 5A cry of fear is heard—
it is the sound of panic, not of peace.
6Ask and see *for yourself*:
can a man give birth *to a child*?
Then why do I see strong men
clutching themselves,
their hands on their abdomens as if they are in labor?
Why has every face paled, *looking sickly*?
7*I will tell you why:*
for that great *and awesome* day is like no other.
It will be a time of suffering for Jacob's *descendants*;
still they will be rescued from it.

8For on that day *of deliverance,* declares the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, I will break *Nebuchadnezzar's* yoke off their necks and tear off their shackles; no longer will foreigners force them into slavery. 9Instead, they will serve the Eternal their God, and I will raise up *a descendant of* David their king *to rule* over them.

* 29:26 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

10So do not be afraid, O Jacob, My servant;
do not be troubled, O Israel.
For I, the Eternal One, promise
to liberate you from that distant place,
to bring your children home from where they are in exile.
Jacob will return *home* to peace and quiet,
and no one will make him afraid,
11Because I am with you, and I will deliver you.
I will completely destroy all the nations where I have scattered you,
But I will not destroy you completely.
I will discipline you, but My discipline will be just.
I will not let you go unpunished.

12Your wound is incurable;
your *shattered* pieces are beyond repair.
13There is no one to plead your case—
no healing for your injury,
no relief for your *affliction.*
14All *of those allies* you loved have forgotten about you;
they care nothing about you.
For I have struck you as an enemy would
and punished you like the cruelest *of foes.*
Why? Because your sins abound
and your evil actions are abundant and brazen.
15Why do you cry out over this wound,
this pain that won't go away?
I have done these things to you because your sins abound
and your wicked acts are abundant and brazen.
16But all those who devour you will be devoured.
Exile awaits each of your enemies.
Those who plunder you will be turned into plunder,
and all who prey upon you will be turned into prey.
17For I will make you well again and heal your wounds
I, the Eternal One, declare to you,
Because they have called you an outcast:
"*Look,* it is Zion, the one for whom no one cares."

18I, the Eternal, have this to say:
Look, I will bring back those from captivity.
I will show mercy to Jacob's tents and dwellings;
From the ruins I will rebuild Jerusalem,
and the palace will *once again* stand where it belongs.
19Songs of joy and gratitude will rise from the people.
I will *bless My people and* increase their numbers;
nothing will diminish them.
I will honor them *in the presence of others*;
no one will despise them.
20Their children will live as they did long ago,
their community will be established *again* before My *watchful* eyes,
And I will punish anyone who tries to harm them.
21The prince who leads them will come from among Jacob's *descendants*;
their ruler will be one of their own.
I will draw him near to Me, and he will *delight to* come close,
for he will devote himself to remain close by My side.
22*And as before,* you will be My people,
and I will be your God.

23Behold, the storm of the Eternal's wrath will now break open,
swirling down *out of the sky* like a whirlwind onto the heads of the wicked.
24The Eternal's anger will not relent until He has carried out His most fervent plans.
You will understand all of this in the days to come.

31 1-3This is what the Eternal has to say:

Eternal One: There will come a time when I will be the God of all the clans *and families* of Israel, and they will be My people. This is what I, the Eternal One, declare to you:

My people who survived the sword found grace *as they wandered* in the wilderness;

When Israel went in search of rest,
I appeared to them from far away and said:
"I have loved you with an everlasting love—
out of faithfulness I have drawn you *close*.
4And so it shall be again, My virgin Israel;
I will build you up, and you will be rebuilt.
You will again take up the tambourine
and join with those who are dancing for joy.
5You will again plant vineyards on the hillsides of Samaria;
Your farmers will plant them,
and you will enjoy the fruit *yourselves*.
6The day will come when those who guard *the land*
will cry out from the hills of Ephraim,
'Get up! Let us go to Zion, *dear Jerusalem,*
and *worship* the Eternal our God.'"

7Sing a song of joy for Jacob; shout for this greatest of nations.
Shout it out with praise *in your hearts*:
"O Eternal, save Your people—
rescue the remnant of Israel."
8Watch now, as I bring them from the land to the north,
as I gather *My people* from the ends of the earth.
Look who is among those *returning home*: the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and even those giving birth—
All of these together in the multitude on its way home.
9*Listen,* as they come home weeping *and repenting,*
praying *for direction, pleading for mercy* as I bring them back.
In that day I will lead them beside *quiet* streams of water
and *take them* upon a straight path where they will not stumble.
Why? Because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is My firstborn *son*.

10Listen to the word of the Eternal, you nations *of the earth*;
take *this story* to distant shores and make it known:
The One who scattered Israel will now gather *His people*
and watch over His flock as a shepherd.
11For the Eternal has rescued Jacob
and redeemed him from people who are too strong for him.
12The redeemed will return home and shout for joy from the top of *Mount* Zion;
they will shine with the sheer goodness of the Eternal—
The *harvests of* grain, wine, and oil; the healthy flocks and herds.
Their lives will be like a lush, well-watered garden.
From that day on, they will never know sorrow.

Eternal One: 13Young women will dance for joy;
young men will join them, old ones too.
For I will turn their mourning into joy.
I will comfort *My people* and replace their sorrow with gladness.
14From the overflow *of sacrifices,*
I will satisfy My priests;
All My people will feast on My goodness.

The people now cling to this promise as they struggle with exile. Jeremiah returns the focus to the heartbreak of a people being deported to a foreign land.

This is what the Eternal declares!

Eternal One: 15A voice rises from Ramah—
mourning and bitter weeping are heard *day and night*.
The voice is Rachel's; she's weeping for her children.
She will not be comforted,
for her children are no more.*

► The setting is Ramah, a village a few miles north of Jerusalem, where exiles are assembled before the long march

* 31:15 Matthew 2:18

to Babylon. Later the prophet himself will spend time in this refugee camp awaiting his own exile (40:1). For now, he paints the picture of Rachel, one of the matriarchs of this nation, weeping for her children as they head off into captivity.

16But listen to what the Eternal says:

Eternal One: Do not weep, *Rachel*—
wipe the tears from your eyes—
for *I promise* I will reward you for what you have done.
Your children *will return from this exile;*
they will come back home from this enemy land.
17There is hope for your future, I promise.
Your children will come home to their own land.
18I have heard *the cries of* Ephraim, groaning, "You have disciplined me.
I was like an unruly calf, but You disciplined me.
Bring me back, so I can return *home,*
for You are my God, the Eternal.
19After I had turned away *from You,* I repented.
I turned back toward You when I understood what I had done;
I slapped my thigh in shame and regret
for the disgraceful things I did when I was young."
20So I, the Eternal One, asked:
"Is this not Ephraim, My beloved son, My darling child?
As often as I speak against him, I have never forgotten him.
Even now, My heart longs for him;
I will surely show him mercy!"

21Set up markers along the road;
put up guideposts *so you can find your way home.*
Pay attention to the highway, the road you take into exile.
Return *by the same way,* My virgin Israel;
return to your cities *and villages.*
22How long will you drift this way and that,
My renegade daughter?
Take heart—for now the Eternal will do a new thing on the earth:
a woman will surround a man.*

23This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has to say:

Eternal One: When I bring them back from exile, people throughout the land and villages of Judah will speak these *familiar* words:

May the Eternal bless you, home of righteousness,
O sacred mountain!

24*In those days of restoration,* farmers and herders all across Judah will live together *in peace* alongside those who live in the cities. 25I will satisfy those who are weary, and I will refresh every soul in the grips of sorrow.

26At this moment, I woke up from a wonderful sleep and looked around.

► Jeremiah receives God's messages in a variety of ways. In this dream-vision, he sees the future for his people. This is a sweet comfort and a welcomed contrast to other messages of doom and judgment. But as Jeremiah will see, God's message of consolation is not only a hope of restoration for one rebellious nation, but a promise for all people. Jeremiah is perhaps best known as the prophet of the "new covenant." According to the prophet, God is about to establish a new relationship with a new people. It will be unlike any earlier agreement. It will not be written on stone tablets that can be broken or on scrolls that can be lost or forgotten or even burned (36:23). No, this covenant between God and humanity is so intimate that it is to be written on the heart.

* 31:22 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

Even as words of hope and consolation are offered, the stark reality of the present looms large. The Babylonian army is near. The siege of Jerusalem is now under way. It is a dark time in the land; there is much fear, and many have questions as the capture of the capital city is now a certainty. Again, Jeremiah must live out his faith in front of a people who have abandoned God. He is under arrest and being questioned by King Zedekiah. Though the details surrounding his imprisonment come in chapter 37, once again it is an unpopular message that makes Jeremiah a most unpopular prophet. But he willingly lives out his faith in an attempt to offer an unreceptive audience hope.

As strange as the other assignments given to Jeremiah may seem, this one may be the most difficult to understand. A rotting linen belt (chapter 13) and a shattered clay jar (chapter 19)—these were at least vivid pictures of the people's rebellion and God's judgment. But now, in the face of certain captivity and ruin, Jeremiah is instructed to do a most absurd thing: he is to purchase a piece of property with his money. Given its location, this plot of ground may even be under Babylon's control. Why this apparent waste of money? To show the people that one day this land of promise will again be theirs.

Eternal One: 27Look! the days are coming when I will plant anew the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will repopulate the land with people and animals. 28Just as I watched over them in order to uproot and stamp out, to upend and destroy, and to bring disaster *from the north,* so now I will watch over them as I rebuild and replant them. This is what I, the Eternal One, declare. 29In those coming days, people will no longer speak *the proverb,*

> Fathers have eaten sour grapes,
> and their children's teeth are set on edge.

30No, now it will be that each one will die for his own sins. If you eat sour grapes, then it is your own teeth that will be set on edge.

31Look, the days are coming when I will bring about a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors *long ago* when I took them by the hand and led them out of *slavery in* Egypt. They did not remain faithful to that covenant—even though I *loved and cared* for them as a husband. 33This is the *kind of new* covenant I will make with the people of Israel when those days are over. I will put My law within them. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. 34No longer will people have to teach each other or *encourage* their family members and say, "*You must* know the Eternal." For all of them will know Me *intimately* themselves—from the least to the greatest *of society.* I will *be merciful when they fail* and forgive their wrongs. I will never call to mind *or mention* their sins again.

35These are the words of the Eternal,

> *The One* who orders the sun to give light to the day,
> *the One* who directs the moon and the stars to light the night,
> *The One* who stirs up the sea so its waves *churn and* roar.
> The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, is His name.

Eternal One: 36Only if the natural order disintegrates before Me
will the people of Israel cease to be a nation in covenant with Me.

37This is what the Eternal says:

Eternal One: If the heavens above could *ever* be measured,
or the depths below be fully explored,
Only then would I disown the children of Israel
because of everything they have done.

So says the Eternal.

Eternal One: 38Look! The days are coming when I will rebuild Jerusalem for My own *purpose and glory*—from the tower

of Hananel to the corner gate. 39A measuring line will stretch out to the hill of Gareb and then sweep across to Goah. 40The valley *of Ben-hinnom* where the dead bodies and ashes *from the sacrifices* were thrown, and all the *terraced* fields leading out to the Kidron Valley, and as far east as the corner of the horse gate—all of these *most defiled and polluted areas* will again be made holy to the Eternal. The city will never again be uprooted or destroyed.

32 The Eternal spoke *again* to Jeremiah in the 10th year of Zedekiah's reign as king of Judah. This was also the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign *as king of Babylon*. 2At this time, Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonian army, and Jeremiah the prophet was being held in the court of the guard in the royal palace of Judah. 3Zedekiah king of Judah had ordered him held there *and leveled this charge against him*:

Zedekiah: Why do you *continue to* prophesy *such things*? You tell us the Eternal says, "Look! I am going to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. 4King Zedekiah of Judah will not escape from the Chaldean forces. He will be turned over to the king of Babylon and have to stand eye-to-eye before this *powerful* ruler. 5Nebuchadnezzar will order Zedekiah to be taken to Babylon, where he will stay until I *am ready to* visit him. This is what I, the Eternal One promise: if you try to fight the Chaldeans, you will fail."

Jeremiah *(to Zedekiah)*: 6The message of the Eternal came to me *through my cousin*: 7"Look! Hanamel (son of Shallum, your uncle), is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth; *as my nearest relative,* it is your right to buy it before I offer it to anyone else.* *It is also your duty to keep it in the family*.'" 8And just as He had predicted, my cousin Hanamel came to me *while I was being held* in the court of the guard. He said, "*Jeremiah,* buy my field in *your hometown of* Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin. It's your right to buy and redeem it *so that it stays in our family*." Then I realized this message was from the Eternal.

9So I bought the field in Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin for seven ounces of silver. 10I signed and sealed the deed in front of witnesses; after weighing out the silver on the scales, *I paid Hanamel*. 11Two copies of the deed were made. I took the sealed copy along with the terms and conditions *of the purchase* and the unsealed copy and 12handed them to *my trusted friend and confidant,* Baruch (son of Neriah and grandson of Mahseiah). *I did all of this* in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, the witnesses who had signed the deed, and all of the people of Judea who were there *that day* in the court of the guard. 13In the presence of all those people, I directed Baruch: 14"'The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says: 'Take both the sealed deed and the unsealed deed and place them in a clay jar *to preserve them. I want this deed of sale* to last for a long time.' 15For this is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and the God of Israel, promises: '*The day will come* when *My people* will buy houses and vineyards and fields again in this land.'"

16After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch (son of Neriah), I prayed to the Eternal: 17"Eternal Lord, with Your outstretched arm and Your enormous power You created the heavens and the earth. Nothing is too difficult for You. 18You show loyal love *and endless mercy* to thousands. But You also allow the damaging effects of the parents' sins to fall into the laps of their children. You are the great and powerful God; the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, is Your *solemn* name. 19Your instructions are great, and Your actions are too wondrous *for words*. You see all *that happens on this earth*; You know what everyone does, and You deal with each fairly. 20What miraculous signs and wonders You did in the land of Egypt! You continue to perform them for Israel and the rest of humanity to this day! You have made a great name for yourself *among the nations,* and we still remember *Your great works* today. 21You rescued Your people Israel out of Egypt with *miraculous* signs and wonders—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a power too terrible *for words*. 22*But You did not stop there, O gracious God.* Then You gave them this land, *the very land* You had promised to their ancestors, an *abundant* land flowing with milk and honey. 23They entered this land and conquered it *as You*

* 32:7 Leviticus 25:23-28

led them. But *even as they settled in,* they refused to listen to Your voice and live as You instructed. They rebelled against Your *entire* law. So You caused these disastrous consequences to fall on them. 24Look! The siege ramps are built against the *walls of the* city. Soon the Chaldeans will begin the assault. Because of war, famine, and disease, the enemy will soon have control of the city. It is all happening as You said it would. 25But You, Eternal Lord, tell me, "Buy *Hanamel's* field with *your own* money in the presence of witnesses"—even as You hand over the city *of Jerusalem* to the Chaldeans.

For almost two years the Babylonians have tightened their grip: food supplies are dwindling, disease is rampant, and there is little hope supplies or relief might get through to besieged Jerusalem.

26Then the Eternal spoke to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 27Look! I am the Eternal, the God of all living things. Is anything too difficult for Me? 28I tell you this: I am about to hand this city over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and his Chaldean army, and they will conquer it. 29The Chaldeans who are now assaulting the city will enter and set everything on fire. They will set houses ablaze where people set up shrines on roofs to burn incense to Baal and pour out drink offerings to other gods. Their *offerings* have ignited My anger. 30The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in My sight since their early days. They have done nothing except kindle My anger with their handmade *idols and the way they live their lives.* 31From the day Jerusalem was built until this very moment, the people have stirred My anger and provoked My wrath; so now I am forced to remove this city completely from My sight. 32The people of Israel and Judah have angered Me with their wickedness—from their kings and their officials to their priests and prophets, from the people of Judah to the citizens of Jerusalem. 33They have *all* turned their backs to Me instead of their faces. They have refused to listen and learn from My instruction, even though I tried to teach them again and again. 34They even put up their detestable idols in My temple, defiling the very place that is supposed to honor Me! 35They built altars to another master* in the valley of Ben-hinnom so they'd have a place to sacrifice their own children to Molech! I never demanded they *do such a thing*—it never even crossed My mind that they would do such a disgusting evil or that Judah would sin like that.

36*Jeremiah,* listen to what the Eternal God of Israel has to say about Jerusalem: you say that by war, famine, and disease this city will fall to the king of Babylon, *and you are right.* 37Look! I will gather My people from all the countries where I scattered them in My *righteous* anger, in My great wrath and fury. I will bring them back to this place, Jerusalem, and let them live here safely under My protection. 38They will be My people, and I will be their God. 39I will unite them behind a single desire and purpose: to revere *and worship* Me forever for their own good and for the good of all who will come after them. 40I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop blessing them with good things, and I will put in them a fear *and respect* of Me so they will not turn their backs to Me again. 41It will be My great joy to do good things for them, and you can be sure that I will devote Myself completely to planting them *anew* in this land.

42This is what I, the Eternal, declare: Just as I brought this great disaster upon My people, so will I do all these good things I have promised to them. 43Property will be bought *and sold* once again in this land about which you say, "This land is a wasteland—not fit for man or beast—for it has been handed over to the Chaldeans." 44Property will be bought *and sold once again* for silver—deals will be made and deeds signed in the presence of witnesses—in the territory of Benjamin, in the vicinity of Jerusalem, in the villages of Judah and the hill country, in the villages of the western hills, and in the cities of the Negev. *In all these places* I will restore them from their exile.

So says the Eternal.

33 1-2For a second time the message of the Eternal came to Jeremiah as he was being held in the court of the guard. The Eternal who made the earth, who formed and

* 32:35 Hebrew, the *baal*

fashioned it, the One whose name is the Eternal, has this to say:

► Time is growing short; the city is being squeezed, and the dreaded enemy is one step closer to victory. Some hope Egypt might come to Jerusalem's rescue, but nothing can stop her inevitable defeat. In these dark days just before the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is still a prisoner of the king. People come to Jeremiah as he sits shackled in a courtyard, surrounded by guards. In this humiliating scene, another message comes to the prophet from God. Once again, Jeremiah is looking past the city's present despair to a future God is showing him: one day God will restore Jerusalem and the people of Israel.

Eternal One: 3Call to Me, and I will
answer you. I will tell you of great things,
things beyond what you can imagine,
things you could never have known. 4I,
the Eternal God of Israel, tell you that
all these public buildings and royal pal-
aces have been dismantled *in vain. You
thought you could strengthen the city walls
with the scraps of those buildings, but
it is a useless* defense against the siege
ramps and swords 5of the Chaldeans. In
this fight, the city will be filled with the
dead whom I will destroy in My anger
and wrath, for I have hidden My face
from this city because of their wicked-
ness. 6*Nevertheless,* keep watching! I will
restore this city and heal the wounds of
My people. I will lavish them with peace
and stability. 7I will bring both Judah
and Israel back from captivity, and I will
rebuild their land to what it was before.
8I will cleanse them from all the sins
they committed against Me and forgive
all the wrongs they have done and all
the ways they rebelled against Me. 9*Jeru-
salem* will have a sweet-sounding name
once again. The good I do for her will
bring Me joy, praise, and honor among
all nations of the earth, for they will be
in awe and tremble at the peace and
prosperity I give to this city.

10*Listen to Me, Jeremiah.* You say this
place will become a *desolate* wasteland
with no people and no animals, *but it
will not always be so.* The towns of Judah
and the streets of Jerusalem may indeed
become lifeless, but I, the Eternal One,
promise you *the silence will be broken.*
Once again you will hear 11the sounds of
laughter and joy, the sweet words of the
bride and bridegroom *at a wedding,* and
voices of those who bring thank offer-
ings to the temple singing,

> Give thanks to the Eternal,
> Commander of *heavenly*
> armies,
> for He is good. His faithful love
> endures forever.

All of this will happen because I will
restore the riches of this land to what
they once were.

12I, the Eternal, Commander of *heav-
enly* armies, promise: even this desolate
place—with no people and no animals—
and all of its *ruined* cities will once again
have pastures where shepherds will rest
their flocks. 13In the towns of the hill
country, in the villages of the western
hills, in the cities of the Negev, in the ter-
ritory of Benjamin, in the vicinity around
Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah,
once again flocks will be cared for by a
faithful shepherd who will count *each
and every one of* his sheep.

14Look! The days are coming when
I will fulfill the promise I made to the
people of Israel and Judah. 15In those
days, when the time is right, I will cause
a righteous Branch to sprout from *the
old stump of* David's *lineage*; He will do
what is right and just in the land. 16In
those days, Judah will be liberated, and
Jerusalem will live in safety. And the city
will be called *by His name,* The Eternal
Is Our Righteousness. 17I tell you, the
royal dynasty of David will not cease; the
throne of Israel still belongs to his fam-
ily.* *Remember this, even as other kings
rule over you.* 18*Remember also that* the
line of Levitical priests will not cease; for
all time they will stand before Me offer-
ing burnt offerings, grain offerings, and
making sacrifices.

19-20*Again,* the word of the Eternal came to
Jeremiah.

Eternal One: If you can *figure out a way to*
break My covenant with the day and with

* 33:17 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:5

the night so they do not always arrive on schedule, *the very rhythm of life on this earth*, 21only then will My covenant with My servant David be broken and his son not rule from his throne. Only then will My covenant with the Levitical priests who minister before Me *be null and void.* 22I will make David's descendants, along with the Levitical priests who minister before Me, so numerous they will seem like the stars of the skies that cannot be counted and the sands of the seashore that can never be measured.

23The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah *again.*

Eternal One: 24Have you noticed what *some* people are saying? "The Eternal chose these two families, *Israel and Judah,* but He has now rejected them." They *clearly* despise My people—they don't even consider them a nation any longer! 25*But again,* this is what the Eternal promises: "Just as I am not about to stop ruling the universe with fixed laws so that the day and the night become confused, 26*I will likewise keep My promise to* the descendants of Jacob and David, My servant; I will not reject them. I will not forget the covenant I made with David that one of his descendants will rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will restore their fortunes and have mercy on them.

34 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon led his army, and all the kingdoms and peoples of his empire, to begin *the final* assault against Jerusalem and all the towns *and villages. One by one they fell. As this dreaded ruler and his vast army drew closer to Jerusalem,* the word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 2The Eternal God of Israel has this to say: Go and deliver this message to Zedekiah, king of Judah: "I, the Eternal, am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it *to the ground.* 3*As for you,* you will not escape from him. *No,* you will be captured and turned over to the king of Babylon. You will have to stand before him and look *this powerful ruler* in the eyes as you are sentenced to *exile in* Babylon.

4"But hear this promise from the Eternal, O Zedekiah, king of Judah: 'I declare that *if you obey Me now,* you will not die in battle, 5but you will die in peace.' People will burn *spices at your funeral* in your honor, just as they did for your ancestors, the kings who ruled before you. Mourners will weep for you saying, 'O, our king *is dead*!' I, the Eternal, promise you *this can still happen.*"

6The prophet Jeremiah *faithfully* related all of this to Zedekiah, king of Judah, *while both were still* in Jerusalem. 7This was when the Babylonian king's siege of Jerusalem and the rest of Judah's cities was under way, with Lachish and Azekah the only other fortified cities that had not been conquered.

8*Now as the siege continued and the conditions became more severe, another* message came to Jeremiah from the Eternal after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with the citizens of Jerusalem to free the slaves *in the city.* 9The king commanded all those who held Hebrew slaves to release them—both men and women—so that no Jew would hold a fellow Jew in slavery. 10So all the leaders and people *of the city* entered this covenant and agreed *with the king* to free all of their *Hebrew* slaves.

11*Not long* after *the people had freed their slaves,* they changed their minds and forced the men and women they released back into slavery. 12It was then that a word from the Eternal came to Jeremiah *regarding the people of Jerusalem*:

Eternal One: 13I, the Eternal God of Israel, *am reminding you that I* made a covenant with your ancestors when I rescued them from slavery in the land of Egypt. I told them: 14After six years of service, a fellow Hebrew slave must be freed from slavery in the seventh year.* But your ancestors never took My directive seriously or obeyed Me. 15Not long ago, you changed your mind and did what was right in My eyes: you set your kinsmen free *from bondage.* You even established a *sacred* covenant before Me in the house that bears My name. 16But now you have *reversed yourselves,* turned around, *and broken that covenant!* You have defiled My name by forcing these men and women you freed back into slavery.

17That is why I proclaim the following: Since you have disobeyed Me and not declared that your fellow

* 34:14 Deuteronomy 15:12

countrymen are set free, *I will now set you free from My protection.* I declare that you will be "free" to *die by* war, disease, and famine. *The destiny* I set before You will terrify the watching world. [18]Those who violated this covenant with Me will now be treated like the calf they cut in two and walked between when this promise was made.

► In Jeremiah's time, the agreeing parties affirm the terms of a covenant by participating in an ancient ritual. They gather in a sacred place, cut an animal in half, and pass between the two parts. These ritual actions depict an implicit threat that if either covenant partner violates this agreement, he will become like the sacrifice and suffer the consequences of death and dismemberment. It is hard to imagine people taking such solemn ceremonies lightly, but they do. They always will.

Eternal One: [19]The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court servants, the priests, and all people in the land who walked between the halves of the calf *will suffer a common fate.* [20-21]I will hand them over to their enemies, to those who want them dead. Their corpses will *not be buried; they will lie on the ground and* become food for the birds and wild animals. I will also hand Zedekiah (king of Judah) and his officials over to their enemies, to those who want them dead. Although King Nebuchadnezzar and his army have pulled back from your city, *that is only temporary.* [22]I, the Eternal One, will give the order and call them back to Jerusalem. They will fight against this city, capture it, and burn it *to the ground.* I will *use the army of Babylon to* destroy the towns of Judah so no one can live there.

35 This word from the Eternal came to Jeremiah when Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) was king of Judah.

► The next two chapters are a flashback to earlier times and circumstances. Jehoiakim is in the last years of his reign as king of Judah. Babylon, along with Aram, is raiding Judean villages. These raids cause many to seek refuge in Jerusalem, which is not yet under attack. Among those who run to the capital city is a nomadic clan known as the Rechabites. Their customs are simple and austere; their lifestyles are not suited to city living. However, they now find themselves in Jerusalem. Their faithfulness to those strict customs is held up as an example for the rest of Judah.

Eternal One: [2]Go to where the Rechabites are now staying and invite them to My temple. Take them to one of the side rooms there and offer them wine to drink.

[3]So I took *the leader of this clan,* Jaazaniah (son of Jeremiah and grandson of Habazziniah) along with his brothers and sons who represented all of the Rechabites [4]to the temple of the Eternal. I led them into a side room that was used by the sons of Hanan (son of Igdaliah), a man of God. This room was right next to the room used by *temple* officials and right over the room of Maaseiah (son of Shallum), the doorkeeper. [5]*Once we were in the room,* I set before these Rechabite men pitchers full of wine with some cups.

Jeremiah *(to the Rechabites)***:** Have some wine.

Rechabites: [6]We do not drink wine because our ancestor, Jonadab (son of Rechab), gave us *very clear* commands: "You and your children must never drink wine. [7]You must not build houses or plant crops or have vineyards. *You are not to do anything that resembles settling down in this land.* Instead, live in tents and roam the land as nomads. Do this, and you will live for a long time in this land." [8]So *we have done just that*—we have obeyed our ancestor Jonadab (son of Rechab) throughout *these many years.* We have never drunk wine, nor have our wives or children. [9]We have never built houses to live in or owned a vineyard or a field or even planted seed. [10]We have *faithfully* lived *as nomads* in tents and have obeyed what our ancestor, Jonadab,

commanded *all those years ago.* 11But when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded this land, *we knew we could no longer wander the countryside.* So we said, "Come on, let's go to Jerusalem so we don't fall victim to the Babylonian and Aramean armies." That is why we are here in Jerusalem.

12After *this encounter with the Rechabites,* the word of the Eternal came to instruct Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 13I, the Eternal One, the God of Israel, Commander of *heavenly* armies, want you to go and deliver this message to the people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem: "Why won't you hear My words and learn from Me? 14Jonadab (son of Rechab) told his children, *among other things,* not to drink wine, and they obeyed him! To this day they still obey their ancestor for this is his command. But I speak to you again and again, and you have never obeyed Me. 15I have sent My servants, the prophets, to you again and again. *They warned you* with My words: 'Turn back from your wicked ways and change what you are doing. Stop worshiping other gods so that you may continue to live in this land that I gave to you and your ancestors.' But you did not bother to listen to Me. 16The descendants of Jonadab (son of Rechab) have obeyed the orders of their ancestor *and leader,* but these people have not obeyed Me.

17"Listen! This is why I, the Eternal One, the God of Israel, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will send all the disaster I promised against Judah and all the citizens of Jerusalem. For I spoke to them, but they never listened. I called out to them, but they never answered back."

Jeremiah *(to the Rechabites)***:** 18-19The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has this message *for you and your families*: "Because you obeyed your ancestor Jonadab and *faithfully* followed his instructions *for all these years,* I promise that Jonadab (son of Rechab) will always have descendants who serve Me."

36 When Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) was in his fourth year as king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Eternal.

Though prophecy is primarily oral, eventually Jeremiah's companion, Baruch, records Jeremiah's sermons and actions on a scroll that in turn becomes critical.

Eternal One *(to Jeremiah)***:** 2Write down on a scroll all that I have told you *over the years* about Israel, Judah, and the *surrounding* nations. Start with the first words I gave you when Josiah was king, and include every message up to the present. 3Maybe when the people of Judah hear *all of it together*—every disaster that I will bring upon them—maybe then they will turn from their wicked ways so that I can forgive their sins and wrongdoings.

4So Jeremiah called for Baruch (son of Neriah) *to help him.* Jeremiah then dictated the messages and prophecies the Eternal had given him while Baruch wrote it all down on a scroll.

Jeremiah *(to Baruch)***:** 5Since I am prohibited from going to the Eternal's temple, 6you must go *for me.* Go to the temple on a fasting day; and *once you are there,* read the Eternal's words from the scroll just as I dictated them to you. That way, people from all the towns of Judah *who have gathered for the holiday* will hear *this message from Him.* 7Maybe they will turn from their wicked ways and seek the Eternal's *forgiveness,* because *they will realize* His great anger and wrath are coming their way.

► It is 605 B.C., many years before the siege and fall of Jerusalem. But the increasing power of Babylon is casting its shadow across the region. Egypt has been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish. The warning signs are clear—Judah is at risk and must heed the words of God's prophet while there is still time. The following is an account that takes place during this pivotal time, when Judah still has hope. But the reaction of King Jehoiakim—perhaps the fiercest opponent to Jeremiah's ministry—begins to seal not only his own fate but also his people's. If they had hope, it quickly fades with his arrogant and

outrageous actions. The lesson for this evil king and his people is clear: The power of God's word always prevails, even when others attempt to destroy it.

8Baruch (son of Neriah) did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do; he went to the Eternal's temple, *stood among the crowds there,* and read from the scroll the words of the Eternal.

9This took place on a day of fasting in the ninth month of the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim (son of Josiah). *Just as Jeremiah had hoped,* people had come from all over Judah *for the holiday*. 10*Baruch positioned himself* in the room of Gemariah (son of Shaphan) who was secretary at the temple. This room was in the upper courtyard of the temple, near the new gate. *From here, all the people who had gathered at the temple could listen as* Baruch read the *fateful* words of Jeremiah from the scroll.

11When Micaiah (son of Gemariah and grandson of Shaphan) heard the words of the Eternal *that were written* on the scroll, 12he *immediately* went to the palace, to the secretary's room where all the officials were meeting. Elishama the secretary, Delaiah (son of Shemaiah), Elnathan (son of Achbor), Gemariah (son of Shaphan), and Zedekiah (son of Hananiah) were among the officials *who were there*. 13Micaiah reported to them everything he heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll. 14Then all the officials sent Jehudi (son of Nethaniah and grandson of Shelemiah and great-grandson of Cushi) with a message for Baruch.

Jehudi: Bring the scroll you have read to the people and come *to the palace*.

So Baruch (son of Neriah), with the scroll in hand, made his way to the palace *and entered this room where some of Judah's most influential leaders were waiting.*

Officials *(to Baruch)*: 15-16Please sit down and read this *scroll* to us.

Baruch then read the *entire* scroll to them. When they heard it, *they were visibly upset.* They began to look around *the room* at each other, each one afraid *but knowing what must happen next.*

Officials *(to Baruch)*: We must report to the king all we have heard, *but first we must ask you some questions.* 17Tell us how you wrote all of this? Did Jeremiah dictate this to you?

Baruch: 18*Yes.* He dictated each and every word to me. I *simply* wrote down his words with ink on this scroll.

Officials: 19*Before we take this to the king,* you and Jeremiah should go into hiding. *For your own safety,* don't tell anyone where you are!

20After the officials put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they approached the king in the palace and told him everything they had heard. *But the king was not satisfied.* 21So he ordered Jehudi to go and get the scroll. Jehudi brought it from Elishama's room and read it to the king and all his officials as they stood around him. 22Since it was the ninth month *and the colder winter weather had set in,* the king had moved to a more sheltered apartment *in the palace* where he could stay warm by the fire. 23*The king listened as* Jehudi read *column after column of* the scroll. As soon as he finished reading three or four columns, Jehoiakim would take a knife, cut that section *out of the scroll,* and then throw it on the fire. *This happened again and again* until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. 24Neither the king nor his advisors *seemed to be concerned* about what they had just heard. They weren't afraid. They didn't tear their clothes *in remorse and repentance.*

The king shows everyone, including his advisors, exactly what he thinks of God's message written on the scroll.

25Even when Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he ignored them. 26Instead, he ordered his son, Jerahmeel, along with Seraiah (son of Azriel) and Shelemiah (son of Abdeel), to arrest Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Eternal had already hidden them.

27After the king burned the scroll containing Jeremiah's prophecies, which Baruch had *carefully* recorded, the word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 28Take another scroll and write down all the words that were on

Many years have now passed since Jehoiakim's arrogant scroll-burning incident, but the prophecies against him and his people are coming to pass: Babylon is now exerting its power in the land, and Jehoiakim's legacy has indeed crumbled. His own son Jehoiachin (also known as Coniah) has already been sent into exile by the Babylonians in 598 B.C. In his place, Nebuchadnezzar has placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah. This new king has pledged to remain loyal to Babylon in exchange for the crown. And while he is not as arrogant and openly rebellious as Jehoiakim, in his own weak way, he, too, disobeys God. At times he seems genuinely interested in the words of Jeremiah, but he never shows the courage necessary to obey God during this dramatic time. Throughout his 11 year reign (597-587 B.C.), Zedekiah is unable to stand up to his advisors and at one point agrees to break with Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, siding instead with the pharaoh of Egypt. This sets in motion the final retaliation of the Babylonians, including the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

the first one King Jehoiakim destroyed in the fire. 29As for Jehoiakim king of Judah, this is what I want you to say: "You burned this scroll and asked, 'Why have you written that the king of Babylon is coming to destroy this land and will leave it a lifeless *wasteland*?'" 30That is why I, the Eternal now declare this about Jehoiakim, king of Judah: *His reign will soon end, and* none of his descendants will sit upon the throne of David. His dead body will be tossed out and exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. 31I will punish him, his children, and his advisors for their wickedness. Because they did not listen *to My word,* I will bring about every disaster I predicted against them, the citizens of Jerusalem, and all the people of Judah.

32Jeremiah *did just as God instructed*—he took another scroll, gave it to Baruch (son of Neraiah) the secretary, and dictated everything that was on the first scroll. This new scroll had all the words that Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had burned in the fire, plus many more prophecies.

37 Zedekiah (son of Josiah) was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He reigned instead of *his nephew,* Coniah (son of Jehoiakim) *who had already been deported to Babylon.* 2Neither *young* Zedekiah nor his *inexperienced* advisors nor the people of Judah themselves listened to what the Eternal said through His prophet Jeremiah.

3Zedekiah *one day* sent Jehucal (son of Shelemiah), along with the priest Zephaniah (son of Maaseiah) to ask the prophet Jeremiah, "Please pray to the Eternal our God for us." 4Now Jeremiah had not yet been put in prison, so he was free to move about *the city.* 5This happened when the Chaldeans pulled back from their siege on Jerusalem because they heard Pharaoh's army was marching out of Egypt *toward them.* 6It was then that the word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah the prophet, *who faithfully delivered it to the king's messengers.*

Jeremiah: 7This is what the Eternal God of Israel has to say: "Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask for My help: 'Look! Pharaoh's army—which *you hoped* would help you—will turn back to Egypt to *protect* its own land. 8Then the Chaldeans will come back to attack *Jerusalem.* They will capture this city and burn it *to the ground.*'" 9The Eternal says *this to you*: "Do not fool yourselves into thinking the Chaldeans will leave you alone. They will not! 10Even if *somehow* you defeated their entire army, their wounded soldiers lying in tents would come out and burn this city *to the ground* in a fiery blaze."

11Now during this time when the Chaldeans had pulled back from Jerusalem to face Pharaoh's army, 12Jeremiah started to leave Jerusalem. He was heading back to the land of Benjamin to settle his affairs regarding a piece of family property there.* 13But as he was leaving through the Benjamin gate *on the north side of the city,* the captain of the guard, Irijah (son of Shelemiah and grandson of Hananiah), arrested him.

* 37:12 Jeremiah 32:8

Irijah: *You traitor!* You are trying to desert to the Chaldeans!

Jeremiah: 14That's not true! I'm not deserting to the Chaldeans.

But Irijah would not listen to Jeremiah, so he arrested him and brought him to the city leaders. 15They were *already* angry with Jeremiah *because of his predictions of destruction and his advice to surrender.* So they had Jeremiah beaten and placed him under arrest in the house of Jonathan the secretary (which they had made into a prison). 16He was placed in a dark, *damp* cell below ground and left there for a long time.

17Eventually, King Zedekiah had him secretly brought to the palace so the king could talk with him.

King Zedekiah: Have you received any more messages from the Eternal?

Jeremiah: Yes, *but they haven't changed:* you will *still* be handed over to the king of Babylon. *But while I'm here, let me ask you*—18what crime have I committed against you, your advisors, or this nation that I should be imprisoned? 19*I told you nothing but the truth about Babylon from the beginning, so why am I in this cell?* Meanwhile, your *so-called* prophets keep telling you, "*Don't worry,* the king of Babylon will never attack you or this land," *and they go unpunished?* 20Please, I'm asking you, my lord the king, do not send me back to that cell in the house of Jonathan the secretary, or I will die there.

21*Though the news he heard was not encouraging,* King Zedekiah *granted Jeremiah's request.* He gave the order and had the prophet transferred to the court of the guard. He also gave *strict* orders that each day Jeremiah be given bread from the city's bakers until the supplies ran out. That is how Jeremiah ended up *a prisoner* in the court of the guard.

38 Shephatiah (son of Mattan), Gedaliah (son of Pashhur), Jucal (son of Shelemiah), and Pashhur (son of Malchijah) overheard Jeremiah speaking to the people *of Jerusalem.*

Jeremiah: 2The Eternal says that anyone who stays in the city will die by war, famine, or disease; but those who surrender to the Chaldeans will at least have some reward—they'll keep their own lives. 3The Eternal has proclaimed that Jerusalem will be handed over to the army of Babylon's king, who will capture it.

4When these officials heard *Jeremiah's remarks,* they advised the king.

Court Officials *(to King Zedekiah)***:** This man *is a traitor*; he should be put to death! His words *border on treason; they are* affecting the morale of what troops we still have in the city, as well as all the rest of the people. This man does not have the best interests of this people at heart—only their downfall.

King Zedekiah: 5Look, do what you want with Jeremiah. The king will not interfere.

6So they took Jeremiah and threw him into a *muddy* cistern in the court of the guard that belonged to the king's son, Malchijah. *Rather than killing him immediately,* these officials lowered Jeremiah by ropes into this *deep, dark* cistern where he sank into the mud. *Now he would be silenced. Soon he would be dead.*

7-8But another court servant in the palace, Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, overheard that Jeremiah had been dropped down into this cistern. So he left the palace and went *directly* to the king who was sitting in the Benjamin gate *where he was holding court for the people.*

Ebed-melech: 9My lord the king, *do you know what some of your court officials have done?* They have done a wicked thing to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a *muddy* cistern and left him to die, which will surely happen when he, like the rest of the city, runs out of food.

King Zedekiah *(to Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian)***:** 10Take 30* of my men with you, and rescue Jeremiah the prophet from that cistern before he dies.

11So Ebed-melech did as the king commanded and took the men with him. But before he left the palace, he went to a room under the treasury. There he found

* 38:10 Some manuscripts read, "three."

some rags and old clothes that he lowered with the ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. 12Ebed-melech the Ethiopian *then called down into the cistern and* told Jeremiah:

Ebed-melech: Put these rags and old clothes under your armpits so the ropes *won't hurt you as we pull you up.*

The prophet did as he was told, 13and the men pulled Jeremiah out of that *muddy* cistern. Still *however,* Jeremiah remained *a prisoner* in the court of the guard.

► Sometime later Zedekiah summons Jeremiah. This will be the last encounter between prophet and king. Will the king finally respond with courage and faith to the word of God? Despite decades of warnings from a faithful prophet who has the courage to speak truth regardless of the consequences, Jerusalem and her leaders continue to disobey God. And now Jeremiah's dreaded predictions come true. After a long siege that leaves the city weak and impoverished, the walls of Jerusalem are breached.

14King Zedekiah sent for the prophet Jeremiah and had him brought to the third entrance to the Eternal's temple.

King Zedekiah: I am going to ask you something, and I want you to tell me the truth; don't hold anything back.

Jeremiah: 15If I give you *another honest* answer, how do I know you won't kill me? Besides, even if I do give you advice, you won't listen to me.

King Zedekiah *(leaning in so no one could hear this secret oath)***:** 16Jeremiah, as surely as the Eternal lives and gives us life, I promise not to kill you or hand you over to those who want you dead.

Jeremiah: 17*All right.* This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, the God of Israel, says *about your situation*: "If you surrender to the officials of the Babylonian king, you will survive *this invasion* and Jerusalem will not be burned *to the ground.* You and your entire family will live. 18But if you refuse to surrender to the officials of the Babylonian king, not only will this city be handed over to the Chaldeans, but they will burn it *to the ground* and you will not escape their punishment."

King Zedekiah: 19But I am afraid of the Judeans who have already *defected and* gone over to the Chaldeans. What if our captors hand me over to them and they abuse and torture me?

Jeremiah: 20*That will not happen.* The Babylonians will not hand you over *to your former subjects. This is your chance to* obey *the voice of* the Eternal by just doing what I tell you. You will come out of this alive, and things will go well for you *if you do what God says.* 21But if you refuse to surrender, let me tell you something else the Eternal revealed to me: 22"All of the women left in your palace will be taken and given to officials of the Babylonian king. *As they are being led away,* those women will *mock you* and say:

Look how they misled you and
defeated you—
these *so-called* friends of yours.
While your feet sank in the mud,
your friends all deserted you.

23All your wives and sons will be marched out before the Chaldeans. And as for you, *Zedekiah,* you will not escape capture by the king of Babylon. As for this city, *Jerusalem,* it will be burned *to the ground.*"

King Zedekiah: 24Do not tell anyone about our conversation, or you may be killed! *We must keep this a secret.* 25If my officials learn that I spoke to you, they may come to you and threaten you saying, "Tell us everything you told the king and what he said to you. Don't try to hide anything from us or we will execute you." 26If that happens, tell them, "I was *only* begging the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house again because I *was afraid of* dying there."

27The king's officials *were curious about the encounter and* did come to Jeremiah and question him *just as Zedekiah had predicted.* So Jeremiah responded as the king instructed *and shared only what they had*

agreed earlier. Because no one overheard the conversation *between Jeremiah and Zedekiah,* the officials *eventually* stopped questioning him. [28]Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the court of the guard until the *sorrowful* day Jerusalem was captured.

39 This is how Jerusalem fell: *When the Egyptian threat in the south was over,* King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon brought his army *back* to Jerusalem and resumed the siege. This began in the 10th month of the 9th year of Zedekiah's reign as Judah's king. [2]*For the next 18 months, the siege continued until* the 9th day of the 4th month of Zedekiah's 11th year. *On that sad summer day, Jerusalem finally fell when* the Chaldeans broke through the city wall. [3]All the officials designated by Babylon's king *to exercise his authority* entered *the city* and sat at the middle gate. These included Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, Sar-sekim (who was a chief officer), Nergal-sar-ezer (a high official), and all the other officials sent by the king of Babylon.

[4]When King Zedekiah of Judah and his troops saw *the Babylonians break through the wall on the north side of the city,* they fled under the cloak of darkness. They made their way out of the city by passing through the king's garden and then through the gate between the two walls. Once they left, they headed toward the Jordan Valley. [5]But the Chaldean army *discovered this and* chased after Zedekiah, capturing him on the plains of Jericho. They took him to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, *who had set up his command post* at Riblah in the *old Aramean* city of Hamath. It was here that the *dreaded* king pronounced judgment on Zedekiah *for rebelling against him.* [6]Zedekiah was forced to watch as his own sons and the nobles of Judah were slaughtered right in front of him. [7]*This was the very last thing he saw, because* Nebuchadnezzar then blinded the eyes of Zedekiah. This *blinded and humiliated* king was then placed in bronze shackles and carried off to Babylon. [8]Back in Jerusalem, the Chaldean troops burned down the king's palace and the commoners' houses and then tore down the walls *of the city*. [9]Those who were left in the city, along with those who had previously surrendered, were then deported to Babylon by Nebuzaradan (captain of the imperial guard). [10]But he left some of the poorest people in Judah and gave them vineyards and fields *to care for.*

Removing only the rich and influential citizens, who might cause them trouble, is a political strategy. They leave behind the poor and destitute to serve as their labor force.

[11]*In these days of conquest,* King Nebuchadnezzar *learned* about the prophet Jeremiah and gave this order to his captain of the imperial guard, Nebuzaradan:

King Nebuchadnezzar: [12]Go and get *this prophet they call* Jeremiah, and look after him. Make sure he isn't harmed, and give him whatever he wants.

[13]So Nebuzaradan (the captain of the imperial guard), Nebushazban (a chief officer), Nergal-sar-ezer (a high-ranking official), and the other officials from Babylon [14]ordered Jeremiah released from the court of the guard and brought *to them.* They *eventually* handed him over to the care of Gedaliah (son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan), who took Jeremiah back to his home. *And so it was that* Jeremiah *was allowed* to remain *in the land of Judah* among his people.

[15]While Jeremiah was still confined in the court of the guard, the word of the Eternal came to him.

Eternal One: [16]Go and give this message to Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian. "This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, promises you: 'Look! Very soon I will bring disaster not prosperity on Jerusalem *and her citizens* as I warned *through Jeremiah.* And you, *Ebed-melech,* will see all this happen with your own eyes. [17]But *do not worry, for* I will rescue you on that day so that you will not be taken prisoner by those you fear. [18]I will protect you, and you will not die in the war. Your life will be your reward because you trusted in Me. I, the Eternal One, declare this *to you.*'"

40 The word of the Eternal came *again* to Jeremiah after Nebuzaradan (captain of the imperial guard) found the prophet in chains with the rest of the exiles from Jerusalem and Judah and let him go. He had been taken to Ramah with the others who would soon be deported to Babylon. [2]When the captain of the imperial guard *learned of the mix-up,* he took Jeremiah aside and spoke to him.

► In the aftermath of war, confusion and mistakes are rampant. Nebuchadnezzar himself has ordered that Jeremiah be placed in the care of Gedaliah (39:11-12), but some incompetent staff member has sent Jeremiah to be processed for exile in Babylon. It falls to Nebuzaradan to try to fix the mistake, before it is too late.

Nebuzaradan: Your God, the Eternal, commanded all of this to happen. 3He brought this disaster on this land, just as He said He would. And it all happened because your people sinned against the Eternal and refused to obey His voice. 4But today I am giving you your freedom. I am ordering the chains removed from your wrists. *I am also giving you the chance to decide where you will live.* If you'd like, you can come with me to Babylon, and I will look out for you. But if you'd rather not come to Babylon, then don't. Look around you; you can go from here *today and live* anywhere you want. *You decide.*

5But before Jeremiah turned to leave, Nebuzaradan made a suggestion.

Nebuzaradan: Why don't you go back to Gedaliah (son of Ahikim and grandson of Shaphan)? The king of Babylon has put him in charge of the towns of Judah. You could live with him and *still be* among your people. *But again,* feel free to go where you please.

At this point, the captain gave Jeremiah some food and supplies, along with a gift, and released him. 6Jeremiah *took his advice and* went to Mizpah where Gedaliah (son of Ahikim) *had settled.* There he remained with the others who had been left behind in the land *of Judah.*

7The news reached Judah's army officers and soldiers *who were scattered* throughout the countryside that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah (son of Ahikam) governor and put him in charge of the men, women, and children—the poor people of the land—who had not been deported to Babylon. 8So a group of them came to Gedaliah's *home* in Mizpah *to meet with him.* These included Ishmael (son of Nethaniah), Johanan and Jonathan (sons of Kareah), Seraiah (son of Tanhumeth), the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah (son of the Maacathite), along with all their men. 9Gedaliah (son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan) reassured those who gathered.

Gedaliah *(to the leaders and their men)***:** Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. If you will settle *peacefully* in the land, agree to serve the king of Babylon, *and give up any idea of rebelling against him,* things will go well for you. 10I will continue to live here in Mizpah and act as your representative whenever the Chaldeans come *and want something from* us. Go back and live in the *villages and* towns you have taken over. Harvest the *grapes for* wine, the summer fruits, and the *olives for* oil. Store what you gather, *and live your lives in peace.*

11When all the Judeans *living* in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the other *neighboring* nations heard that the king of Babylon had permitted a few people to remain in Judah and left Gedaliah (son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan) in charge, 12they began to return *home* to the land of Judah from all the places to which they had run. With Gedaliah *as their leader, governing* from Mizpah, they *returned to their ancestral lands to* gather a great harvest of *grapes for* wine and summer crops.

This ragtag group of fugitives and survivors, along with the poorest of the poor, try to go back to life as normal. Perhaps there is still a glimmer of hope.

13Now Johanan (son of Kareah) and the rest of the army officers who were still in the field came to Mizpah to *speak with* Gedaliah.

Johanan *(speaking for the rest)***:** 14Are you aware that Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) has been hired by Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, to kill you?

But Gedaliah (son of Ahikam) *had not heard of this threat and* was not inclined to believe them. 15So while he was in Mizpah, Johanan asked to speak with Gedaliah privately.

Johanan: Authorize me to go and kill Ishmael (son of Nethaniah). No one will know *what happened.* Should he *be allowed to* kill you *just because he thinks*

you're a pawn of Babylon? Think of what will happen to those Jews who have *returned home and* look to you as their leader. They will be scattered *again,* left to die *because Babylon would consider this an act of aggression against them.*

Gedaliah: [16]Do not kill him! What you are saying about Ishmael is not true!

41 But in the seventh month of the year, *this same* Ishmael (son of Nethaniah and grandson of Elishama)—a member of *Judah's* royal family and a former captain of the king—came with 10 of his men to Mizpah to visit Gedaliah (son of Ahikam). As they were eating together, [2]Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) and his 10 men *betrayed their host and suddenly* got up and with their swords attacked and killed Gedaliah (son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan), the man the king of Babylon had appointed governor of the land. [3]Ishmael *and his men* then killed all the *rest of* the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah and the Chaldean soldiers who *had been left* there.

[4]The next day, before anyone had learned of Gedaliah's assassination, [5]a group of 80 men arrived from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria. *They were on their way to Jerusalem,* bringing grain offerings and incense to *what was left of* the temple of the Eternal. *It was obvious they were in mourning,* having shaved their beards, torn their clothing, and cut their bodies. [6]Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) met them just outside Mizpah, weeping *as if something terrible had happened.* When he got to their company, he said:

Ishmael: Please, come *and see what has happened* to Gedaliah (son of Ahikam).

[7-8]But once they were in the city, Ishmael and his men started to slaughter the *innocent* worshipers and throw their murdered corpses into a *large* cistern. Now there were 10 of these men who pled with Ishmael.

Men: *Please* do not kill us. We have a large quantity of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the field.

Ishmael agreed to let them live *in exchange for these supplies.* But he did kill *70 of* their company.

[9]Now the cistern into which Ishmael threw the corpses of Gedaliah, his men, and these worshipers *on their way to Jerusalem* had been dug by King Asa *years ago* when he was preparing for an attack from King Baasha of Israel. Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) filled it with dead bodies.* [10]*After this massacre,* Ishmael took the rest of the people in Mizpah captive, including the royal princesses and the others left under the care of Gedaliah (son of Ahikam) by Nebuzaradan (captain of the imperial guard). Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) forced everyone to leave the city with him as he escaped to the land of the Ammonites.

[11-12]Now when Johanan (son of Kareah) and the other army leaders who were with him heard about this massacre carried out by Ishmael, they rallied all their men and pursued Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) to fight him. They caught up with him not far from the great pool in Gibeon. [13]When the people Ishmael had captured saw Johanan (son of Kareah) and the other army leaders closing in, they rejoiced. [14]All those who had been taken prisoner by Ishmael at Mizpah escaped and joined Johanan (son of Kareah) *in the fight against Ishmael.* [15]But *somehow* Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) and eight of his men were able to escape from Johanan and cross over into the land of the Ammonites.

► What little hope there is for a relatively peaceful future in Judah quickly vanishes with the massacre at Mizpah. The Babylonians show leniency in allowing Gedaliah—one of their own—to rule over this region, but that will change. There will be a response from Nebuchadnezzar. It will be swift and brutal. The question on the minds of those still living in the land is this: how can we escape the vengeance of Babylon? Johanan, by default, has become the new leader of these people. Although he quickly decides the next move, both he and this remnant of Judah hope it is not a mistake.

[16]Then Johanan (son of Kareah) and the other army leaders led the people they

* 41:9 1 Kings 15:17-22; 2 Chronicles 16:1-6

had just rescued away from Gibeon. This group (who had been taken from Mizpah after Ishmael assassinated Gedaliah) included soldiers, women, children, and court officials. 17 *They made their way south* and stopped at Geruth Chimham near *the village of* Bethlehem. The entire company was on its way to Egypt 18 to escape the Chaldeans; for the Judeans were afraid of what would happen when the Chaldeans discovered that Ishmael (son of Nethaniah) had killed Gedaliah (son of Ahikam), the man appointed governor of the land by the king of Babylon.

42 At this point, all the army leaders, Johanan (son of Kareah), Jezaniah (son of Hoshaiah), and the rest *of the Judeans* from the least to the greatest, came 2 to the prophet Jeremiah.

People: Please hear our request and pray to the Eternal your God for the few of us who are still here. As you can see, what used to be many people is now just a remnant. 3 *Pray* that the Eternal your God will tell us where to go and what to do.

Jeremiah: 4 I have heard your request, and you can be assured that I will pray to the Eternal, just as you asked. I will tell you everything He says. I will hold nothing back.

People: 5 May the Eternal be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not obey every word He speaks to us through you. 6 Whether we like the answer or not, we *promise* to obey the voice of the Eternal our God. That is why we are sending you to Him. We want to obey the Eternal our God so things will go well for us.

7 Ten days later, the Eternal gave His answer to Jeremiah. 8 Then the prophet assembled Johanan (son of Kareah), all the army leaders, and the rest *of the Judeans* from the least to the greatest.

Jeremiah: 9 You sent me to present your request to the Eternal, the God of Israel. Here is His answer: 10 "If you will stay here in this land, *I will bless and protect you.* I will rebuild you and not tear you down. I will plant you *anew* and not uproot you. For I deeply regret the disaster I had to bring upon you. 11 I know you are afraid of this king of Babylon, but don't fear him *any longer.* For I, the Eternal One, declare that I am with you and I will save you and rescue you from his authority. 12 I will show you compassion, and then he will have compassion on you. He will even restore you to your land. 13 But if you disobey the Eternal your God and say, 'We're not staying in this land; 14 no, we will go and live in Egypt where we will not have to face the sights and sounds of war or go hungry for lack of bread,' 15 then listen *closely* to what I am saying to you, O remnant of Judah. The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, declares: if you are determined to go to Egypt anyway and settle there *after hearing My answer,* 16 the wars you fear and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt. And there, you will die. 17 Yes, all of you who are determined to run to Egypt and settle there will die from war, famine, and disease. None *of you who go there* will survive or escape the disaster I will bring to them—*not even a remnant of this remnant.*"

18 For this is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, promises: "Just as My anger and wrath were poured out on the citizens of Jerusalem, so it will be poured out on you when you step foot in Egypt. You will become a curse, an object of horror, a disgraced and ridiculed people. And you will never see this place, *Judah,* again."

19 O remnant of Judah, *listen to what* the Eternal has said to you: "Do not go to Egypt!" You must recognize that today I have given you *fair* warning. 20 Your lives are at risk, for you did not mean it when you sent me to the Eternal your God with this promise: "Pray to the Eternal our God for us, and tell us everything He says. We will obey Him no matter what the answer is." 21 So today I have given you His answer, but *I can see* you have no *intention of* obeying the Eternal your God, regardless of what He sends me to tell you. 22 So you will surely die from war, famine, and disease in that place where you are now determined to go.

43 When Jeremiah finished giving the people this answer from the Eternal their God—and he did tell them everything that is recorded here, *just as he promised*—2 Azariah (son of Hoshaiah) and Johanan (son of Kareah) and all the other overconfident men *in that group* spoke.

Leaders *(to Jeremiah)*: These words are lies! The Eternal our God didn't tell you to say, "Do not go to Egypt and settle there." *These are not His words at all.* 3*They are the words of* Baruch (son of Neriah), *your secretary*. He is trying to turn you against us so we will be handed over to the Chaldeans, *when they come back. If we listen to his counsel,* we will be killed or taken into exile in Babylon.

4So Johanan (son of Kareah), all the other army leaders, and all the people refused to obey the Eternal's command to remain in Judah. 5So Johanan (son of Kareah) and the other army officers gathered up all the Judeans who had survived and returned to Judah from the countries they fled to. 6*This vast company of refugees included* the men, women, children, and daughters of the royal family and everyone else who Nebuzaradan, captain of the imperial guard, had left in the care of Gedaliah (son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan). Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch (son of Neriah) were also *forced to join* the company *leaving Judah for Egypt.* 7And so it was that this *vast* company *of Judeans* entered the land of Egypt in disobedience to the voice of the Eternal. They traveled as far as *the northern city of* Tahpanhes.

► Egypt is not where Jeremiah or Baruch want to be, especially since God clearly tells these Judeans—survivors of the Babylonian attack on their land—not to go there. After all these years, Jeremiah again delivers a difficult message to an unreceptive people, this time in Egypt. And once again, he is instructed to act this message so that all can see and clearly understand. Many years have passed since Jeremiah told God he was too young to be His prophet; but here he is, an old man, still performing strange and difficult feats to make His point.

8While they were in Tahpanhes, the message of the Eternal came to Jeremiah.

Eternal One: 9While everyone from Judah is watching, pick up some large rocks and then bury them in the clay of the brick pavement at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. 10*Once you've done this,* give the people this message from the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel: "I am sending My servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, *to Egypt.* I will set his throne over *the exact spot* where I've hidden these stones, and he will spread his royal canopy over this exact spot. 11He is coming to attack Egypt, and he will bring death to those destined to die, captivity to those destined to be captive, and war to those destined to die in battle. 12I will start a fire, and then he will burn the temples of Egypt's *so-called* gods. He will take these idols *back to Babylon.* He will pick through the land of Egypt as easily as a shepherd picks clean his robe. *And once he's finished,* he will return home unharmed. 13He will tear down the obelisks of Egypt in the temple of the sun. Yes, he will burn down the temples of Egypt's gods.

44 This is the message that came to Jeremiah concerning the Judeans living in the *northern* Egyptian cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and the *southern* region of Pathros.

► Some time has now passed since the Judeans who were not deported to Babylon fled to Egypt in a kind of self-imposed exile. Their reason for leaving Judah and settling in Egypt is fear—fear of reprisal from Nebuchadnezzar for the assassination of Gedaliah. Against the protests of Jeremiah, the people settle down in Egypt. Ironically, as they escape the wrath of the dreaded Babylonian king, they foolishly ignore the wrath of God that follows their complete disregard of His prophet. Jeremiah now delivers what will be his last recorded message to these faithless Judeans who have settled in Egypt.

Jeremiah: 2-3This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has to say: "You saw what happened to Jerusalem and the towns

of Judah *when the people disobeyed Me.* I brought disaster upon them because of their wickedness, and now the cities are in ruins and no one dares to live there. The people infuriated Me when they burned incense and worshiped other *so-called* gods that neither they nor you nor any of your ancestors ever knew. 4Time after time I would send My servants, the prophets, saying, 'Oh, stop doing these disgusting things. *You know* I hate them!' 5Still they refused to listen and ignored *what I had to say*; they refused to abandon their wicked ways and kept burning incense to other gods. 6Therefore, My hot anger was poured out; it raged and burned its way through the towns *and villages* of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. That is why they are a desolate wasteland today."

7And now the Eternal God, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, asks: "*Why are you doing this to yourselves again?* Why are you bringing further disaster upon yourselves and all your people? For there will be no man or woman, no infant or child who will survive this onslaught and return to Judah *from this place.* 8Why do you stir up My anger with your handmade *idols* and the incense you burn to the gods here in the land of Egypt where you are determined to live? You will destroy yourselves and become objects of scorn and cursing to the nations of the earth. 9Have you forgotten the evil committed by your ancestors, the kings of Judah and their wives? *What about* the evil that you and your wives committed throughout the land of Judah and on *every* street in Jerusalem? 10To this day, I've seen no evidence of sorrow or regret *for what has been done by My people.* They have shown no reverence for Me, nor have they obeyed My law and the decrees I set before them and their ancestors."

11Therefore, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, now declares: "Look! I have decided to destroy you and bring disaster on all of Judah. 12I will wipe out the remnant of Judah who were so determined to *make a new start and* settle in Egypt *despite My command,* and I will finish it there. They will all die in Egypt, from the least to the greatest, either from war or famine. I will make them a horror, a disgrace, an object of scorn and cursing. 13I will punish those living in Egypt with war, famine, and disease, just as I punished *unfaithful* Jerusalem. 14None of those who made it out of Judah alive and fled to Egypt will survive. None of them will escape *what is coming.* None of them—except for a few fugitives—will ever return to the land of Judah for which they long.

15All the men who were aware that their wives had been burning incense to other gods gathered in a large crowd, along with the women. They had come from *the northern cities of* Egypt and *the region of* Pathros *to the south* to speak with Jeremiah.

People: 16We will not listen to you or the message *you claim* comes from the Eternal! 17We are going to stand by our own word: we will burn incense and pour out our drink offerings to the queen of heaven* just as we have always done—just as our ancestors, our kings, and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Back then we had plenty to eat, and no harm came to us. 18But ever since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out our drink offerings to her, we've not had enough of anything. Besides that, we are being finished off by war and famine.

Women *(to Jeremiah)*: 19Do you think our husbands didn't know and approve *of the fact* that we were burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her? How could we have baked bread marked with her image and poured out offerings to her *and our husbands know nothing of this*?

20Then Jeremiah addressed all these men and women who responded *so rebelliously*.

Jeremiah: 21Do you think while you and your ancestors, your kings and officials, and all the rest of the people were burning incense in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that the Eternal knew nothing of this? Did you think He would forget or that it would somehow slip His mind? 22Today, your land is an object of cursing, a horror, a lifeless ruin because the Eternal could no longer stand your wickedness and the

* 44:17 Likely a reference to *Ishtar*, a fertility goddess.

detestable things you did. 23*Take a good look at* the disaster that has come upon you. It happened because you burned incense *to other gods* and sinned against the Eternal. *It happened* because you refused to obey His voice or follow His law and His decrees, *because you ignored* His warnings.

24(to the entire assembly) Hear the word of the Eternal! You people of Judah who live in Egypt, 25the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has a message for you: "You and your wives have shown *where your true devotion lies* with both your words and your actions! You say, 'We will keep our vows to the queen of heaven; we will continue to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to her.' *Well I say,* 'Go ahead. Keep your vows! Do exactly what you promised!'" 26But hear what the Eternal now says to the Judeans now living in Egypt: "I swear by My great name that no man *or woman* of Judah now living in Egypt will ever again invoke My name or begin an oath *with the words* 'As the Eternal Lord lives!' 27because I will watch over their lives to bring harm, not good. All the Judeans living in Egypt will suffer from war and famine until all have died. 28There will be only a few who survive and return to Judah from Egypt. All the remnant of Judah who were so determined to live in Egypt will *finally* know whose word can be trusted—theirs or Mine. 29Here is a sign for you so that *you will know* I am going to punish you in Egypt. This way you can be sure that My threats against you *are not idle*—they will come true. 30*And this will be your sign:* watch as I hand over Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, to his enemies who want to kill him, just as I handed over Zedekiah, king of Judah, to his enemy, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

► To the very end, Jeremiah speaks out against the injustices and infidelities of his countrymen who keep turning to other gods. His words are strong, and Jeremiah lives to see many of his painful prophecies come true. What remains in the following chapters are words surely spoken before the prophet was an old man in Egypt: first is a brief message for his scribe Baruch in the heartbreaking aftermath of the burning of the scroll (36:1-8) and the terrible judgment then declared on Judah; second is a series of declarations or oracles against the various nations surrounding Judah in these historic times.

45 This is the message the prophet Jeremiah gave to *his secretary,* Baruch (son of Neriah) when he had written on a scroll *all* the words Jeremiah dictated *to him. It took place* when Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) had been king of Judah for four years.

Jeremiah *(to Baruch)***:** 2The Eternal, the God of Israel, has given *me* a message for you, Baruch. 3*He heard you when* you cried out, "Oh my, what pain I am in! *As if I weren't hurting enough,* the Eternal has piled on even more sorrow. I am so tired from groaning; I can find no rest." 4And so the Eternal has given me this message for you: "Hear Me, *Baruch,* for I tell you I am about to upend what I have built and uproot what I have planted in this land, in the whole land. 5Should you worry about achieving personal greatness? No, do not chase after such *a dream*! *But take comfort that* when I bring this disaster on all people, I will reward you by sparing your life. *I promise to protect you* wherever you go.

46 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah concerning the nations.

► Prophets often speak against foreign nations. God is not neutral to the designs and practices of outsiders. These first oracles are directed against the nation of Egypt, who fought and lost the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. Though the fallout was not immediate, this battle was the undoing of Egypt. Babylon is now clearly the dominant world power, and Nebuchadnezzar is her despotic and cruel ruler. But as powerful as he is now and is destined to become, the Babylonian king is only an instrument in the hand of God. By continuing to oppose Babylon and fostering ill-fated political

alliances with other nations, Egypt is, in effect, opposing God Himself. God will accomplish what He sets out to do—and all will answer to Him—for God is the God of all history and sovereign over all rulers.

2This message is about Egypt and the army and her king, Pharaoh Neco; they were defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. *This decisive battle happened* when Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) had been king of Judah for four years.

Eternal One: 3Line up your shields,
large and small.
March toward the battle!
4Harness your horses; mount your
stallions!
Get in position; put your
helmets on!
Polish your spears; put on your
armor!
5And what do I see *when I look at the Egyptian army*?
They are panicked, pulling back
in retreat;
their mighty warriors are
already defeated.
Look how they run away so quickly,
never looking back, for terror is
everywhere they turn.
6The fast cannot outrun *it*; the
mighty cannot escape *it*.
Beside the river Euphrates in the
north, they stumble and fall.
7Who is this *I see* rising like the *river* Nile,
like a swollen, flooding river?
8*It is* Egypt that rises like the *river* Nile,
her pride like a swollen, flooding
river.
Pharaoh blusters, "I will rise and
cover the earth, *like a river.*
I will destroy the cities and their
people *who dare to stand in my way.*"
9Charge, O horses; *go up into the fray*! Let your chariots madly
rush in!
March, mighty warriors,
summoned to war.
Soldiers of Ethiopia and Libya who
carry shields,
archers of Ludim who bend the
bow, *march to your defeat!*
10For this day belongs to the Eternal
Lord, Commander of
heavenly armies;
it is a day of vengeance, a day to
pay back His enemies.
The sword will devour them until it
is satisfied,
until its thirst for their blood
has been quenched.
For the Eternal Lord, Commander
of *heavenly* armies,
will offer *them as a* sacrifice
beside the river Euphrates in
the land of the north.
11Go up to Gilead to find balm *for your wounds,*
O virgin daughter of Egypt.
But you will find no relief in your
many medicines.
This time your wound will not
heal.
12The nations *of the world* hear of
your shame;
the earth is filled with your cries.
One *mighty* warrior stumbles over
another,
and both of them fall down
together.

13This is the word the prophet Jeremiah received from the Eternal about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to attack the land of Egypt.

Eternal One: 14Make this announcement
in Egypt, and tell everyone in
Migdol;
proclaim it in Memphis and
Tahpanhes as well:
Take your positions, and get ready
for battle,
for the sword will devour
everyone around you.
15Why are your mighty warriors lying
face down?
They do not stand, *indeed cannot stand,*
Because I, the Eternal One, have
pushed them to the ground.
16These *soldiers* will stumble again and
again—falling over each other.
They will say *to each other,* "Pick
yourself up! Let us go home
To our own land and people;
let us escape *the edge of* our
enemy's sword."
17It is there, *in that moment,* that they
will cry out,
"Pharaoh, king of Egypt, makes
a lot of noise, but he missed
his chance."

Between Egypt and Babylon are several smaller nations whose futures hang in the balance. To whom will they submit in the coming years? The first of these smaller states to receive a word of judgment is Philistia. At one time a formidable foe of Israel, this nation has seen its power and influence slowly weakening for the last 400 years, since the time of the great King David. In these days of political intrigue, it is likely that the Philistines have entered into a treaty with the city-states of Tyre and Sidon to the north. These allies are among those considering standing up to Babylon (27:3). Perhaps it is this rebellion against God's greater plan to use Babylon that is the reason for this judgment, or perhaps it is something else He sees in these people who live along the coastal plains of the Mediterranean. Whatever the case, it is God, the mighty warrior, who now moves against the Philistines.

18 As I live, says the King
whose name is the Eternal,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
That one is coming who will tower *over you*
like *Mount* Tabor over the mountains,
like *Mount* Carmel over the sea.
19 Pack for the coming exile, you citizens of Egypt,
for Memphis will be a wasteland, a city destroyed and empty of life.
20 Egypt is like a heifer—beautiful, *but helpless—*
because a *biting* horsefly from the north is coming against her.
21 The mercenaries in her army are like fattened calves:
they will turn and run, all of them together.
They will not stand their ground, for the day of disaster is coming;
the time for their punishment *is upon them.*
22 Egypt will slither away like a hissing serpent
as her enemy marches on.
They will come with axes,
like woodsmen *who cut down trees.*
23 I, the Eternal One, declare, "As thick as the forest *of Egypt might be,*
they will chop her down,
For they are more numerous than locusts,
their numbers too great to count.
24 The daughter of Egypt will be disgraced;
she will be handed over to this nation from the north."

25 Then the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, gave this word *to Egypt and anyone foolish enough to side with Egypt.*

Eternal One: Look! I will soon punish Amon, *the god* of Thebes, and all the other *so-called* gods of Egypt. *I will punish* all her rulers, including Pharaoh *(who claims to be a god himself)* and any who trust in him. 26 I will hand them over to the enemy who wants them dead—to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and his officers. But later, *I will restore Egypt.* Her people will return in numbers to live there again as in the days of old. I, the Eternal, promise this.

27 Do not be afraid, O Jacob, My servant.
Do not be dismayed, O Israel.
For I will rescue you from that distant land;
I will bring your children home from the exile.
Jacob will again know peace and what it means to feel secure.
No one will make him afraid.
28 Do not be afraid, O Jacob, My servant, for I am with you.
Even if I completely destroy all the nations
To which I have scattered you, I will not completely destroy you.
Remember this, O Israel: I will discipline you out of justice.
I will not let you go unpunished.

47 The word of the Eternal came to Jeremiah the prophet about the Philistines, before Pharaoh attacked Gaza, *one of Philistia's five major cities.*

Eternal One: 2 Do you see how the waters are rising in the north?
They will become an overwhelming flood.

They will flow across the land,
covering everything—
including the towns and the
people who live there.
Those people will cry out;
those who live in that land will
weep loudly,
3For they will hear the *pounding*
hooves of the charging horses,
the clatter of enemy chariots, and
the rumbling of their wheels.
Fathers *will panic and* abandon
their children,
their hands limp *with fear*.
4For the time will come
to destroy all the Philistines.
She will find no help in Tyre and
Sidon—
these allies, too, will be cut off.
The Eternal will destroy the
Philistines,
this remnant from the coasts of
Caphtor.
5The people of Gaza will shave their
heads *in mourning,*
for Ashkelon is no more.
You who remain in the valley,
how long will you cut yourselves
in grief?

6*You cry out,* "O sword of the Eternal,
when will you stop?
Return to your sheath, rest *from your
destruction,* and be still!"
7But how can His sword be still
when the Eternal has given it a direct
order?
For Ashkelon and those along the coast
will be no more!

48 This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, has to say about Moab.

Next is Moab, a familiar enemy of Israel. Despite Jeremiah's warning they will answer for their trust in themselves, their material wealth, and their god Chemosh.

Eternal One: Woe to *the city of* Nebo,
for she is in ruins.
So, too, will Kiriathaim be put to
shame when she is captured.
The proud fortress *of Moab* will
be humbled and shattered
into pieces.
2No one will praise you, Moab—that
time has gone.
Instead, in *places like* Heshbon,
men are planning your
destruction.
"Come," *they will say,* "and let us
finish off that nation."
Indeed, the town of Madmen will
be silenced,
for war will *surely* find you.
3Do you hear the voice from
Horonaim—
the cries *rising up from the* ruins
and desolation?
4Moab is broken,
and her little ones cry *in
desperation.*
5The defeated make their way up
Luhith, crying bitterly as
they go;
as they descend to Horonaim,
they hear the anguished
cries of destruction.
6Run for your lives! Save yourselves!
Live in the desert like a juniper
bush, alone and forsaken.
7You depended on your own works
and your own wealth,
and now you will *be humbled
and* taken captive.
Your so-called god, Chemosh, will go
with you into exile
along with his priests and
officials.
8The destroyer is coming to each of
your towns; none of them
will escape.
The valley will be ruined;
The plateau will be destroyed
because I, the Eternal One, have
spoken.
9Give Moab wings so she can fly away.
Her cities will be a wasteland
with no one living in them.

10A curse on any who do not finish the work I, the Eternal One, have given you! A curse on anyone who holds back his sword and refuses to shed blood.

11Moab has been at rest since his
early days—
like wine that is *carefully* left
to age,
Not poured from jar to jar,
not going *from nation to nation*
in exile.
And so his flavor has remained; his
aroma has not faded.

12*But all of that will change.* Look, in the coming days, I, the Eternal One, declare that I will send those who will upend

him, *stirring him up and* pouring him out
until his jars have nothing left. They will
empty his jars and smash the empty jugs.

13Then Moab will be ashamed of *his pow-*
erless god, Chemosh, just as the people of
Israel were ashamed of Bethel when they
trusted in their false gods.

Eternal One: 14How can you still boast,
"We are mighty warriors, brave
in battle?"
15*Because* Moab is destroyed;
invaders have laid waste his
towns.
His best young men have gone
down to slaughter.
So say I, the King whose name is
the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies.
16The fall of Moab is at hand;
his disaster is coming quickly.
17Grieve for him, you neighbors of
Moab,
all who know his name.
Say, "Look how his mighty scepter
is broken,
how the splendor of his staff *is*
gone!"
18You people of Dibon, come down
from your glory *on the hills*
and sit on the dry, *dusty* ground
and wait,
For the same one who destroyed
Moab
is coming against you and will
tear down your strongholds
as well.
19Stand by the road and watch *closely,*
you people of Aroer.
Call out to the refugees running
from Moab.
Ask them what happened!
20*And they will answer:* "Moab has been
humiliated and crushed.
Weep *for him,* and cry out.
Go down to the Arnon *River* and
proclaim that Moab has been
destroyed."

21Judgment has come to *the cities of* the
plain: to Holon, Jahzah and Mephaath; 22to
Dibon, Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim; 23to
Kiriathaim, Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon;
24to Kerioth and Bozrah. To all the cities of
Moab, far and near, *judgment has come.*

Eternal One: 25*The symbols of his strength*
are gone; the horn of Moab has been cut
off, and his arm broken.

26Make Moab *drink deeply from this cup*
until he is drunk, for he has exalted himself
above the Eternal. *Make him drink* until he
wallows in his own vomit; then he will be
ridiculed *by all who see him.* 27Did you not
ridicule Israel? *Was he guilty of a crime?*
Was he caught among thieves? Is that why
you, *Moab,* shake your head in contempt
every time you speak of him?

Eternal One: 28Run from your towns
and live *in the wilderness,*
you citizens of Moab;
Hide among the rocks
like doves who nest among the
cliffs.
29We have all heard about the pride
of Moab—
so vain and so smug.
We have all heard about her pride
and arrogance
and her overconfident heart.
30I, *too,* know of the *arrogant*
outbursts, but they are
pointless;
empty boasts accomplish
nothing.
31This is why I will mourn for Moab;
for all her people, I will cry
aloud;
for the men of Kir-heres, I will
moan.
32You *who tend the prolific* vineyards
in Sibmah,
I will cry for you more than I did
for Jazer.
Your vines once spread as far as the
sea, as far as the sea of Jazer.
But now the destroyer has
spoiled your summer harvest
and *sweet* grapes.
33The joy of the harvest is gone
from Moab's orchards and
vineyards.
For I have stopped the flow
of wine; no one treads the
grapes.
The land is full of shouting, but they
are not shouts of joy.

34The anguish of their cries rises from
Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz, from Zoar
all the way to Horonaim and Eglath-
shelishiyah; for even the waters of Nimrim
will dry up.

Eternal One: 35I will put an end to *idol*
worship in Moab, to those who make
offerings on shrines in high places and
burn incense to *so-called* gods.

36Like the somber sound of a flute, my
heart mourns for Moab. My heart mourns
for the men of Kir-heres, for everything
they had is gone.

37For every head is shaved, and every
beard is cut short;
every hand is cut, and every waist is
wrapped in sackcloth.

Eternal One: 38On every rooftop in
Moab and on every street
corner,
there is nothing but mourning
Because I have smashed Moab like
a jar that no one wants.

39How broken he is! How the people wail!
How *the once-proud* Moab turns
away in shame!
See how Moab has become a
laughingstock
and a horror to all his neighbors.

Eternal One: 40Look *in the distance:* an
eagle will swoop down
and spread his wings over Moab,
his prey.
41The cities will be captured and the
strongholds seized.
On that day the heart of Moab's
warriors
Will be like the heart of a woman
in labor—*helpless and
vulnerable*.

42The nation of Moab will be no more
because he *dares to* defy the Eternal.
43Terror and traps and snares lie ahead,
O citizens of Moab.

Eternal One: 44If you run from the
terror, you will fall into a pit.
If you climb out of the pit, you
will be caught in a trap.
There is no escape, for I will bring
these disasters against Moab;
the year of their judgment *has
come at last.*

45*Run if you will, but* in Heshbon's
shadow the refugees are
helpless.
Look! A fire rages from Heshbon;
destroying flames leap from
Sihon;
They consume the northern regions
of Moab
and destroy his clamoring
rebels.

46Woe to you, O Moab! Worshipers of
Chemosh are destroyed;
your sons are sent away, your
daughters taken captive.
47But even so, in latter times the day
will come
when I will restore the fortunes
of Moab.

This is the end *of Jeremiah's oracle* of judgment against Moab.

49 Now concerning the Ammonites. This is what the Eternal has to say:

► Long is the history between Ammon and Israel, and many are the conflicts between them. In Jeremiah's day, Ammonite raiders have taken land originally meant for Israel, specifically the tribe of Gad. Along with other nations, the Ammonites have conspired against Babylon. After the fall of Jerusalem, the king of Ammon hires the assassin, Ishmael, to kill Gedaliah at a pivotal moment in the relationship between Judah and Babylon. Time and again, this proud nation defies the God of Israel and His people. They put their trust in their god, Malcam, and they find security in the mountainous region where they live.

Eternal One: Does Israel have no sons?
Is there no one to inherit *the
land I gave her*?
Is that why *Ammon's god,* Malcam,
has taken *the land of* Gad?
Why would his people be living
in her cities?
2I, the Eternal, tell you the days are
coming
when you will hear the shout of
war raised against Rabbah,
Ammon's capital.
On that day it will be reduced to a
pile of ruins,
and the villages surrounding the
city will be burned.
Then Israel will take back what was
taken from her.
3Weep, O Heshbon, for *the town of* Ai
is destroyed!
Cry out, O citizens of Rabbah!

Put on sackcloth and mourn *your losses.*
Run back and forth inside your *city* walls
Because *your so-called god,* Malcam,
will be carried into exile
along with his priests and officials.
4You boast of your *abundant* valleys,
you faithless daughter,
but they are fading away.
You trusted in your own wealth *and thought,*
"Who could ever attack me?"
5Watch! I will surround you with terror.
I, the Eternal Lord, Commander of *heavenly* armies, declare this.
You will be driven out of the land in single file,
with no one to keep your exiles together.
6But after this, *there will come a day when* I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites.

So says the Eternal.

► Like the relationship between Esau and Isaac—the twin ancestors from whom Edom and Israel descend—relations are often stormy between these two peoples. It is no secret that the Edomites hate the Israelites and often rejoice in their troubles. But it is pride that ultimately is Edom's undoing, for they cannot imagine any enemy penetrating their mountain fortresses. They, too, are part of the council of nations that consider standing against Babylon (Jeremiah 27). As always, Jeremiah instructs that such resistance is an affront to the God of Israel who is using Babylon to accomplish His purposes in history.

7Here now is *the oracle* concerning Edom, *the descendants of Esau,* spoken by the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: What happened to the wise *men* of Teman?
Has their insight failed them?
Has their wisdom merely vanished *into thin air*?
8You who live in Dedan,
run and hide deep in the caves,
For I will bring a disaster on Esau's *descendants*
when I come to punish him.
9When workers harvest the grapes,
do they not leave some on the vine for those *who are poor*?
Even when thieves enter *your home*
in the middle of the night,
do they not destroy *and steal* only what they need?
10But *I will treat* Esau's descendants *differently*:
I will strip them bare, *exposing* their secret places—no place to hide.
Their children, their families, and even their neighbors will die,
and this nation will be no more.
11Leave your orphans to Me, for I will protect them.
Leave your widows as well, for they can trust Me.

12This is what I, the Eternal, have to say: "If the innocent must drink of this cup *of wrath,* why do you think you should escape punishment? You will not escape, for you will surely drink from this cup! 13I swear by My own name, the Eternal, that Bozrah, *Edom's capital,* will become a wasteland, an object of horror, of scorn and cursing; *Edom's* towns will forever lie in ruins."

14I have heard a message from the Eternal.
An envoy was sent to the nations to say,
"Assemble your troops to attack *Edom*!
Rise up, *and prepare* for battle!"

Eternal One *(to Edom)***:** 15Look! I will *humiliate you* among the nations,
make you small and *insignificant,* despised by all.
16The terror you inspire *in others*
and your ingrained arrogance have deceived you!
You think you are safe in your mountain hideaways;
you hold the high ground *above your enemies.*
You may build your *fortress* as high as an eagle's nest,
but I can *still* bring you down from there.

17Edom will become an object of horror; all who pass by *and see what I have done* will shudder and gasp at all of his wounds. 18Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and all their neighbors were destroyed, *never to rise again,* I, the Eternal One, declare that no one will live there; no one will *dare to* make Edom their home. 19Like a lion that suddenly emerges from the dense undergrowth beside the Jordan *to attack a flock* feeding in the lush pasture, so in an instant I will *arrive and* chase the people of Edom from their land. Then I will put in place a leader of My choosing. For who is like Me, and who can challenge Me? What shepherd can stand against Me?

20That is why you must hear the plan that the Eternal has for Edom, and what He intends to do to those who live in *the city of* Teman.

Eternal One: The little ones will be
dragged away from the flock.
All will scatter when their
pasture is left desolate.
21The sound of Edom's fall will cause
the earth to shake.
Their *anguished* cry will echo to
the Red Sea.*
22Look, an eagle is rising, spreading
its wings!
Soon it will swoop down *and*
attack Bozrah.
On that day, the heart of Edom's
warriors
will be like the heart of a
woman in labor—*helpless*
and vulnerable.

► Damascus has long been at odds with Israel and Judah, and she controls caravan routes in the region. But she must also submit to the sovereign power of the Eternal.

23*Here now is an oracle* concerning Damascus.

Eternal One: *The towns of* Hamath and
Arpad are put to shame,
for they have heard bad news:
doom is coming!
They are distressed, troubled, *and*
unsettled like the swirling
sea.

24Damascus is *weak and* helpless; she
has turned and run away.
Panic grips her *heart*;
Torment and pain have grabbed her
like a woman giving birth.

Citizens of Damascus: 25Why is this glorious city—this city that gives us so much joy—not *already* deserted?

Eternal One: 26Her young men will fall
in the streets,
and her warriors will fall silent
on that day.

So says the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: 27I will set fire to the walls
of Damascus,
a fire that will spread and burn
up the palaces of Ben-hadad.

28Here is *an oracle* from the Eternal concerning Kedar and *the nomadic tribes of Arabia known as* the kingdoms of Hazor, all defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Eternal One: Rise up and attack Kedar.
Destroy the tribes of the east.
29They will take away their tents and
their flocks,
their curtains, their camels, and
all their possessions.
They will shout to one another,
"Terror is everywhere we turn!"
30Run away quickly *while there is time*!
Hide deep in the earth, people
of Hazor.
For Nebuchadnezzar, king of
Babylon, has schemed
against you.
He has a plan for your defeat.
31So *I tell you to* rise up and attack
this complacent nation,
which assumes it is secure—
A nation without walls or gates
that lives alone *in the desert.*
32Their camels and livestock will be
the spoils of war.
I will scatter to the wind these
people who cut the corners
of their hair

* 49:21 Hebrew, Sea of Reeds

And surround them with disaster
on every side,
so I, the Eternal, declare.
33Hazor will become a haunt for
jackals,
a *place of* desolation for all time.
Certainly no one will live there *ever*
again.
No one will make it his home.

34Here is *an oracle* concerning Elam. The word of the Eternal came to the prophet Jeremiah early in the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah. 35This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies has to say:

Eternal One: I will break the bows of Elam's *archers*—the very best of their *military* might. 36I will bring the four winds from the four corners of heaven to blow against Elam. I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where her exiles will not go. 37I will shatter Elam right in front of her enemies, before those who want her dead. I will bring disaster upon these people, for My violent anger burns *against them*. I will pursue them in war until they are no more. 38I will destroy her *wicked* king and officials and set the king I want on the throne over Elam. 39But even so, in the latter times, *the day will come when* I will restore the fortunes of Elam.

So says the Eternal.

50 This now is the word the Eternal spoke through His prophet Jeremiah concerning *the mighty empire of* Babylon and the land of the Chaldeans.

► Babylon is a dominant world power in Jeremiah's time that God uses to accomplish His purposes. The prophet says that even Babylon will answer to God. East of Chaldea, the Persian Empire will take over the region and conquer Babylon. This time the Persian King Cyrus will be used by God to alter the course of events.

Jeremiah now conveys his firm belief that it is the God of Israel—not kings and their armies—who shapes history. He delivers a strong message from God concerning Babylon (who oversteps her bounds in the treatment of Judah and the other nations). Intermixed is Jeremiah's message of hope for those in exile. One day, the people of Judah will return home from Babylon. Those who make the journey will find that God never stops loving them, even as He disciplines them.

Eternal One: 2Tell the nations *of the world*; announce it *to them all*.
Raise a flag—*get their attention*—tell them! Hold nothing back; tell them,
"Babylon has fallen; Bel has been put to shame:
Marduk has been shattered. Her images are disgraced;
There's nothing left of Babylon's idols *but broken pieces*."

3Now it is Babylon's turn to be attacked from the north; another nation will destroy her land. No one will live there; both man and beast will run away.

4But in those days *of judgment* and when the time is right, I, the Eternal One, declare this: The people of Israel and those of Judah will come *to Me* together. With tears *in their eyes,* they will come and seek the Eternal their God. 5They will ask about the way *back* to Zion and turn toward *home.* They will come *together* and bind themselves to the Eternal in a lasting covenant that will never be forgotten.

6My people have become like lost sheep, and their shepherds have led them astray. They wandered *so far from My protection*—on mountaintops and hills they lost their way, *worshiping false gods,* forgetting *where I was and* where they could find rest. 7And whoever found My *lost* sheep devoured them. Their enemies said *to themselves,* "*Why worry?* We are not the guilty ones here. They are the ones who sinned against *their God,* the Eternal One, their place of safety, the Eternal One, the hope of their ancestors."

8Get out of Babylon *while you can*! Leave behind this land of the Chaldeans. Be like the goats at the head of the flock; *lead the way home.* 9For I am stirring up *trouble* against Babylon; I am bringing *together* the armies of great nations to

attack *Babylon* from the north. They will *draw up their battle plans and* march against her. The arrows *of this army* will be like those of a skilled marksman; they will not *miss the target or* come home empty-handed. 10Chaldea will be plundered; all her conquerors shall have their fill of the land's wealth.

This is what the Eternal declares.

Eternal One *(to Babylon)*: 11*Because of your treatment of* My people,
because you rejoice and celebrate as you plunder My heritage,
Because you dance about like a heifer roaming the grassland
and neigh like a stallion *as you plunder them,*
12Your homeland will be put to shame.
She who gave you life will be disgraced.
She will become the least of all nations,
nothing but *a patch of* wilderness, a dry *and dusty patch of* land, a *barren* desert.
13Because of My anger, no one will live there.
She will be a desolate wasteland.
All who pass by Babylon *and see what* I, the Eternal, *have done*
will shudder and gasp at her many *deep* wounds.

(to Babylon's enemies) 14*Prepare for battle!* Take your positions!
Surround Babylon on every side, all you archers.
Shoot at her! *Show no mercy!* Spare no arrows,
for she has sinned against the Eternal.
15Shout your battle cries on every side!
She has *already* given up.
Her towers have fallen, and her walls have crumbled.
Since this is My vengeance, *the justice* of the Eternal,
Do not hold back—take vengeance on her.
Do to her what she has done to others.
16Uproot from Babylon those who plant crops
and those who harvest with the sickle.
When they *see the flash from* the enemy's sword,
everyone will run away;
everyone will go back to his own land.

17Israel is like a *frightened* flock scattered by the lions who hunt them. The first to *attack and* devour them was the king of Assyria, and the last to chew on their remains was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. 18For this reason, I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, promise this: Just as I punished the king of Assyria *for the way he treated you,* so will I punish the king of Babylon and his land. 19*But you,* Israel, I will bring back to your own pasture. *Once again* you will graze in *the lush fields of* Carmel and Bashan; *your hunger will be no more;* you will fill yourself on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead. 20And in those days when the time is right, I, the Eternal One, promise this: If anyone searches for *even a trace of* Israel's wrongdoings, they will find nothing. *If they look* for the sins of Judah, none will be found because I will have forgiven this remnant of *My people.*

(to Babylon's enemies) 21Go up and attack the land of Merathaim
and those who live in Pekod.
Slay *them all;* completely destroy them.
Do everything I, the Eternal One, have commanded you.
22The sounds of war can be heard in the land,
anguished cries of great destruction.
23That hammer *who pounded the nations* of the earth
now lies broken and pounded into pieces *herself*!
Mighty Babylon—how you have become a horror
to the *watching* world!
24I set a trap for you, O Babylon, and you fell for it.
Before you realized what had happened,
You were discovered and captured
because you dared to fight against the Eternal.

25*Yes,* the Eternal has opened His armory—
unleashed the weapons of His wrath—

For the Eternal Lord, Commander of
heavenly armies, is at work
in the land of the Chaldeans.
26Come against her from far away *and on*
every side.
Break open her storehouses;
Crush her cities, and leave her dead in
piles like so much grain.
Destroy her completely; let nothing
survive.
27Let her young bulls die by the sword.
Let them all be slaughtered!
Woe to *each of* them, for their day of
punishment has come.

28Hear the clamor of refugees and fugitives, *fresh* from the land of Babylon. *They arrive* in Zion to announce how the Eternal our God has paid Babylon back for what she did to *His people* and His temple.
29Call up the archers to attack Babylon; surround her on all sides so no one can escape. Repay her for her *horrible* deeds; do to her what she has done *to others,* because she has *proudly* defied the Eternal, the Holy One of Israel. 30The Eternal declares that her young men will fall in the streets, and all her soldiers will fall silent on that day.

Eternal One: 31See I am against you,
O prideful one.
I, the Eternal Lord, Commander
of *heavenly* armies, declare
That your time has come:
I will now punish you *for all*
you've done.
32In your pride, you will stumble and
fall,
and no one will help you up.
I will set fire to your cities *and towns,*
and it will devour everything
around you.

33This is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says *about Israel*:

Eternal One: The people of Israel are
oppressed—
so, too, the people of Judah.
All those who took them captive
continue to hold them
and refuse to let them go.

34But their Redeemer is strong;
the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, is His name.
He will take their side and defend their
cause;
He will give them rest in their own land.
But He will shake the earth beneath the
citizens of Babylon.

Eternal One: 35*I will send* a sword
against the Chaldeans—
against the citizens of Babylon
herself—
against her leaders and wise
men.
36*I will send* a sword against her
diviners;
they will be *exposed as* fools.
I will send a sword against her
mighty warriors;
they will be paralyzed with
terror.
37*I will send* a sword against her *war*
horses and chariots
and all the foreign troops
fighting alongside her;
They will all become *weak like*
women.
I will send a sword against her
treasures;
They will all be plundered.
38*I will send* a drought against her
water supplies;
they will all dry up
Because this is a land filled with
images,
and the people are madly
devoted to their idols.

39So the beasts of the desert will roam *this land*—jackals and ostriches will make it their homes. But never again will it be home *to people*; from generation to generation, no one will live there. 40As God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and *all of* their neighbors,* so does the Eternal declare that no one will live in the land *of Babylon.* No one will make his home there.

Eternal One: 41Look *in the distance and*
you will see an army
marching *toward you* out of the
north.
A nation of many kings whose size
and might *you can't imagine*
is now awakening *and coming*
from the remote parts of the
earth.
42They are armed with bows and
spears;
their hearts are cruel and will
show *you* no mercy.

* 50:40 Genesis 19:24-25

The sound of *their massive army,*
riding in on their horses,
is like the sound of an angry sea;
They are ready for battle, marching
in formation,
coming to destroy you,
O daughter of Babylon.
43The king of Babylon has received
the news about them,
and his hands fall *to his side,*
weak and helpless—
Distress has gripped him *so,*
like a woman in the agony of
giving birth.

44Like a lion that suddenly emerges
from the dense undergrowth beside the
Jordan *to attack a flock* feeding in the
lush pasture, so in an instant I will *arrive
and* chase Babylon from her land. Then
I will put in place a leader of My choos-
ing. For who is like Me, and who can
challenge Me? What shepherd can stand
against Me?

45That is why you must hear the plan that
the Eternal has for Babylon, and what
He intends to do to those who live in the
land of the Chaldeans: The little ones will
be dragged away from the flock. He will
leave their pasture desolate. 46The sound
of Babylon falling will cause the earth to
shake; her cry will echo among the nations.

51 The Eternal has this to say
regarding Babylon:

Eternal One: Watch as I stir up a
destroying wind
against Babylon and the people
of Chaldea.*
2I will send outsiders to *sift through
this nation,*
separating the wheat from the
chaff, laying waste this land.
They will fight her from every side
on that *fateful* day of Babylon's
reckoning.
3Do not let the archers draw back
their bows.
Do not let them put on their
armor!
Do not spare the life of one young
soldier.
Destroy her army completely.
4They will all fall dead in the land of
the Chaldeans;
her streets will be full of the
dead and dying.
5For Israel and Judah have not been
forsaken
by their God, the Eternal One,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
Even though their land is awash with the
guilt *of their sins*
against the Holy One of Israel.
6Get out of Babylon! Escape with your
lives!
Do not be caught up in *Babylon's*
punishment,
For this is the time for the Eternal to
avenge *His people.*
He will pay *Babylon* what she
deserves.
7Babylon has been a golden cup in the
Eternal's hand,
intoxicating the whole earth.
Yes, the nations drank her wine,
which is why they went mad.
8But now Babylon—*cup of God's wrath*—
has fallen and shattered.
Weep for her, *if you can*!
Give her something for her pain;
perhaps she may *still* be healed.

Exiles: 9We would like to have healed
Babylon,
but she was beyond our help.
It is time to leave her and go home
before it is too late,
before we get caught in her
coming judgment.
Look, even now it fills the skies,
rising up *to the clouds.*
10The Eternal has vindicated us;
come, we must tell those in
Jerusalem
What the Eternal our God has
done!

11*Enemies of Babylon,* sharpen your arrows
and fill your quivers. *Get ready to
attack!*
For the Eternal has stirred up the spirit
of the kings of the Medes
to accomplish His purpose against
Babylon.
He will exact His vengeance for *what the
Chaldeans did to* His temple.
12Raise up the *battle* flags around the walls
of Babylon!
Reinforce the guard. Station
watchmen *along the way.*
Prepare to make a surprise attack, for
the Eternal will see His plan
carried through
against the people of Babylon.

* 51:1 Hebrew, *Leb-kamai,* which means "heart of those who rise against," a cryptic name for Chaldea.

13You who live by the great river
with *the comforts of your* abundant
treasure,
The end has come, *and you will lose it all.*
Your time has run out.
14The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, has sworn by Himself.

Eternal One: I will cover your land with
enemy troops
the way a swarm of locusts
covers *a field.*
And they will shout victory over you.

15God *alone* is powerful enough to create
the earth.
He *alone* is wise enough to put the
world together.
He *alone* understands enough to
stretch out the heavens.
16His voice thunders through the heavens,
and the waters gush from the sky.
He summons the clouds to build up
over the earth.
As the rain falls, the lightning flashes at
His command;
the wind rushes in from where He
alone can store it.
17All of humanity is stupid and bankrupt
of knowledge.
Those who make idols are shamed
by their creations.
What they fashion out of gold are
imposters—breathless, *lifeless*
frauds.
18Their idols are worthless, the work *of their*
hands an *embarrassing* mockery.
They are doomed to perish under
God's judgment.
19The portion of Jacob is not like any of
these.
He was not fashioned by human
hands.
Instead, it was He who made all things and
appointed Israel to inherit it all.
His name is the Eternal, Commander
of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: 20You are My war club—
My weapon for battle;
with you I shatter nations;
with you I destroy kingdoms;
21With you I shatter the horse and
its rider;
with you I shatter the chariot
and its driver;
22With you I shatter men and women;
with you I shatter both young
and old;
with you I shatter the young
man and the maiden;
23With you I shatter the shepherd
and his flock;
with you I shatter the farmer
and his oxen;
with you I shatter governors and
leaders.

24But *now,* before your very eyes, I will
repay Babylon and the people of Chaldea
for all the harm they have done in Zion.

25I *have turned* against you,
O mountain of destruction,
you destroyer of the earth.
So now I will raise My hand
against you;
I will roll you down from the *lofty*
rocks *where you offered*
sacrifices
and turn you into a mountain
of ashes.
26*When I am finished with you,*
there will be no stones to
salvage—
No cornerstones, no foundation
stones;
you will be desolate forever.

27Lift up a *battle* flag; *let it wave* in
the land!
Sound the trumpet—call the
nations *together*!
Prepare the forces *for battle* against
her;
summon the kingdoms of
Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz.
Assign a commander *to lead the*
troops against her.
Send in the *war* horses, *seething*
like bristly locusts.
28Prepare the nations *for battle*
against her—the kings of the
Medes,
their governors and leaders, and
the lands they rule.
29*As the battle rages,* the land
trembles and writhes,
for the Eternal is accomplishing
His purposes against
Babylon.
He will lay waste her land
and leave it completely empty.
30Babylon's mighty warriors have
stopped fighting;
they stay inside their fortresses,
afraid.
Their strength is gone; they have
become *as weak* as women.
The houses of Babylon are
burning, the bars of her *city*
gates broken.

31 *The news travels fast*—a runner
races to meet another;
the word goes from messenger
to messenger
Until it reaches the king of Babylon:
His entire city has been captured.
32 The river crossings have been taken,
the marshlands have been set
ablaze,
and the soldiers are terrified.

33 This, then, is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and God of Israel, says:

Eternal One: The people of Babylon
are like wheat ready to be
threshed,
spread out on the floor waiting
to be trampled.
A little while longer and the time
for her harvest will come.

Citizens of Jerusalem *(crying out to God)*:
34 Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,
has devoured us.
He has squeezed *the life out of us*
and left us an empty jar.
Like a monster *from the sea,* he
swallowed us
and gorged himself on the
richness *of Israel*
Only to cough us up and throw us
out.
35 "May the violence done to our
people be repaid to Babylon,"
we the people of Zion pray.
"May our blood be upon those who
live in Chaldea,"
so Jerusalem prays.

Eternal One: 36 Watch now as I defend
your case
and avenge *what was done to*
you.
I will *expose this monster and* dry up
her sea.
I will deplete her wellsprings.
37 Babylon will be reduced to a heap
of rubble,
the haunt of jackals,
An object of horror and hissing
scorn,
a place where no one lives.
38 *O how* this nation roars! Like *a pack*
of young lions,
like lion cubs, they growl.

39 And once they are stirred up,
I will lay out a feast and make
them *all* drunk
until they laugh and feel happy.
But when they fall asleep, they will
sleep forever.
This is what I, the Eternal One,
promise you.
40 I will bring these *proud lions* down
like lambs going to their own
slaughter.
Like rams and goats *they will be*
humbled.

Prophets see things not as they are but as they will be. Babylon is still powerful, but her end is coming. Jeremiah sees her fall as an accomplished fact.

41 How Babylon* has been captured!
Babylon, the pride of all the
earth, has fallen!
How *mighty* Babylon has become
an object of horror
among all the nations *that once*
feared and admired her.
42 The rising tide of the sea has
flooded Babylon.
She disappears beneath its
raging waves.
43 Her cities have become an object of
horror.
Her fruitful land *has been left*
parched, like a desert,
a wilderness where no one lives,
where no wants to go.
44 I will punish Bel, the false god of
Babylon;
I will make him cough up all he
has swallowed.
The nations will no longer make
their way to worship him
because even the *great* walls of
Babylon have fallen.

45 Get out of Babylon, My people,
before it is too late!
Run! Save yourselves!
Run! Do not get caught up in the
destruction
caused by My fierce anger.
46 Do not lose heart or give in to fear
and panic
when the rumors start to fly in
the land.
Year after year, the rumors will
come—rumors of violence
and reports of one ruler warring
against another.

* 51:41 Hebrew, *Sheshak*

47 *So,* look! the days are coming
when I will punish Babylon's
idols.
Her whole land will suffer
humiliation,
and her dead will lie *unburied*
within her borders.
48 Then the heavens and the earth
and all that is within them
will shout for joy over *the disaster*
that comes upon Babylon,
For the destroying armies will
march against Babylon from
out of the north.

49 As the slain of Israel fell, so must
Babylon fall.
As the slain of all the earth fell,
so must Babylon fall.
50 You who escape *the blade of* the
sword
must get out now. Don't delay!
Remember Me in that distant land;
remember the Eternal, and
think *fondly* of Jerusalem.
51 *In that bittersweet moment,*
the remnant of My people will say,
"We are ashamed—we have been
insulted *by invaders,*
and disgrace covers our faces
When we think of foreigners
entering the holy places of
the Eternal's temple
and defiling it by their presence."

52 But I, the Eternal One, declare that
the day will come
when I will punish Babylon's
images and idols;
and the groans of her dying will
echo through the land.
53 No matter how high she reaches or
how strong her defenses,
I will send enemies to destroy
her.

So says the Eternal.

54 *Listen!* Hear the cry that comes from
Babylon.
It is the sound of great destruction in
the land of Chaldea.
55 For the Eternal is destroying Babylon;
He will drown out the piercing sound
of her cries
As wave after wave of her enemies
roars in,
crashing against her, with the
deafening sound of battle *in the*
air.

56 A destroyer is coming to attack Babylon;
her *mighty* warriors will be
captured.
Their weapons will be broken.
For the Eternal is a *just* God who pays
accordingly,
and He will repay *Babylon* in full.

Eternal One: 57 I will make her leaders
and wise men drunk
as well as her governors, leaders,
and *mighty* warriors.
And when they fall asleep, they will
sleep forever,

So says the King, whose name is the
Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies.

Eternal One: 58 The wide *and sturdy*
walls of Babylon will be
toppled,
and her massive *city* gates will
be set on fire.
The people toiled *to build those*
walls,
but it was all in vain.
Prisoners from other lands
exhausted themselves *to*
build this city,
but their work went up in
flames.

► This strongly worded message about Babylon is the last of the oracles against the nations. Such is the message that the prophet Jeremiah is called to give—even while Babylon's power is at its height. And so in 594 B.C., before the final fall of Jerusalem, the prophet to the nations delivers this prophecy to the exiles already in Babylon and—if they choose to listen—to the Babylonians themselves. Jeremiah instructs an assistant to the king of Judah to take this oracle to Babylon and read it aloud. As if that is not enough, he then instructs the man to perform a symbolic act—the sort of thing Jeremiah himself would do if he were there. His willing accomplice will dramatize the ultimate sinking of the Babylonian Empire by fulfilling the prophet's strange request.

59Jeremiah the prophet gave the following order to Seraiah (son of Neriah and grandson of Mahseiah), when Seraiah was accompanying Zedekiah (king of Judah) to Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign. Seraiah worked in the king's administration. 60Jeremiah had written on a scroll all of the terrible things that would *one day* happen to Babylon (those things which *you have just read*). *Once this important message* had been recorded, 61he said to Seraiah,

Jeremiah: When you get to Babylon, *find a public place and* read aloud every single word *written on this scroll.* 62Then say *loud enough for others to hear,* "O Eternal One, You have promised that You will destroy this place so that neither man nor beast will live here. *Babylon* will *then* be a wasteland forever." 63When you have finished reading the scroll *and saying these things,* tie it to a *heavy* stone and throw it into the Euphrates *River*. 64Then say *loud enough for others to hear,* "*Just as this stone and scroll sink,* so will Babylon *and her people* sink, never to rise again, for they shall be tired after the disaster I, *the Lord,* am bringing to her."

The messages of Jeremiah end here.

► Jeremiah's words are often not "his" words. Early in life, his mouth is touched by God, and from then on the prophet is God's mouthpiece to the world. Jeremiah thinks with God's mind and speaks with God's voice when the world around him is crumbling (1:9-10). In many ways, he sees the world as God sees it and then shares those visions, no matter the cost. His ministry spans five kings of Judah, few of whom bother to listen to him. He survives public ridicule, loneliness, and attempts on his life. He witnesses his beloved Jerusalem fall just as he predicts. But he knows the faithfulness of God. The Eternal has promised to sustain him through a difficult life, and so He does.

52 Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king. His reign in Jerusalem lasted for *a total of* 11 years. His mother was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah *(not the prophet of Anathoth).* 2Zedekiah committed evil in the eyes of the Eternal, just as Jehoiakim had done. 3All that *then* happened to Jerusalem and Judah took place because of the Eternal's anger. He finally forced them *out of the land and* away from His presence. It was then that Zedekiah *foolishly* rebelled against the king of Babylon.

4King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon brought his entire army to surround Jerusalem. On the 10th day of the 10th month, during the 9th year of Zedekiah's reign, *the mighty army of Babylon* was camped outside the city and built siege mounds around it. 5This siege lasted *18 months, well into* the 11th year of Zedekiah's reign. 6By the 9th day of the 4th month *of that year,* the famine had become so severe inside the city that no one had anything to eat. *Panic was setting in as people feared starvation.* 7When *a section of* the city wall was breached, all the warriors *of Jerusalem* escaped through a gate between the two walls near the king's garden. Even though the Chaldeans had the city surrounded, *these warriors escaped the city* under the cover of night and fled *east* toward the Jordan Valley. 8But the Chaldean army *discovered this* and chased after Zedekiah, catching him on the plains of Jericho. All of his soldiers had scattered, and he was alone 9when they captured him. They took him to the king of Babylon, *who had set up his command post* at Riblah in the land of Hamath. *It was here that* the king pronounced judgment on Zedekiah. 10Zedekiah was forced to watch as his own sons and the nobles of Judah were butchered in front of him in Riblah. 11*This was the very last thing he saw, because* after this Nebuchadnezzar blinded Zedekiah's eyes. He was then placed in bronze shackles and carried off to Babylon, where he remained in prison until his death.

12*About a month later,* on the 10th day of the 5th month, Nebuzaradan (the captain of the imperial guard and *trusted* advisor of the king) arrived in Jerusalem. This was during the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon. 13He systematically destroyed the important structures of the city. He set fire to the Eternal's temple, the king's palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. 14All of the Chaldean troops that had accompanied the captain then tore down all the walls surrounding Jerusalem. *The capital was*

now in ruins. 15-16Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the imperial guard, *gathered together* those still living in the city, including some of the poor and those artisans who had not been deported earlier. He put them with the deserters who had fled to Nebuchadnezzar and forced them all into exile, *far away from their homeland.* But he left the remaining poor people behind to care for *Judah's* vineyards and fields.

17*Before the Babylonian army burned the temple, they proceeded to take everything of value.* They took the bronze pillars *at the entrance* of the temple and the stands and bronze sea that were inside the Eternal's temple. After breaking them in pieces, the Chaldeans took the bronze back to Babylon. 18They also took the pans, the shovels, the snuffers, the bowls, the dishes, and every bronze utensil that was used during the temple rituals. 19The captain of the guard also took the *various* sacrificial bowls, firepans, pots, lampstands, dishes, and anything else made of gold or silver. 20The weight of bronze from the two pillars, the sea, the 12 bronze bulls under the sea, and the stands was so great that it could not be accurately measured. These items *were very old, for they* had been crafted for the temple of the Eternal in the days of King Solomon. 21The bronze pillars were 27 feet high and had a circumference of 18 feet; they were hollow, *but the bronze walls of the pillars* were about 3 inches thick. 22-23The bronze capital atop each pillar was 7½ feet high and covered with latticework and pomegranates—all made of bronze—circling the entire capital. There were 96 pomegranates on all sides of the capital, 100 total in the latticework around *the top.*

24*Nebuzaradan,* the captain of the imperial guard, took Seraiah (the high priest) and Zephaniah (next in line to be high priest), along with 3 officers in charge of the gates. 25Of those still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the army and 7 of the king's advisors. He also took the army commander's secretary, who was in charge of enlisting people *into the army,* and 60 other men. 26-27Nebuzaradan, the captain of the imperial guard, took this entire group to the king of Babylon, *whose command post was* in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Nebuchadnezzar had them all beaten and killed. This is how Judah was taken from her land and sent into exile.

28This, then, is the number of people Nebuchadnezzar took captive *during 3 deportations*: In the 7th year *of his reign*: 3,023 Judeans; 29in the 18th year of his reign: 832 citizens of Jerusalem; 30and in the 23rd year of his reign: 745 people were taken into exile by Nebuzaradan, captain of the imperial guard. In all 4,600 people were taken captive.

► Years later, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-merodach (562-560 B.C.), hope emerges. The exiled king Jehoiachin is shown kindness; it seems God has not forgotten them.

31On the 25th day of the 12th month during the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, ascended to the throne and showed mercy to Jehoiachin and released him from prison. 32*Babylon's* new king was good to Jehoiachin and gave him a place of honor higher than the other nations' exiled kings in Babylon. 33And so it was that Jehoiachin exchanged his prison clothes *for new clothes,* and for the rest of his life he dined regularly at the king's table. 34The king of Babylon even gave him a daily allowance on which he lived until the day of his death.

LAMENTATIONS

A communal response to the fall of Jerusalem

By Jeremiah, the heartbroken prophet

Oh, the pain and despair of it all! How can God allow such oppression, such suffering, such agony? There are no words to title this book, only the "aaghh" of grief and despair. And so it begins. The people of Judah are broken, humiliated, and abandoned in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction and fall at the hand of Babylon (586 B.C.). Grief can be such dark chaos. Words tumble recklessly, senselessly, out of a heart broken with total despair. But how does one express these dark thoughts? They need shape and order. To get a handle on this sadness, to pull the thoughts together, they are brought under the discipline of poetry. They are forced into the order of an acrostic, or rather four separate acrostic poems. In the Hebrew each poetic set of lines begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with the exception of chapter 3 where sets of three lines are set as an acrostic. The words and thoughts are made to conform to this literary device simply to make it possible to bend these horrific scenes into a shape that the people can bear and remember long after the event. In this way, the writer (whoever he may be) can speak the unspeakable. This English translation uses a form of the acrostic without the strict adherence to the Hebrew style. This poetic form is essential to the presentation of the message.

Tradition associates this book with Jeremiah, so the Christian canon places it after Jeremiah's prophecy. There is nothing in the book itself to say who composed its mournful lines, but it was obviously written in the land of and for a people completely devastated by Babylon's victory.

Lamentations is not just the record of a dark period in history, but it also faces head-on some of the most difficult issues that God's people must ever consider. How can a loving God allow His people to suffer in such a horrible fashion? How can a sovereign God let other nations oppress His own? How can pain and utter loss be reconciled with God's mercy, righteousness, and justice? Echoing through these dark moments is the voice of hope, for the Lord is using these harsh measures to bring His wayward people back to Him. From the dust of destruction comes the rebuilding of the nation and the hope of His redeeming love. God's anger may not last forever, but His faithfulness to His covenant promises will. For those who put their trust in God, every day is an opportunity to experience His love and mercy.

1 **Aaghh!* Lonely is this city that once
bustled with life;
Cheer is empty; like a widow, she
is abandoned
and oh, so lonely.
She who was a princess, great among
the nations,
has *lost everything and* been forced to
serve as a slave.

2*Bawling,* she weeps without constraint
every night,
cries herself to sleep, bitter tears
streaming down her cheeks.
Her former friends ignore her;
there is no one there to share her
sorrow;
Companions *contend and* have betrayed
her;
friends have *been unfaithful and*
turned against her as enemies.

3*Carried off to a foreign place,* Judah is
exiled in misery
and debased by affliction and hard
labor;
She cannot find rest living among the
pagan nations.
She tried to run and hide, but in her
distress pursuers have overcome
her.

4Despair permeates *the very dust of* Zion's
roads.
Nobody walks them in anticipation
of celebration *and worship.*
No one enters the city's desolate gates
*bringing offerings or sacrifices to
God.*
The religious leaders are heavyhearted,
And the virgin women despair.
It's so bitter for *dear* Zion!

5Enemies *of Jerusalem* have gained the
upper hand.
Her foes prosper *against her.*
The Eternal One has caused her sorrow
because of her rebellions,
for she acted against Him, willfully,
again and again.
Even her little ones are taken away at the
whim of her foes.

6Faded beauty, this daughter Zion.
Her princely young men, like stags,
They have no place to graze, no strength
to fight;
they fled *to the woods,*
Pursued *mercilessly* by hunters.

7Gone are the days that she remembers,
happy and precious;
Jerusalem wanders aimlessly and
remembers what precious things
she has lost—
Things from the old days *of David,
Solomon, and Josiah.*
But now her people have fallen to
her enemies,
And *in this defeat by her enemies,* no one
ran to her aid,
and her enemies now snicker and
gloat at her downfall.

8Hideous *must be* Jerusalem's crimes
that the city itself is now *morally and*
ritually impure.
Those who once admired her now hate
her.
They strip her naked *and laugh.*
All she can do is groan
and shrink back, *ashamed.*

9Impurity clung to her inside *the cover of*
her clothes.
She refused to consider anything but
the present,
Never expecting her impurity would be
revealed.
Nobody came forward with
comfort—*no one.*

Lady Jerusalem: See, Eternal One, how
badly I suffer
and how my enemies swell with
pride.

► The people of Judah and Jerusalem have had many opportunities to recognize their failings. Now they learn that their choices have grave consequences. For generations they have ignored the warnings and continued in idolatry, dependence upon foreign powers, and oppression of the less fortunate. Yes, the sacrifices in the temple have continued, but they have continually turned away from God. One prophet after another has called them back to a life of trust in the Lord, but they still look to others for assurance. Time has run out.

* 1:1 A Hebrew acrostic poem. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet.

10 *Jabbing and* fondling,
mauling all her treasures, the enemy
takes stock.
Foreign nations enter even her holy place,
claiming what You decided was
off-limits
And forbidden to them—Your temple.*

11 Kept in hunger,
her people are desperate for food.
Once prosperous, they trade her treasures
for nourishment of any kind.

Lady Jerusalem: Look, Eternal One—
really see how hated I've become.

12 Look around, you who pass by *and*
go about your business.
Is there any sorrow as great as
mine?
Any pain as great as that which has
been forced on me?
No. Because my pain comes from
the Eternal.
It is His judgment, rendered on the
day of His intense anger.

13 My bones burn with the wrath of
God,
the fire sent from on high.
He laid a trap, then left me,
turned me back to the
destruction,
With the shakes, constantly *sick*
and faint.

14 Now the burden of all my wrongs is
a yoke.
God has laid them upon my
shoulders,
Bound them around my neck.
He has made sure I'm too weak
to support them.
The Lord gave me into the hand of
an enemy.
I could not resist.

15 *Overwhelmed by none other than*
God,
the Lord has determined that all
my warriors are worthless.
He has summoned a meeting of
those who are against me
to crush the young men who
would protect me,
And He has stomped *lovely* Judah,
virgin daughter,
like *grapes* in a winepress.

16 *Pity,* my eyes won't stop their
crying; *I can't stop.*
There is no one nearby to
comfort me or revive my
spirit,
No one to pull me up.
My children know it—they're
left empty,
The enemy has won.

17 *Quietly,* Zion spreads out her hands,
pleading for comfort.
But no one comes. *The Lord forbids it.*
God has commanded Jacob's enemies
to surround her.
Jerusalem has become their foe;
she is an impurity among them.

The poetic imagery is violently and sexually disturbing. Zion's captors enter her sacred area and cart off her children. She has been unfaithful to her husband, the Eternal One.

Lady Jerusalem: 18 Right and true is the
Eternal One.
I am the one in the wrong: I have
rebelled against His law.
Listen all of you peoples.
See how much I have suffered;
My *handsome* men and my *gentle*
women, unmarried and
unprotected,
have marched away into captivity.

19 Summoning my lovers brings
nothing—
nothing but pain in their betrayal.
The old guard, religious and
political leaders,
have died starving here in the
city;
Their search for sustenance failed.

20 Take account, Eternal One, of me;
how miserable I am.
My belly growls and turns;
My heart is wrung out like a rag;
my faults and failings are to
blame
because I have been rebellious.
Death is everywhere in the homes;
the sword makes women
childless in the streets.

21 Uncaring, with no compassion from
others,
they know how badly I suffer.

* 1:10 Deuteronomy 23:3

O how alone I am.
My enemies gloat, and You have
brought about my misery,
So happy to know I'm in pain.
But You, *O God,* will make them
as bad off as I.

22Vindicate me and judge their evil
actions
and make them suffer,
As You've made me suffer
for all my wrongdoings.
I'm a wreck, and I groan with a faint
heart.

2 *Aaghh!* How could the Lord surround
Zion in a cloud of His anger
as if He has cast the beauty of
Israel down from heaven to
earth?
Majestic Israel, God's footstool,
is debased by God's anger in a
moment of wrath.

2*Buried beneath the dust,*
Jacob's houses have been swallowed.
The Lord did this without mercy,
shattering her fortresses.
God brought down to the ground
daughter Judah,
and defiled her kingdom and her
leaders.

3Cut down by God's anger,
the *pride and* strength of Israel falls;
He withdrew His right hand *and stood
back* and allowed Israel's enemies
to wreak havoc in the land.
God has burned and consumed Jacob
in an insatiable fire.

4Deployed like an enemy, God stood
poised *against Judah*—
bow bent, right hand clinched—
crashing down
On everything that we admired
among daughter Zion's tents.
The anger of the Lord whipped like
flickering flames *to reduce it to
ashes.*

5Enemy of ours—our God—*who would
have thought?*
Yet the Lord chewed up Israel,
Swallowed its mighty palaces;
He spit out fortresses and reduced
them to dust.
God increased suffering and sorrow
to a fever pitch in daughter Judah.

6Felling His own dwelling like a garden
hut,
God destroyed His meeting place;
He did away with the sacred festivals
and Sabbaths in Zion,
and in fierce anger
He *ignored and* spurned *our leaders*—
our king and priests alike.

7God disdained *the most sacred religious
spots*—
His altar, His sanctuary, *the
centerpiece of our tradition.*
The Lord gave our enemy full charge of
the city,
palaces and all.
And in *the temple itself,* the Eternal's
house,
they hoot and holler as if it's one of
our sacred festivals.

► For generations the Judeans have looked upon the temple in their midst as a comfort and even a protection. Jeremiah stood before the temple and preached to these same people that they should not trust in the lying words of others: "Change your ways and stop what you are doing, and I will let you live in this land. Do not rely on the misguided words, 'The temple of the Eternal, the temple of the Eternal, the temple of the Eternal,' *as if the temple's presence alone will protect you*" (Jeremiah 7:3-4). Even good things from God can be misconstrued to turn us away from Him. Now the temple itself will be brought low because of the hard hearts of the people.

8Hesitating not for one moment,
the Eternal measured across *the city
of* daughter Zion;
Unrelenting, He was determined to
destroy,
to bring the city down with rampart
and wall
To its knees in *rubble and* grief.

9Into the earth, Jerusalem's *defenses, the*
bars and gates, are sunk—
her leaders, both king and prince,
scattered among *surrounding*
nations,

Gone to foreign places.
Now there is no law, *no wise instruction;*
The prophets receive no *divine* visions;
who can see the Eternal's way?

10*Jerusalem* elders of daughter Zion are mute,
dispensing no precious wisdom.
They sit on the ground *distraught,* clad in sackcloth;
they hurl dust on their heads.
The young maidens of Jerusalem hang their heads
down to the ground.

11*Knowing the fate of Zion,* my insides are in turmoil and pour out
for *Jerusalem,* the devastation of the daughter of my people.
I can't see because of the tears for the children in the streets—
I can't stop crying for infants and toddlers too weak to wail.
My people are destroyed.

Little Children: 12Mother, grain and wine—where is it?

Like the wounded,
collapsing in the city streets,
They pine and die
on their mother's breast.

13*My dear* daughter Jerusalem,
how can I tell your *tragedy*?
To what can I liken *this disgrace*?
O virgin daughter Zion, would that I could comfort you.
Who can heal your massive injury
that is as deep and wide as the sea?

14Nothing but vanity from your prophets—nothing but worthlessness from them;
They never *warned and* exposed you to correct your wicked ways
so that *things would go well again* with no captivity.
Instead, they told divine oracles of lies and deceit,
that everything was fine.

15*On your head, now,* passersby heap scorn; they wag their fingers, shake their heads at daughter Jerusalem.

Passersby: Is this the city everyone thought was so great—
a city of perfect beauty and Earth's pride and joy?

16*Pursuing you,* your enemies cut you down.

Enemies: *Ha! Would the day ever come? We've got her now!*
Look, we've swallowed her whole, *destroyed her.*
We waited anxiously for today, and we made it happen!

17*Question* the Eternal One about what He has done.
He determined—*punished* according to the term and tenets
He laid down so long ago.
He executed fierce destruction without pity
And made your enemy glad.
He has made them prevail with might.

18Raise your cry to the Lord *with all your might*!
Take no relief; be ceaseless in grief.

Lady Jerusalem: Oh walls, *may your stones cry out,*
cry out for daughter Zion;
Make rivers with tears *of sorrow, rushing.*
Do not cease from your weeping.

19Stand up and yell in the night with all your heart;
call to God even while the city sleeps during the night watch;
Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands *and plead* to Him for the lives of your children,
For the babies weak with hunger dying on every street corner.

20Take heed, Eternal One!
Look *what You've done and* to whom you have done this.
Can it be—women eat their offspring, even their tender newborns;
and in the most sacred places of the Eternal,
Priests and prophets are slaughtered?

21*Unable to go on,* young and old fall, lying in the dusty streets.
My *strong* young men and women, all unmarried,
are attacked and killed by Your sword in Your anger.
You are responsible *for this mayhem and misery.*
You, *God,* slew without pity.

22Victims all, You summoned those
terrors surrounding me
as if You were calling together a
sacred festival.
On the day of Your divine wrath
there was no escapee,
not even one survivor.
The ones whom I raised up and
made numerous,
my enemy made a complete end
of them.

3 Afflicted, I have seen *and know* what
it's like
to feel the rod of God's anger:
2An absence of light and only darkness.
Darkness—that's where God has
driven me.
3Against me *and me alone,* over and
over,
God raises His hand incessantly.

4Bones are broken, skin rubbed off, and
my flesh wasted;
this is God's doing:
5Besieged in hardship,
wrapped in *a husk of bitter poison
and* trouble;
6Brought to darkness like those dead and
decaying,
and left there alone to live.

7Cut off from every avenue of escape, God
has fenced me in
and tied me up with heavy chains.
8Crying and carrying on do me no good;
God shuts out my prayer.
9*Closed in and* blocked by walls of cut
stone,
what paths I have *left,* He has twisted
and confused *my steps.*

10*Dangerous* as a stalking lion or a lurking
bear,
God lies in wait for me.
11Dragging me off the path and tearing
me up,
He has left me desolate.
12Drawing back His bow, God aims
straight at me with His own arrow.

13*Ever true* arrows, ready in His quiver,
now sink into my gut.
14Echoing taunts ring 'round me from *the
mouths of* my own people,
laughing and joking about me all day
long.
15*Enough!* He has filled me with bitterness,
saturated me with gall.

16For He crushes my teeth *with a mouth
filled* with gravel;
He humiliates me, trampling me in
ashes.
17*Fragmented,* my self knows no peace.
I cannot remember what it's like to
be happy.
18"Failed," I say to *myself.* "My hope fails
in the face of what the Eternal One
has done."

19*Grievous* thoughts of affliction and
wandering plagued my mind—
great bitterness and gall.
20*Grieving,* my soul thinks back;
these thoughts cripple, and I sink down.
21Gaining hope,
I remember *and wait for* this thought:

22How enduring is God's loyal love;
the Eternal has inexhaustible
compassion.
23Here they are, every morning, new!
Your faithfulness, *God,* is *as* broad *as
the day.*
24*Have courage, for* the Eternal is all that I
will need.
My soul boasts, "Hope in God; just
wait."

25*It is good.* The Eternal One is good to
those who expect Him,
to those who seek Him *wholeheartedly.*
26It is good to wait quietly
for the Eternal to make things right
again.
27It is good to have to deal
with restraint and burdens when
young.

28Just leave in peace the one who waits in
silence,
patiently bearing the burden of God;
29Just don't interfere if he falls, gape-
mouthed in the dust.
There may well be hope yet.
30Just let him offer his cheek when struck.
Let him be the butt of jokes.

This is the heart of the lament. Pain and despair are deep and lasting, but God's rejection is not forever because Jerusalem is the city of the Lord.

31*Kept in God's care:*
the Lord won't reject him forever.
32*Kindness prevails:* Even though God
torments *sometimes,*
the greatness of God's loyal love wins
out.

33 *Keeping us down:* it is not the desire *or way* of God's heart
to hurt and grieve the children of men.

► Hope is realized when the next generation of exiles in Babylonia receive God's mercy and are brought back to the promised land, Palestine, in a second exodus, a journey not unlike what the Israelites experienced as they left Egypt under Moses' leadership.

God surely causes grief and torment, but He also provides kindness that originates from His heart of compassion. The discipline administered by the heavenly Father hurts, but the pain is not lasting and actually reflects His compassion. When the Lord sends affliction, it is instructive, restorative, and temporary. Affliction and judgment may sometimes come from the Almighty, but what always springs from the heart of God is a deep and eternal mercy for His people.

34 Left as captives of the land
to be stomped on and crushed,
35 Legal action *and human rights* denied
in the very presence of our exalted God,
36 Lord, surely You do not approve it—they deny
one person's rights and a fair trial.

37 *Matters not* who says a thing will or won't happen
unless the Lord determines that it should.
38 Most High *God* must proclaim it so—
for both good and bad, *joy and sorrow* come from Him, so
39 Mind your complaint. *Why should a person fuss*
when faced with the consequences of his own wrongdoing?

40 Now let's search out our *thoughts and* ways
and return to the Eternal.
41 Now let's lift up to God in heaven
our hearts along with our hands *in praise and supplication.*
42 *Now, let us admit that* we persisted in wrong
and You, *God, were right to* deny us forgiveness.

43 You have wrapped Yourself in anger.
You hunted us down and became our merciless killer.
44 Our prayers couldn't penetrate the cloud
You *then* wrapped around Yourself.
45 Oh, we are trash: You've made us so
in the eyes of all people.

46 *Putting us down,* our enemies scoff.
They gape *and gawk* at us.
47 Panic and pitfalls are all around us,
nothing but breakdown and decay.
48 Pouring out from my eyes are tears like rivers
over the destruction of my people, daughter *Zion.*

49 Quenched? It can't be quenched,
this sorrow in my eyes,
50 Quelled only by knowing that
the Eternal looks down from heaven and sees.
51 *Quickly I recoil* from what my eyes see; I am choked with grief
at the fate of the young women of my city.

52 *Running me down,* my enemies for no reason
hunt me, a tiny bird.
53 *Rattling my bones* with stones thrown down on my head,
having flung me *mercilessly* in a pit.
54 *'Round about me and* over me, watery *darkness* closes in.
I cry out, "I'm drowning! *All is lost, lost.*"

55 Saying Your name, Eternal One, I called to You
from the darkness of this pit.
56 Surely You've heard me say,
"Don't be deaf to my call; bring me relief!"
57 So close when I've called out *in my distress,*
You've whispered *in my ear,* "Do not be afraid."

58 Taking up my cause, Lord, You've been my champion.
You've paid the price; *You saved* my life.
59 Terrible things have been done to me.
You've seen it, Eternal One.
Judge my case *with justice.*
60 *Their abuses against me are not hidden from You.*
You've seen all the awful things my enemies determine to do to me.

61Ugly words and *uglier* plans they have
for me—
You've heard it all, Eternal One.
62*Under their breath,* my adversaries
whispering about me,
devising *nasty* schemes all the time.
63Unkind jokes at my expense,
whether they're sitting around or
going to and fro.

64Villains You will return to their
recompense,
Eternal One, according to their
deeds.
65Visit them with anguish and an
insensitivity *to Your words.*
Make Your curse fall *hard* on them.
66Vehemently *pummel them.* Chase them
down, obliterate them
from below the heavens of the
Eternal, *from the earth itself.*

4 Aaghh! The gold no longer shines;
even our finest gold is changed,
And precious gems *from the holy
place*
are scattered and spilled in the street.

2But *worse yet, the people themselves,* the
precious children of Zion,
are treated like clay pots formed by
a potter—
Now debased and devalued,
but they were once worth their
weight in gold.

3Cruelty marks our young women.
Even jackals nourish their young,
But like the *stupid* ostrich in the desert,
my people don't care *a whit for their
own.*

4*Desperate* infants thirst *for milk,*
their tongues stuck to the roofs of
their mouths.
Hungry children beg for food,
and no one responds.

5Even those raised with a silver spoon,
swaddled in the richest fabrics,
Are *starving,* perishing in the streets.
They swarm through rubbish *like flies.*

6*Forever,* without relief, it seems my city
will suffer
more for their wrongdoing than *cruel*
Sodom did;
With their instant *and violent* overthrow,
no one wrung hands in despair for
that city.

Eternal One: 7*Glory comes in service for*
those consecrated to Me;
they are purer *and cleaner than*
snow and whiter than milk
Their bodies *chiseled and healthy,*
as polished as sapphires and
redder than coral.

8*How stark the contrast; they have
suffered so.*
Now they are sullied with
grime,
Unrecognizable on the streets,
skeletal and frail, as dry as
tender.

9If only they could have died
valiantly by the sword—
rather than doubled over by
famine,
This long-drawn agony of hunger,
deprived of the yield of the field.

10*Just imagine the injustice:* loving
mothers
are forced to cook their babies'
flesh.
Children have become their food!
All because of the destruction of
the daughter of my people.

► Is this poetic hyperbole, or could such a horror really have happened? Even today, famine and disease cause devastation in developing nations reminiscent of what this poet describes happening in Jerusalem. Suffering will always exist because sin—rebellion against God—affects every aspect of a culture at every level of society. When Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in the early sixth century B.C., he did not allow any food or provision to enter the city; he literally waited for God's people in Jerusalem to starve to death. As the executioner of God's judgment, Nebuchadnezzar punished everyone equally, regardless of the severity of his or her sins, because all sin is worthy of death. The people in Jerusalem really experienced God's dark cloud and His frowning countenance.

11 Kindling a fire, the Eternal attacked Zion
until nothing was left—not even the foundations.
His anger was poured out
as that angry fire consuming all.

12 *Little did they know,* thinking Jerusalem could not be breached—
not by kings, not by ordinary people, and not by anyone on the earth—
Absolutely no one imagined
Jerusalem's enemies would get in.

13 *Many and terrible were* the crimes that her leaders,
the ones who should be most righteous of all, committed.
Prophets and priests shed the blood of the upstanding
and also the just in her midst.

14 *Never had* leaders wandered blindly,
polluted by the blood they spilled,
Untouchable even by their garments.

15 "Out! Get away from us. We're impure. Do not touch us!"
the priests and prophets yelled.
So they wandered like fugitives, rejected wherever they went.
Even the foreign nations wouldn't take them.

16 Presence of the Eternal is overwhelming.
God has scattered them *to the winds.*
He no longer held them in esteem:
the priests received no honor, the elders no respect.

17 *Quietly* we waited for help until our eyes failed.
We hoped and watched for a nation to rescue us.
But we waited in vain: no rescue came.

18 *Routinely* our steps were tracked
so that we could not even walk our own streets.
This was it, our days at an end;
we were done for.

19 Swifter than eagles in the sky,
they pursued us through the mountains;
And in all the wild places,
they hunted us and lay in wait.

20 *Trapped, our king,* the Eternal's anointed,
the breath of our life,
was taken to their pits;
Of him we said, "He casts a *long* shadow that will protect us from the nations."

21 Utter your words of joy: Edom,
inhabitants of the land of Uz,
go ahead—be happy.
In time the cup *of suffering* will be yours too,
and you'll drink *so deeply, so perilously* as to be intoxicated and stripped naked.

22 *Viciously,* daughter Zion, your iniquity has been punished.
That is done; your exile is over.
Daughter Edom, on the other hand, *is a different story:*
you'll be called to account for your sins and uncovered accordingly.

A pun encourages daughter Zion that she will no longer be exiled or "uncovered," but the same idiom condemns daughter Edom, for she will be "uncovered."

5 Remember, Eternal One; *don't forget* what happened.
Just look at how we are demeaned, disgraced.
2 All that You gave to us has been handed over to strangers.
Even our houses foreigners have taken *for their own.*
3 *Abandoned too early and on our own,* we are like fatherless children;
and our mothers, now widows, *have nothing either.*
4 *The most basic necessities, food and* water, *shelter* and warmth, we must pay *dearly* for.
5 Those pursuing us breathe down the backs of our *heavily-yoked* necks,
driving us relentlessly.
Like overworked oxen, we are exhausted and without rest.
6 *So what else could we do?* We succumbed to agreements with Egypt and Assyria
just so we could get enough to eat and survive.
7 Our fathers sinned *and got us into this.*
Now they've passed on, and we *suffer for it and* bear their deeds.
8 Those *less capable and less deserving* slaves rule;
they are actually in charge of us—
Your chosen ones—and nobody sets it right.
Nobody comes to rescue us from their *cruel* hand.

9 At risk of life *and limb,* we seek our daily
food
despite threats of sword *and danger*
in the wild places.
10 *We are feverish with hunger.*
Famine's scorching heat burns our
flesh like an oven.
11 In *the place where God should be—*
Zion and the *surrounding* towns of
Judah—
Women, young and old alike,
are brutally raped *and violated.*
12 Our leaders are *made an example,* hung
by their hands,
and our elders are treated with
contempt.
13 Our best youths are forced to grind *grain
relentlessly*;
and boys stagger, bent under
burdens of wood *too heavy.*
14 Gone from the gates are *debate, trade,
and the wisdom of* sages.
The streets, too, are silent—the young
neglect their music.
15 The joy from our hearts is gone, *utterly
gone.*
Our once-dancing *feet now plod*
along mournfully.
16 The wreath that crowned our head has
slipped and fallen; *now it's crushed.*
O how we've sinned! Pity us *for
the punishment we brought on
ourselves.*
17 We're sick at heart about it all,
blind with the sorrow and grief *we
caused.*
18 *God's heaven on earth,* our Mount Zion,
is desolate
except for the jackals *who haunt only
ruins.*

19 But You, Eternal One, *despite all this,*
You will abide and rule forever, from
generation to generation.
20 Why, then, have You completely
forgotten about us?
Why have You turned Your back on
us through so many *dark* days?
21 *We are so sorry and have suffered for it.*
Eternal One, take us back again,
That we may be restored to You *and You
to us,*
just as it used to be.
22 Or are You so very angry that You've
rejected us,
that You've given up on us completely?

EZEKIEL

Judah is taken into exile

The message of Ezekiel, a prophet of God

01 02 03 04 05 06

Born into a priestly family before the conquest of Judah by Babylon, Ezekiel is an intelligent man blessed with a good foundation in God's law. His family's status in Jerusalem prior to 598 B.C. suggests he enjoys a socially prominent life. But power and influence have one major drawback—these are the qualities Nebuchadnezzar is looking for when he deports the chief citizens of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. As the only biblical prophet called by God to minister directly to His exiled people, Ezekiel begins teaching and writing in 593 and continues until 571 B.C. Other than in God's visions, Ezekiel is never to return to Jerusalem. He dies in exile a full generation before the Persians conquer the Babylonians in 539 B.C. and the first wave of expatriates returns to rebuild Jerusalem.

Ezekiel lives and works through one of the most turbulent periods in Israel's history. As a younger contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah, Ezekiel watches King Jehoiakim scheme against the Babylonian Empire and bring about the siege and capture of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. This results in the deportation of a number of key citizens from the holy city, including Ezekiel and the king's son. Now living in exile, Ezekiel prophesies that King Zedekiah—Babylon's puppet king—will do the same thing. When Zedekiah does rebel, Nebuchadnezzar responds by leveling Jerusalem, burning God's temple, and effectively ending the Davidic monarchy. Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem is the turning point for Ezekiel's prophecies. Prior to that war, Ezekiel sounds a lot like Jeremiah—urging his people to return to God and accept His punishment, and prophesying what will happen if they ignore His warnings. But after Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.—when hope appears lost—Ezekiel sees a vision of a restored Jerusalem and gains insight into God's new covenant with His people.

Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration come true. The temple is rebuilt late in the sixth century, and God begins a new work with His people through Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah. However, the return from political exile does not produce the ideal existence back home many are hoping for. Political, economic, social, and spiritual realities do not match the lofty visions and prophetic imaginations about the world as God would make it. As a result, many of God's faithful people continue to feel as if there is more to come; and as it happens, they are right.

1 1-2When I was thirty years old, I was living near the Chebar Canal *off the Euphrates River* among the exiles. On the fifth day of the fourth month (during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile), the *windows of the* heavens were thrown open and I saw visions of the True God.

► The literary structure of Ezekiel is arranged by how long the exiles have been in Babylonia after the 597 B.C. deportation of Jehoiachin and those with him (8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 31:1; 32:1; 40:1). The expatriates are counting the days until they can return to their ancestral lands in order to rebuild the temple. If Ezekiel is 30 years old when he has his initial vision, he is about 50 years old when he has the temple vision (chapters 40–48).

3The word of the Eternal One came to Ezekiel the priest (Buzi's son) near the Chebar Canal in the land of the Chaldeans. It was there that the hand of the Eternal settled on him.

4I looked *up,* and I saw a *ferocious and* stormy wind coming from the north—a monstrous cloud filled with the constant dance of lightning, surrounded by a glowing, *all-encompassing* light. At the center of the lightning flashes was something that looked like gleaming metal, 5and within that *otherworldly scene* were what looked like four living creatures. The creatures *had a form that* resembled humans, 6but they each had four faces and four wings. 7Their legs were straight *like the pillars of a temple,* and their feet looked like the hoofs of a calf and shimmered *in the firelight* like polished bronze. 8They had human hands on all four sides under each wing. All four of these living creatures had faces and wings, 9and their wings touched one another. As they moved, they did not turn *to the right or left*; they all went straight ahead. 10Each of the four creatures had *four* faces: a human face *in front,* the face of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left, and the face of an eagle *in the back.* 11*The features of* their faces *were similar.* Two of the creatures' wings stretched upward, and one wing *on each side* of each creature was touching the wing of the creature on either side of it. The other two wings covered each creature's body. 12All of the living creatures went straight ahead wherever the spirit directed them; the creatures moved without turning *to the right or left.* 13The living creatures had an appearance of something that looked like burning charcoal. Untamed ribbons of fire darted back and forth among them. It was all very bright, and lightning bolted out of the *glowing* fire. 14The living creatures ran back and forth like flashes of lightning.

15As I observed the living creatures with their four faces, I saw a wheel on the ground next to each of them. 16The wheels glittered like *sun-kissed* jewels. All four wheels looked exactly alike, each appearing to have another wheel inside it. 17As the wheels moved, they were able to go in the four directions the living creatures faced. They rolled straight ahead, never swerving off to the side. 18The rims of the four wheels were tall and inspired fear, filled with eyes all around. 19*The wheels went wherever the living creatures went:* when the living creatures moved, the wheels stayed right beside them; when the living creatures rose up from the ground, the wheels rose with them. 20The living creatures went wherever the spirit directed, and the wheels stayed right beside them; for the spirit of the creatures directed the wheels. 21When the creatures moved, so did the wheels; when the creatures stood still, so did the wheels; when the creatures rose up from the ground, so did the wheels, because the spirit of the *four* living creatures was in the wheels.

22Suspended above the living creatures was something like a *broad* expanse; it had an awesome gleam like a crystal *ceiling* and stretched wide over them. 23Beneath the expanse, the creatures stretched out their wings toward each other, and each creature had another pair of wings it used to cover both sides of its body. 24-25Whenever the creatures moved, I heard the violent fluttering of their wings, like roaring rapids, like the voice of *God* Almighty, like the sound of an army *besieging a city*. Whenever the creatures stopped, they lowered their wings *to their sides.* As they stood silent, with their wings lowered, a thunderous voice sounded *high* above the expanse over their heads.

26And above that expanse over their heads was something that looked like a throne made of sapphire. Sitting on that throne high above *the earth* was a human-like figure. 27From his waist up, I saw what looked to be glowing metal surrounded by an all-encompassing fire. Below his waist,

I looked and saw something like a *blazing* fire. A *glorious* radiance was all around Him. [28]The glorious radiance resembled a rainbow that lights up the clouds on a rainy day. This was *nothing less than* the glory of the Eternal that appeared to me. When I saw *the vision of the Eternal and His glory,* I fell upon my face and heard a voice speaking *to me.*

► Ezekiel's strange vision of clouds and fires, light and lightning, creatures with four faces, wheels within wheels, and a throne-chariot is a prelude to his ultimate vision. For a moment he glimpses a humanlike figure seated on a throne; this, he says, is the glory of the Eternal. The word "glory" refers to God's visible manifestation. Though God is unseen, from time to time human beings are given the privilege of seeing His glory. This glory accompanies Israel in the wilderness and resides in the temple in Jerusalem. But Ezekiel realizes God's glory is not restricted to Jerusalem; it is in Babylon with those in exile. The fact that God's glory is seen in Babylon and reported by His prophet offers comfort to those displaced in a foreign land.

2 **The Voice** *(to Ezekiel)*: Son of man, rise to your feet. I want to speak to you.

[2]As soon as the voice spoke, the Spirit entered me and lifted me to my feet; I listened to what the voice told me.

The Voice: [3]Son of man, I am dispatching you to the people of Israel. They are a rebellious nation that lives in defiance of Me. They and their ancestors have broken loyalties with Me even up to this very day. [4]Go to the *Israelites, who are* stubborn and hardhearted, and tell them, "This is what the Eternal Lord has to say." [5]Whether this nation of rebels listens or refuses to listen to *My message,* at least they will know a prophet has visited them. [6]Do not fear them or their words, son of man. Though you will dwell among the thistles and briars *of their hostility, though their reactions will make you think* you're sitting on scorpions, do not be afraid. Pay no attention to their threats, and don't let their *glaring* faces intimidate you. They are a rebellious lot. [7]It is vital you feed them My words, whether they choose to digest them or not, for they are a rebellious people.

[8]Listen to what I tell you, son of man. Do not follow their rebellious ways. Open your mouth and eat what I give you.

[9]When I looked, I saw a hand extended toward me. In its palm was a scroll. [10]*As I looked on,* the scroll was unrolled, and I could see that there was writing on the front and back. It was covered with words of lament, grief, and disaster.

► The scroll Ezekiel is handed is a transcript of what he will report about Jerusalem's fate to his fellow exiles in Babylonia. Although scrolls typically have writing on only one side (the front), the prophet sees that this scroll is covered with writing on both sides. This signals not only the overflowing anger that God harbors for His people but also the scope of the disaster that will overwhelm God's rebellious nation.

3 **The Voice** *(to Ezekiel)*: Son of man, eat what you find here—consume the scroll *you see before you.* Then go and preach to the people of Israel.

[2]So I opened my mouth, and He fed me the scroll.

The Voice: [3]Son of man, swallow this scroll I am giving you, and let it fill your stomach.

So I ate it, and *these words of God* tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

The Voice: [4]Son of man, go to the people of Israel and preach My message to them. [5-6]You are not being sent to a *far away* nation with an unintelligible language. I am sending you to the people of Israel. But if I had sent you to foreign peoples with unintelligible languages, surely they would listen to you. [7]But the people of Israel will refuse to listen to you because they refuse to listen to Me. As *I told*

you, the Israelites are a hard-headed, stubborn-hearted people. 8But I have set your jaw *just as tightly* and furrowed your brow *just as deeply* as theirs. 9I have made your head as hard as any rock. Do not be scared or intimidated by them, even though they are a rebellious lot.

10Son of man, take to heart all the words I am speaking to you. Listen carefully *to what I am saying.* 11Now go to your people, the exiles *in Babylonia,* and give them My message. Proclaim to them, "This is what the Eternal Lord has to say." *It doesn't matter* whether they listen to you.

12*Suddenly* the Spirit picked me up, and I heard a loud rumbling sound behind me—*it seemed to say,* "May the glory of the Eternal One be praised in His *holy* place!" 13The sound I heard was the sound made by the wings of the *four* living creatures brushing up against one another and the rumble made by the *spinning* wheels beside them. 14The Spirit picked me up and carried me away. I was *at once* resentful and impassioned, but *I couldn't escape because* the hold the Eternal had on me was strong.

The name Ezekiel means "God strengthens." God makes Ezekiel strong enough to face many challenges and accomplish his mission, but his strength is no match for God's.

15*The Spirit* took me to *a group of* the exiles who lived by the Chebar Canal at Tel-abib. I sat there among them in a daze for seven days.

16After *those* seven days *of confusion,* the word of the Eternal *finally* came to me.

Eternal One: 17Son of man, I have appointed you a sentry for the people of Israel. Listen to what I say, then deliver My warning to them. 18If I send this message to a wicked person—"You will die"—but then you fail to warn him or help him to reconsider his wickedness so that he may not die, then he will die as a result of his evil *deeds. It will be your fault for not warning him.* His blood will be on your hands. 19But if you do forewarn a wicked person *and give him My message,* and yet he does not change his wicked thoughts and actions, then he will die as a result of his evil *deeds.* But you will have saved your own life *by doing what I directed.* 20Or again, when a righteous person turns his back on righteousness and falls into evil, then I will place a stumbling block before him, and he will surely die *as well.* Since you haven't alerted him, he will die for his evil ways. None of the righteous things he did will be remembered, and I will hold you responsible for his death. 21But if you do forewarn a righteous person not to give in to sin, and he does not sin, he will certainly live because he listened to your warning, and you will have saved your own life *by doing what I directed.*

22There the hand of the Eternal came upon me, and His voice spoke to me:

Eternal One: Get up, and venture out to the plain *near Tel-abib.* I will speak to you there.

23So I stood up and ventured out to the plain where I saw the glory of the Eternal looming there—the same glory I had seen *earlier* by the Chebar Canal. *I was overwhelmed, so* I fell down with my face on the ground. 24The Spirit entered me, lifted me to my feet, and spoke to me.

Eternal One: Go inside your house and shut the door *behind you.* 25Son of man, they will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot *get out of your house and* walk among your fellow exiles. 26I will stick your tongue to the roof of your mouth so that you cannot speak to warn them because they are a rebellious lot. 27But when I speak to you *the next time,* I will reopen your mouth, and you will proclaim to them, "This is what the Eternal Lord has to say." At that point, it's each person's choice whether to listen. Some will listen; others will refuse because they are a rebellious lot.

► Like other prophets, Ezekiel often acts out his messages in bizarre ways. These chapters contain a series of prophetic actions that communicate God's message in powerful, nonverbal ways. By dramatizing God's plan before an audience, a prophet is better able to change the people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors because they can see an outcome instead of just imagining it.

4 **Eternal One:** Now, son of man, put a brick in front of you, and draw *a picture of* the city of Jerusalem on it. 2Then lay siege against it: build a wall around it and place a siege ramp against it; *prepare to attack it by* placing *tiny* battering rams and pitching *tiny* camps around it. 3Then take an iron pan and put it between you and the city to represent the iron wall *My people have put between them and Me*. Turn your face toward it *to show* that Jerusalem will be under siege. This will be a sign to the people of Israel.

4Then lie down on your left side, *facing the Jerusalem brick*, and place *all of* Israel's sins on you. You are to carry their sins for as long as you lie on your left side. 5I have decided you *will represent the carrying of sins* the exact number of days as the years of their sin. For 390 days, you will carry the wickedness of Israel's *Northern Kingdom*. 6After you have completed this, lie down again, this time on your right side. *While you lie down on your right side,* you carry the sins of the people of *the Southern Kingdom,* Judah. *This time,* you are *to lie on your right side* for 40 days, one day for each year *of their wickedness*. 7Turn your face toward the siege on Jerusalem, and preach to her *with raw passion,* with your arm bared *ready to strike.* 8I will *see that* you are tied up with ropes so that you cannot turn from side to side or move until the days of your siege are completed.

9Then take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; store them *together* in one crock; use them to make bread for yourself *during the siege*. Eat the bread during the 390 days you are lying on your *left* side. 10Eat no more than 8 ounces of bread per day, and eat your portion at set times each day. 11Drink no more than 11 ounces of water *each day,* and drink it at designated times. 12Eat the bread *in the same manner* you would eat a barley cake. Let the people see you bake it, and use human excrement *instead of animal dung* as fuel. 13This is exactly what will happen to the people of Israel. They will be forced to eat their bread defiled and impure when I drive them to other nations.

Ezekiel: 14Never, Eternal Lord! I have never defiled myself *in such a way*. Since childhood, I have never eaten anything *that is impure*—nothing diseased or ripped apart by wild animals.* Not *a morsel of* impure meat has ever been in my mouth.

Eternal One: 15All right then, I'll let you bake your bread over cow dung instead of human excrement.

16-17Son of man, I am going to cut off the food supply from Jerusalem. The people will *slowly starve,* living off minimal rations of food and water. As they eat their *morsels of* bread and drink their *minimal ration of* water, they will be constantly worrying *about what they will eat and drink the next day*. When bread and water become more and more scarce, everyone will look at each other in horror. They will *slowly* waste away beneath *the weight of* their sins.

5 **Eternal One:** Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a straight razor to shave your head and beard. Then take scales and divide the hair up *by weight into thirds*. 2When the days *prescribed* for the siege are over, take a third of the hair and burn it in a fire within the city walls. Then take another third and thrash it with a sword all around the city. Scatter the last third *of the hair* to the wind. Then I will draw *My* sword and chase them! 3Keep a few strands of the hairs and tie them to the edges of your garment. 4Take some of these *extra* strands of hair and fling them into the fire to burn them up. From there, a fire will spread to the whole house of Israel.

5This is what the Eternal One says:

Eternal One: This stands for Jerusalem. I have placed her at the center of all nations, with countries surrounding her. 6Yet she has defied My teachings and acted more wickedly than any of the other nations living around her; she has rejected My decrees and ignored My guidance. 7This is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: You have been more rebellious toward My guidance and decrees than any other nation, choosing not to live even under the *ethical and moral* standards of other nations, *and certainly not under My laws*. 8Therefore, I say, *I am no longer your ally, Jerusalem.* I am your enemy! I am going to punish you in front of all nations. 9Because of your shocking actions, I am going to do

* 4:14 Leviticus 22:8

something I have never done before and will never do again: 10*The day will come when* fathers will devour their sons, and sons will feed off their fathers' *flesh. This is how* I will punish you and scatter the few of you who survive to the wind.

► When a powerful army surrounds the walls of a city, it cuts off the people's access to their fields, animals, and water sources. If the siege lasts long enough, death is inevitable for those inside the city walls. As the bodies pile up and hunger becomes unbearable, cannibalism may be the only way to stay alive. There is something horrid about cannibalism. The notion that parents may be reduced to eating their children disrupts every natural impulse a parent has. But Scripture teaches that those who break God's law and violate His holiness may be cursed with this punishment (Leviticus 26:29).

Eternal One: 11Consequently, as surely as I live, because you have degraded My *holy* sanctuary with all your detestable images and shocking actions, I will leave you. I will shed no tears of compassion over you. 12One-third of your people will *suffer during the siege,* starving to death or dying from disease within the city walls. Another third of you will die in battles outside of the city walls *as they try to escape.* The remaining third will be scattered to the winds, and I will draw *My* sword and chase after them.

13After this My anger will subside. I will not be satisfied until I have unleashed My fiery judgment on them. Then they will know that I, the Eternal One, am the one who commanded all of this, for I jealously desire *their devotion.* 14When I am finished with you, your nation will lie in ruins. You will be *mocked and* ridiculed by the nations around you and those who pass by. 15You will become a byword to the nations, a warning *to the world* as they watch your horrific downfall when I punish you with anger, with fury, and with fiery judgment. I, the Eternal One, have spoken. 16When I shoot My deadly arrows of famine and war at you, I will shoot to kill. I'll curse you with more famine and cut off your food supply. 17And when the famine *has run its course,* I will send savage beasts to attack you and eat *the rest of* your children. Plague, *disease, murder,* and bloodshed will pass through your land as I wage war against you!

I, the Eternal, have spoken.

6 The word of the Eternal came to me *about Israel's coming destruction.*

The personification of the mountains and land of Israel emphasizes the severity of the situation. The actions of God's wayward people not only defile them—they defile the land.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, turn your gaze to the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them. 3Tell the mountains of Israel to listen to the word of the Eternal Lord. I have a message for the *high* mountains and *green* hills, riverbeds and *lush, fertile* valleys: I am bringing the weapons of war against you, and I will demolish the shrines on your heights. 4Your *sacrificial* altars will be ruined, your incense altars smashed. I will throw down your slain before your *lifeless* idols. 5I will lay the remains of the dead Israelites in front of your *lifeless* idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars *so the place is contaminated with death.* 6In every place you live, the towns will be left in ruins and the high places will be rubble so that every place becomes a desolate wasteland. Your sacrificial altars will be destroyed and abandoned, your idols crushed and flattened, your incense altars smashed, and all you have created will be wiped out. 7Your towns will be full of corpses. Then you will know I am the Eternal One.

8But I will spare a few of you, and those who escape My *punishing* war will be scattered throughout other lands and nations. 9In the nations where they have been taken as exiles, those who have been spared will remember Me—how I have been wounded by their promiscuous hearts that turned away from Me, how I have been hurt by their wandering eyes that desired *lifeless* idols. They will hate themselves for the evil they have done and for their detestable actions. 10Then they will know I am the Eternal One. *They will understand* I did not utter

empty threats when I said I would bring disaster on them.

11Here is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: Clap your hands together, stomp your feet, and shout, How awful *it will be* for the people of Israel because of all the evil, shocking actions they have committed. They will be slain. War, famine, and disease will fall *upon them*! 12Those who are far away will die of disease; those who are near will fall in battle; those who are spared will die of starvation. *This is how* I will spend My wrath on them. 13After all the destruction, you will know I am the Eternal—when *the rotting corpses of* their slain are spread out among their *fallen* altars and *shattered* idols, on every *green* hill and *high* mountaintop, beneath every green tree and leafy oak, any place they offered sweet incense to their *breathless* idols. 14Wherever they live, I will stretch out My hand against them and make their land an empty wasteland, from the wilderness to Diblah. Then they will know I am the Eternal One.

► After such visual and visceral displays as representing Jerusalem on a brick and prophesying against it; lying on his side for over a year; and taking his own cut hair, burning it, and scattering it with a sword; Ezekiel must have acquired quite a reputation. His very life becomes an object lesson and a teaching display for the Judean exiles.

God is concerned about the glory of His name, so He must punish Jerusalem and the Judean population for their adulterous rebellion. Ironically, it is in the very places where God desires to have sweet and unhindered fellowship with His people that all types of lewd, profane acts of worship transpire. If there is any confusion as to what the Eternal is planning to do, then one need look no further than Ezekiel's daily behavior.

7 The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say to the land of Israel:

The end! The end has arrived
for the four corners of the land *and everyone in it.*
3The end is upon you,
and I will release My wrath against you.
I will judge you according to your ways,
and I will repay you for all your shocking actions.
4I will not look on you with pity or spare you—
I will *fully* repay you for your shocking behavior and *despicable* deeds.
Then you will know I am the Eternal One.

5This is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say:
Wave after wave of evil is coming!
6The end has arrived! The end has arrived!
It has awakened against you! It has arrived!
7Doomsday has come for all who live in this land.
The time has arrived; the day is near;
There is no joy upon the mountains—
only shouts of alarm *and horrifying terror.*
8It won't be long now until I pour out My wrath on you,
until I unleash My *fierce* anger against you;
I will judge you according to your ways
and repay you for all your shocking actions.
9I will not look on you with pity or spare you.
I will *fully* repay you for your shocking behavior and *despicable* deeds.
Then you will know it is I, the Eternal, who have crushed you.

10Look, the day is here! It has arrived!
Your doom has erupted.
The rod has budded; conceit has blossomed!
11*The consequence*—violence—has grown up into a rod *to punish the* wicked;
no one will be left, not one of the many!
No wealth, no valuables *will be left from this doomsday.*
12The time has arrived; the day is now.
Buyer, don't celebrate; seller, don't grieve,
for My anger will come to burn all of you!

13The seller won't regain his treasures
while they both live;
for the vision has to do with
everyone, and no one will
escape *My wrath*!
Because of each person's iniquity,
no one will be able to hold onto
his life.

14Though the trumpet will sound to get
everything ready,
no troops will march into battle
because My wrath is against all the
people *of Jerusalem*.
15The sword falls *on anyone* outside *the
city*;
disease and famine ravage those
who remain inside.
Those in the open will die by the sword;
those inside the city walls will
be consumed by famine and
disease.
16The survivors will run for the mountains
and moan like doves because of
their sins.
17Every hand will go *weak and* limp;
every knee will turn to water.
18They will dress in sackcloth,
and horror will cover them.
Their faces will be plastered with
shame,
and their heads will be shaved.
19They will throw their silver into the
streets
and treat their gold as impure,
worthless,
Once they discover their silver and gold
cannot rescue them
on the day the Eternal ignites His
fierce anger.
They will not satisfy their hunger or fill
their bellies *with their riches,*
for their earthly riches are what
made them stumble into sin.
20They took pride in their attractive
jewelry
and constructed *breathless* idols
and disgusting images with it.
Therefore, I will make their riches
impure and disgusting to them.
21I will give their *religious* rubbish away
to strangers
as the wicked marauders of the
earth loot and defile their
treasures.
22I will turn My head
so they may desecrate My treasured
place;
Pillagers will enter into it, *profane it,*
and vandalize it.

23Forge a chain,
for the land is soaked in blood and
violence,
And the city is brimming with brutality!
24I will stir up the very worst of the nations
to take possession of their houses.
I will put an end to the strong ones' pride,
and their most sacred sites will be
desecrated.
25When the horror *of My wrath* comes,
they will look for a calm *place,*
but there will be nothing *but
torrential terror*.
26One disaster after another *will hit them*;
one bad report after another will
come *to them*.
Then they will seek a vision from any
prophet,
but no *instruction in the* law from
the priest
and no *wise* counsel from the elders
will be found.
27The king will grieve,
the prince will wrap himself in
despair,
and the hands of the common
people will tremble.
I will deal with them according to the
way they dealt *with others*;
I will judge them according to way
they judged *others*.

Then they will know I am the Eternal One.

8 *Fourteen months after my first vision,* on the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year, while I was sitting at my house, the elders of Judah came to me. The hand of the Eternal Lord fell upon me, *and I had a vision*. 2I looked, and I saw what appeared to be a human—*just as in my first vision*. From his waist down I saw something like *radiant* fire, and from his waist up it was like gleaming metal surrounded by a glowing light. 3He held out what looked to be a hand and seized me by the hair. The Spirit hoisted me up between heaven and earth and transported me—through a vision of God—to Jerusalem. *I was taken just inside* the entrance of the gate to the inner court that faces north where the *infuriating* image sat—the image that arouses *God's* jealousy. 4Right in front of me was the glory of the God of Israel, just as I had seen *before* in the plain.

Eternal One: 5Son of man, lift your eyes
and look northward.

So I looked to the north, and I *couldn't help* noticing the *infuriating* image that

arouses *God's* jealousy beside the entrance to the altar's gate.

Eternal One: 6Son of man, do you see what they are doing *right in front of the temple*? The people of Israel are committing shocking actions that drive Me away from My own sanctuary! But you will see them doing things far worse than this.

7He then led me to the entrance of the *temple* court. I looked and saw an opening in the wall.

Eternal One: 8Son of man, dig through this wall.

So I dug through the wall, *widening that small hole* until I saw another entrance.

Eternal One: 9Go inside, and witness the shocking sins being committed by the people *of Israel*.

10And so I went in and looked around. *It was unbelievable!* There were engravings all over the wall of every forbidden thing—reptiles, *impure* animals, and all the *lifeless* idols worshiped by the people of Israel. 11In front of the idols stood the 70 elders of Israel's community, *worshiping*. Even Jaazaniah, son of Shaphan *(a leader of Josiah's reforms),* was standing with them. Each one of the elders held a censer, and a perfumed cloud of incense was ascending *from them*.

Eternal One: 12Son of man, are you seeing what each of the elders of Israel is doing in the dark with their carved images? They *are foolish enough to* say, "The Eternal does not see what we are doing since He abandoned the land *to our Babylonian conquerors and their gods*."*

13*This isn't even the worst of it.* You will see them doing things far more shocking than this.

14Then He led me to the entrance of the north-facing gate of the Eternal's own sanctuary, and *on the edge of the holiest ground in Judah,* I saw women sitting around weeping for Tammuz.

Tammuz is a Babylonian god who descends every year into the underworld when the vegetation begins to die. Weeping is part of the religious rites performed for him.

Eternal One: 15Are you seeing this, son of man? You will see things far more shocking than this.

16Then He led me to the inner court of the Eternal's temple. There, *in that sacred place* between the portico and the altar *of burnt offerings,* were roughly 25 men. They all had their backs to the temple of the Eternal One so they could face the east and bow to the rising sun.

Eternal One: 17Are you seeing this, son of man? It's bad enough that the people of Judah partake in the kind of shocking things that are happening here. But do they have to fill the land with violence and continue to arouse My anger *with their disgusting acts* over and over again? Look, they are putting the branch to their nose!* 18This is why I will respond in anger. I will not spare them or shed a single tear of compassion for them. No matter how loudly they plead to Me, I will not listen to them!

9 Then I heard Him exclaim *a judgment on the people of Jerusalem.*

Eternal One: *Heavenly* executioners, approach the city! Have your weapons in hand!

2I then saw six men marching from the direction of the upper gate which faces north. Each of them had a deadly weapon in hand. Another man accompanied *God's* executioners. He was clothed in linen and carried a writing kit at his side. All of them entered and stood next to the bronze altar.

3The glory of the God of Israel rose up from the winged guardian* where it had rested and moved to the doorway of the temple. Then the Eternal called to the man who was dressed in linen—the one carrying the writing kit at his side.

Eternal One: 4Go through this city, yes Jerusalem, and put a mark on the forehead of all those who are grieved by the shocking things going on in the city.

5I listened as He addressed the other *six, the heavenly executioners*.

Eternal One: Follow this man through the city, and kill. Don't shed a single tear of compassion. 6Obliterate the old people,

* 8:12 2 Kings 24 * 8:17 Meaning of the manuscripts is uncertain. * 9:3 Hebrew, *cherub*

The elders who come to Ezekiel to hear this vision must be confused. Jerusalem, they think, has already suffered enough. Surely it will not suffer more. But that is wishful thinking, not the prophet's message. The subjugation of Judah to Babylon takes place over about 20 years. The Babylonians first assaulted Jerusalem in 605 B.C. and took some of the chief citizens into exile. Then in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for 3 months, captured the city, looted the temple and palace, and deported many of the most prominent people to Babylon. The current exiles can hardly imagine anything worse, but it will happen. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar will return to Jerusalem, and this time he will leave nothing but ashes. After a grueling 18-month siege, Nebuchadnezzar will break through Jerusalem's wall and level it, take whatever riches he desires, burn every building (including God's temple) to the ground, and deport what few people survive the battle. This final battle and conquest will decimate God's home; it will leave Jerusalem in ruins. There will be no place left for the exiles to return.

young people, even women and children. *Slaughter them all!* But don't lay a finger on anyone with the mark on his forehead. Begin at My sanctuary.

So the executioners started by killing the elders in front of the sanctuary.

Eternal One: [7]Defile the sanctuary: fill the courts with *the bodies of* the slain! Go!

So they continued their slaughter in the city. [8]While they went out to kill the people, I was left alone. I fell *down* and buried my face *in the ground*. I cried out *to God*.

Ezekiel: O Eternal Lord! Do You intend to wipe out everyone left in Israel the way You unleashed Your anger on Jerusalem?

Eternal One: [9]The sins committed by the people of Israel and Judah are very great *and serious indeed*. The land is saturated with blood. The city has perverted justice. They all say, "The Eternal has abandoned the land *to our Babylonian conquerors and their gods,* so He doesn't see anything." [10]Therefore, I will not spare them or shed tears of compassion. I will set their deeds on their heads. *They have done this to themselves.*

[11]Right then, the man clothed in linen and carrying the writing kit at his side returned and said, "I have done as You commanded."

10 Then I looked and saw what looked like a throne made of sapphire up above the expanse over the heads of the winged guardians.* [2]God spoke to the man clothed in linen.

► These fantastic winged creatures are the same living beings Ezekiel encounters in his initial vision (chapter 1). They serve two purposes in Scripture: accompanying the presence of God—as Ezekiel describes twice—and guarding some of God's holiest places. Creatures like these, of course, strike fear in anyone who sees them; their otherworldly appearance is perfect for decorating the covenant chest in the temple and guarding the way to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). The creatures' fantastic appearance has inspired artists and craftsmen for generations. Depictions of these heavenly creatures appear all over the temple and the tabernacle; they are sewn into tapestries, engraved on walls, and used to decorate tools of worship.

Eternal One: Go among the spinning wheels beneath the winged guardians; gather the burning charcoal among them into your hands, and then spread the coals over the city.

While I was watching, the man *clothed in linen* went *among the wheels*.

[3]Now the winged guardians stood on the south side of the temple when the

* 10:1 Hebrew, *cherubim*

man *clothed in linen* entered. A *great* cloud filled the inner court. 4Then the glory of the Eternal rose above the guardians and moved to the doorway of the temple. The cloud *swelled and* filled the temple, and the court was full of the blazing *presence of the* glory of the Eternal. 5The *otherworldly* sound made by the guardians' wings could be heard as far away as the outer court and sounded like the voice of God Almighty.*

6When God instructed the man clothed in linen, "Remove fire from among the wheels that sit next to the winged guardians," the man went and stood next to a wheel. 7Then one of those creatures reached into the fire burning among them, grabbed hold of some of the fiery coals, and placed them into the hands of the man wearing linen. The man took them and left *the temple court*. 8*It was then I noticed that* underneath the wings of the creatures were what looked like human hands.

9Then I looked and saw four wheels, one beside each of the winged guardians. The wheels glittered like *sun-kissed* jewels. 10All four wheels looked exactly alike; each wheel appeared to have another one inside it. 11As the wheels moved, they went in any of the four directions the living creatures faced. They rolled straight ahead, never swerving off to the side. 12The entire bodies of the living creatures—their hands, backs, and wings—and the wheels belonging to each of them were covered with *what appeared to be* eyes. 13I heard someone call the wheels "the spinning wheels." 14Each of the winged guardians had four faces: the first was the face of a guardian, the second the face of a human, a third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

15Then the winged guardians ascended. These were the same living creatures I had seen earlier near the Chebar Canal. 16When they moved, the wheels stayed right beside them. When the guardians stretched out their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels followed after them. 17When the guardians stood still, so did the wheels. And when they flew up, so did the wheels, because the spirit of the *four* living creatures was in the wheels.

18Then the glory of the Eternal departed from the temple doorway and hovered above the winged guardians. 19I continued to watch the creatures stretch out their wings and rise up from the ground, and as they rose, the wheels went along with them. The creatures and the wheels stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the Eternal's temple. There, the glory of the God of Israel hovered above them.

20These were the same living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel near the Chebar Canal. I understood that they were the *heavenly* winged guardians. 21Each of the living creatures had four faces and four wings, and beneath each wing was what looked like human hands. 22Their faces looked exactly like the faces I had seen near the Chebar Canal. Each of them went straight ahead.

11 Then the Spirit lifted me up and transported me to the eastern gate of the Eternal's house. I saw 25 men standing at the entrance of the gate. I recognized 2 leaders among them—Jaazaniah (Azur's son) and Pelatiah (Benaiah's son).

Eternal One: 2Son of man, these are the ones concocting evil plans and pushing wicked schemes on the city. 3They say, "This is not a good time to build houses. The city *of Jerusalem* is *like* an *iron* pot, and we are the meat *inside it*." 4Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man; speak My message *to them*.

5Then the Spirit of the Eternal came over me and said to me:

Eternal One: Tell them this is what the Eternal has to say: Those may be your *secret* thoughts, people of Israel, but I know what's going on in your minds. 6You have murdered masses of people in this city, and you have filled the streets with dead bodies. 7The corpses you have scattered in the streets are the meat, and this city is the pot; but I will *make sure* you are taken out of this city. 8Since you fear war, that is exactly what I will bring against you.

I, the Eternal Lord, declare that. 9After I drive you out of the city, I will give you over to the control of foreigners, and they will punish you! 10You will die in battle, and My judgment will fall on you as you flee for the border of Israel. Then you will know I am the Eternal One. 11This city will not be a *protective* pot for you, and you *certainly* won't be the meat *tended* within it. I will execute My judgment against you *all the way* to the border of

* 10:5 Hebrew, *El Shaddai*

Israel, [12]and you will know I am the Eternal One. You have been careless with My laws and disregarded My instructions, *mindlessly* conforming to the standards of the nations around you.

[13]As I was prophesying, Pelatiah (Benaiah's son) died. Then I fell *to the ground,* face down, and exclaimed in a loud voice, "Hear me, Eternal Lord! Will You do away completely with the remnant of Israel?"

[14]At this, the word of the Eternal came to me:

Eternal One: [15]Son of man, your people in exile—your own relatives, your countrymen, and the whole nation of Israel—are the ones the citizens of Jerusalem have disparaged, saying, "They have been *taken* far away from the Eternal. This land is ours now. It has been given to us to keep." *But they are mistaken. It is those in exile whom I will redeem.*[16]Give *the citizens of Jerusalem* My message. "Tell them that I, the Eternal Lord, drove them far away *from My temple* and scattered them among other countries, but I have still been a sanctuary for them during this time in those other lands where they have gone." [17]Then deliver My message *to the exiles.* "Tell them that I, the Eternal Lord, will gather you and reassemble you from the places where I scattered you, and I will return *your inheritance*—the land of Israel—to you *because you are My true children.*"

► Ezekiel may seem like a prophet of doom and gloom, but like most prophets he sees beyond judgment to God's restoration of His people. The only hope for the Judean exiles is that they be given a new heart and spirit from their Creator. The prophet receives this optimistic message again and again. Although divine punishment is severe, divine rescue will eclipse any tragedy because God will recreate His people.

Eternal One: [18]When they return home, they will demolish all the disgusting idols and remove all the shocking images *from the land.* [19]I will give them *a new will*—an undivided heart—and plant a new spirit within them; I will remove their *cold,* stony heart and replace it with a *warm* heart of flesh. [20]Then they will follow My commands and uphold My laws and *actually* do as I say. They will be My people, and I will be their God. [21]As for those who remain dedicated to their disgusting idols and shocking images, the very things they have done will be brought down upon them *as judgment.*

So said the Eternal Lord.

[22]Then the winged guardians* stretched out their wings, the wheels *moved* along with them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered above them. [23]The glory of the Eternal arose from the center of the city and *began to move east,* stopping *momentarily* above the mountain to its east *called the Mount of Olives.* [24]The Spirit snatched me up and brought me in a vision given by God's Spirit to the exiles in the Chaldea. Then the vision left me, [25]and I told the exiles everything the Eternal had revealed to me.

12 The word of the Eternal One came to me again, *this time over two days.*

Eternal One: [2]Son of man, you are living among a rebellious lot. They have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear. They are a rebellious lot. [3]Because of this, son of man, act as if you are being sent into exile. I want you to go pack your bag and go about from one place to another so that everyone can see you leaving. Then perhaps they will understand *what you're demonstrating,* although they are a rebellious lot. [4]During the day, bring out the bag you have packed for the journey where they can see you; in the evening, while they watch, leave *the city* as if you are going into exile. [5]While they are watching you leave, dig out an opening in the wall—*as if you were escaping*—and carry your bag through it. [6]Put your bag over your shoulder, and while everyone is watching, carry it out into the dark. Cover your face so that you don't see the land. I have made you a sign *of the coming destruction of Jerusalem* to the people of Israel.

[7]So I did exactly what He told me to do. During the day, I brought out my bag as if

* 11:22 Hebrew, *cherubim*

it were an exile's bag. Then in the evening, I dug out an opening in the wall with my hands. I put my bag over my shoulder and carried it out into the dark. People watched *as I acted out all of this.*

8The word of the Eternal came to me the next morning *and told me how to explain the sign to the exiles.*

Eternal One: 9Son of man, haven't the rebellious people of Israel asked you, "What *do you think* you are doing?" 10*You have been silent, but now you may* answer, "The Eternal Lord says: This message has to do with the prince in Jerusalem and all the rest of Israel still living there." 11Tell them that I am *an example* to you, a *living* sign. As I have done, so it will be done to the people *in Jerusalem.* They will be carried off and taken into exile. 12*Not just the people,* but the prince himself will put his bag over his shoulder and carry it out in the dark. People will dig a hole in the city wall to help him escape, and he'll cover his eyes so that he cannot look upon the land *he'll never see again.* 13But I will set a trap for him, and he will be caught in My net. Then I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, but the *blind* prince won't see any of it. There he will die. 14I will scatter all of his helpers and troops to the wind, and I will hunt them down with a drawn sword.

► Again God calls upon Ezekiel to act out His message. These dramatic actions apply specifically to Zedekiah. After Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in 597 B.C., he deported Judah's king Jehoiachin and most of the powerful citizens of the city—many of whom are now members of Ezekiel's audience in exile. Nebuchadnezzar then installed Zedekiah as king to represent Babylonia's interests and guarantee Judah's submission. But Zedekiah will rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, who will then flatten Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (a decade after Ezekiel performs this sign-act). During that final siege, Zedekiah will do everything Ezekiel portrays here: he will attempt to escape the starving city, but he will be caught and taken to the Babylonian king. As punishment Nebuchadnezzar will order him to be blinded and taken into captivity. Zedekiah's fate is a warning to any other who might consider opposing Babylonia's king.

Eternal One: 15They will know I am the Eternal when I send them far away and scatter them *like chaff* among other lands. 16I will spare a few of them from slaughter, starvation, and disease, so that wherever they are, they will tell the world of all the shocking acts they committed *against Me.* Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

17The word of the Eternal came to me *yet again.*

Eternal One: 18Son of man, tremble as you eat your meals. Shake with anxiousness as you drink your water. 19Tell the people of the land what the Eternal Lord says regarding the people living in Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They will eat their meals in fear and drink their water with anxiety, for their land will be pillaged of everything in it because of their own violent acts. 20Every inhabited *town and* city will be destroyed, and the land will be deserted. Then you will know I am the Eternal One.

21The word of the Eternal came to me *with another message.*

Eternal One: 22Son of man, what is this saying the people keep repeating in the land of Israel: "The days pass by, and the prophecies never come true"? 23Tell the people *of Israel* the Eternal Lord says that this saying will not be quoted for long. I am going to make sure it is never said again in Israel. The time is near when every prophecy will be fulfilled. 24There won't be any more false visions or favorable predictions in Israel. 25I, the Eternal One, will speak, and what I speak will be fulfilled without delay. You rebellious crowd! I will fulfill whatever I say during your lifetime.

So said the Eternal Lord.

26The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 27Son of man, the people of Israel are saying, "The visions of the

prophet are for the distant future; He speaks of events a long way off." [28]Therefore, tell the people of Israel the Eternal Lord most certainly says that nothing I've predicted will wait any longer. Whatever I speak will be fulfilled *without delay.*

13 The word of the Eternal came to me *with two more messages about Jerusalem.*

Eternal One: [2]Son of man, preach against the *false* prophets of Israel—the ones making up predictions *and visions* out of their own imaginations. Tell them to listen to the *real* word of the Eternal One! [3]The Eternal Lord says woe to those foolish prophets whose message is based on their own spirits and have not had a vision! [4]Your prophets, Israel, are like jackals *foraging* through the ruins. [5]You have put forth no effort to repair the broken-down defenses or to reinforce the wall around the city so that it will stand strong in battle on the day the Eternal sends His judgment. [6]Their warnings and predictions are all false. They utter only lies. They speak *in the name of the Lord, claiming,* "the Eternal declares," but I have not sent them. *The funny thing is,* they actually expect their predictions to come true. [7]Did you not perceive a false vision and speak an untrue divination when you proclaimed, "The Eternal declares," although I hadn't said anything at all?

[8]So I say because you have spoken falsely and have seen empty visions, I am against you *who prophesy out of your own imaginations.* [9]I will set My hand against those who see false visions and lying divinations. These *self-proclaimed soothsayers* will not be a part of the council of My people or be listed among the people of Israel. They will be forbidden from entering the *sacred* land of Israel. Then you will know I am the Eternal Lord. [10]It is because these false prophets have lied to My people *and led them off course,* saying, "*Everything is* peaceful *and fine,*" when nothing is peaceful *or fine.* When the people build a *weak and wobbly* wall, the false prophets are right behind them, coating it with plaster. [11]Tell these plasterers that your wall is going to fall. Torrential rains will pour down *upon your lies,* hail will pound *your flimsy creation,* and mighty winds will knock down *your fabricated dreams.* [12]*And guess what?* When your *nicely plastered* wall collapses, the people will ask you, "Where is your plaster? *Didn't it strengthen the wall?*" [13]So I say that in My fury I will release a mighty wind to knock it down. In My anger I will produce hailstorms and torrential rains to destroy it. [14]I will demolish the wall you covered with plaster and level it to the ground so that nothing is left but its foundation. When your wall falls, you will be destroyed. Then you will know I am the Eternal. [15]This is how My wrath will be satisfied against the wall and those who covered it with plaster. Then I will say to you that there is nothing left of the wall or those who plastered it—[16]those *fraudulent* seers of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem, claiming everything was peaceful *and fine* when everything was not peaceful *or fine.*

[17]Now, son of man, you must also preach against the women of your people who prophesy out of their own imaginations. Preach against these *false prophetesses,* [18]and tell them the Eternal Lord says, "Woe to the women who sew magic charms on wrists and make veils of various sizes for heads in order to hunt down souls *with their magic.* Do *you actually think* you can entrap the souls of My people *for your own purposes* without endangering your own lives? [19]You have profaned Me among My people, trading precious souls for a few scraps of barley and bread. Your lies have caused many to die who should not have and many to live who should not have, all because they listened to your lies."

[20]I, the Eternal Lord, have this to say *regarding your enchantments*: I oppose your magic charms you use to hunt *precious* souls like birds! I will strip them from your wrists and set the people free. [21]I will tear off your veils and rescue My people from your power; they will no longer fall prey to your hunt. Then you will know I am the Eternal One. [22]Because you have discouraged the innocent *and unsuspecting* with your lies *and deceptions* when I left them in peace, and because you have encouraged the wicked instead of showing them the error of their ways so they could live, [23]you will no longer conjure up lying visions or practice divination. For I will save My people from your *seductive* powers. Then you will know I am the Eternal One.

At first glance, the naming of these three men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—seems odd. Noah and Job are, of course, central characters in the Scripture; and these heroes lived long before Ezekiel was called to be God's prophet. But the Daniel most people know as the biblical prophet will achieve his fame long after Ezekiel dies. The Daniel mentioned here is not the biblical prophet but another Daniel (also known as Danel) whose story is found in an ancient Ugaritic text called the *Epic of Aqhat.* Like Noah and Job, Danel is an ancient non-Israelite who lives to an old age and becomes famous for his wisdom. Like Noah, he is surrounded by wicked people; like Job, he loses a son.

Perhaps God references these non-Israelite heroes—as opposed to the people's Israelite ancestors—because Ezekiel's audience is living outside of Israel. They would be able to identify with the foreign cultures in these accounts because they are surrounded by the strange customs and the novel stories of Babylon. These three men show an unusual level of devotion to God when the culture around them appears to be moving contrary to His way, so they are more appropriate examples than any Israelite ancestor—such as David, Solomon, or Josiah—who had all the benefits and blessings of God's covenants.

14 Some of the elders of Israel approached me and sat down. 2Then the word of the Eternal came to me with a message *for them.*

Eternal One: 3Son of man, these men are devoted to *breathless* idols and have pursued things that cause them to stumble into sin. Why should I *even bother to* listen to their prayers? 4Therefore tell them the Eternal Lord says *to you,* "Any Israelite who devotes himself to *breathless* idols and pursues things that will cause him to stumble into sin and still *has the audacity to* consult a prophet will be answered by Me, personally, in light of his pagan devotions. 5I am going to recapture the hearts of Israel, all of whom have deserted Me for their idols."

6Therefore, tell the people of Israel the Eternal Lord commands *you to* repent! Turn away from your *breathless* idols, and relinquish all of your shocking ways! 7When any Israelite—or any foreigner living in Israel—severs his relationship with Me, devotes himself to his idols, pursues anything that may cause him to stumble into sin, and then *has the audacity to* consult a prophet to ask questions of Me, I will answer the inquirer personally. 8I will turn against him and make an example of him. I will cut him off from the midst of the people. Then you will know I am the Eternal.

9Also, if a prophet is deceived into offering a message, it is I, the Eternal One, who has deceived him. I will raise My hand against him and cut him off from My people, Israel, *until all memory of him is erased.* 10The prophet and the one who inquires of him will be equally guilty and equally punished, 11so that the people of Israel will not lose their focus on Me or filthy themselves with any more of their rebellious evil. After this, they will be My people, and I will be their God.

So said the Eternal Lord.

12The word of the Eternal came to me *with a new* message.

Eternal One: 13Son of man, suppose *the people of a particular* country wander away from Me in pursuit of sin and I raise My hand against them destroying their food source, sending famine, and killing off the people and animals who live there; 14even if these three *legendary* men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—were all living in that country, they could save only themselves by their righteousness. 15Suppose I send wild beasts into that land and they kill the people, and the place becomes so desolate *and dangerous* because of the animals that no one dares to travel through the land. 16As surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, even if these three men were living there, they could not save their own sons and daughters. Only those *three righteous* men would be saved, and the land would become a wilderness. 17Suppose I bring war against that land and say to let the sword invade and pass through the land; 18as surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, even if these three men were living there, they could not save their own sons and

daughters. Only those three *righteous* men would be saved. 19Suppose I send a disease to spread across that land, flooding it with My anger in blood, *infecting and* killing people and animals alike; 20as surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were living there, they could not save their own sons or daughters. Only those *three* men would be saved because of their righteousness.

21For this is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: It will be far worse when I send out My four tragic judgments upon Jerusalem—war, starvation, wild beasts, and disease—to kill the people and animals! 22-23Still, a few survivors will remain—sons and daughters—who will *join you in* exile. They will come to you, and once you see how they behave and what they do, you will be comforted regarding the awful disaster I have poured out upon Jerusalem. For you will understand that every single judgment and catastrophe I have set against Jerusalem has been necessary.

15 The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, what is the difference between the wood of a grapevine and the wood of a tree in a forest? 3Is the wood *of a grapevine* ever used to make anything *practical*? Can it be carved into pegs to hang things on? 4*No.* When vine wood has been *bundled together and* thrown into the fire as fuel, its ends are burned but the middle is only charred. Are the remains good for anything then? 5Even when vine wood is whole *and not yet singed,* it is not useful for anything; so how can it be made useful after the fire has scorched *some* and consumed *the rest*?

6Therefore, this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: Just as I have gathered the wood of the grapevine among the trees of the forest to be used as fuel for the fire, so I will bundle together those who live in Jerusalem. 7I will turn My back on them. Even though they may survive the fire, another fire will nonetheless consume them. And when I turn My back on them *and oppose them,* you will know I am the Eternal One. 8I will transform this land into a wasteland because of their faithlessness.

So says the Eternal Lord.

16 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message for Jerusalem.*

In Scripture marriage is often used to depict God's covenant with His people. In this oracle God is described as Israel's faithful husband, while Jerusalem is His faithless wife.

2*My Lord commanded me*, the son of man, to confront Jerusalem, condemn her shocking actions, 3and tell her what He says to Jerusalem.

Eternal One: *You won't be able to shake your pagan heritage.* Your ancestors were Canaanites, and you were born among the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite. 4When you were born, no one cut your umbilical cord. *No one took care of you:* you were not washed with water and purified, nor were you rubbed with salt and wrapped *for warmth*. 5No one felt sorry for you or had compassion on you or did anything to help you. Instead, *your parents abandoned you,* tossed you out into an open field. For on the day you were born, people looked upon you with deep contempt.

6Then I passed by and saw you squirming around in your blood. As you lay there in your own blood, I said to you, "Live!" Again, I insisted, "Live!" 7*And that's exactly what you did.* I helped you flourish like plants in the field. In time you grew, became a tall, beautiful young woman:* your breasts developed and your hair grew *thick and long*. But you were still naked and bare. 8I passed by you again and saw you were old enough to love and to be loved, so *I offered Myself to you in marriage.* I wrapped my garment over you to cover your nakedness. Then I gave you My *divine* promise *to always be your Beloved,* and I entered the sacred covenant *of marriage* with you. *I wed you,* and you became Mine. 9I bathed you with *pure* water and washed away the *old* blood from your *skin,* and then I anointed you with *fragrant* oils.

* 16:7 Hebrew manuscripts read, "and came into most beautiful jewels."

10I dressed you in an embroidered gown
and put the *finest* leather sandals on
your feet. I gave you the most luxuri-
ous linens and exquisite garments. 11I
decorated you with *the most expensive*
jewelry: bracelets for your wrists and
a necklace for your neck, 12a nose ring,
costly earrings, and a stunning crown
for your head. 13I adorned you with
everything a woman could wish for: gold
and silver, *the finest* clothes of linen, silk,
and embroidery. You dined on *elegant*
meals made with fine flour, honey, and
olive oil. You became a beautiful woman
and carried yourself as a queen! 14You
became famous among the nations for
your *extraordinary beauty*—beauty that
flourished only because I lavished My
splendor on you.

So said the Eternal Lord.

Eternal One: 15But you trusted in your
own beauty and used your fame to
become a whore. You slept with every
man who was simply passing by. 16You
made shrines for your *idols* out of the
luxurious linens I gave to you and gave
yourself to play the harlot there. Such
things should never have happened and
must not ever again. 17Then you took
all of the expensive gold and silver jew-
elry and precious stones I gave to you,
and you created male images so that
you could play the harlot with them!
18-19You took the embroidered gown *I*
gave you to clothe your *male* images.
Then you took *other gifts* I had given
to you—oil, incense, bread, fine flour,
and honey—and you offered them all
as a pleasing aroma to your idols. This
is what happened, I, the Eternal Lord
proclaim. 20Then you took your sons
and daughters—the ones you bore to
Me—and slaughtered them, sacrificing
your *precious* children to your idols to
be consumed! Wasn't your prostitution
enough? 21You killed My children and
sacrificed them to *breathless* idols as
burnt offerings! 22Not once during all
this prostitution and other shocking
deeds did you remember your youth
when *I found* you naked and bare,
squirming in your own blood!

23To top off all your wickedness—
how bad it will be for you, I, the Eternal
Lord, promise you—24you built your-
selves sacred sites and put lofty shrines
in every *public* square. 25You put them
on every street corner and degraded
your *priceless* beauty, opening yourself
up wide to every man who passed by
to add yet another lover. 26Then you
started whoring with your well-endowed
Egyptian neighbors, and I became *more*
and more angry with your escalating
promiscuity. 27Finally, I reached out and
struck you, decreasing your territory.
I handed you over to your enemies,
the Philistines, to do with you as they
pleased. Even they were embarrassed
by your lascivious behavior! 28You even
started whoring it up with the Assyrians
because your *lust* could not be satisfied.
But even after you prostituted yourself,
you still weren't satisfied! 29So you pros-
tituted yourself to Chaldea, the land of
merchants, but that still wasn't enough
to satisfy you.

30How sick is your heart as you insti-
gate all these *vile* perversions, the deeds
of a brazen harlot? 31When you built
your shrines in every public square and
constructed lofty shrines on every street
corner, you were different from most
prostitutes because you wouldn't take
money *for your favors.* 32Adulterous wife!
You would rather sleep with a stranger
than your own husband! 33Whores are
glad to accept fees from their custom-
ers, but you are the one *paying fees* and
giving gifts to bribe strangers to come to
you. 34So you are the perverse opposite of
all other whores. No one solicits your ser-
vices, and you pay instead of taking their
money! This is why you are so different.

► To understand the comparison of Jerusalem to a harlot, knowledge of the city's political history in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries B.C. is helpful. Two political powers dominate Judah and much of the ancient Near East in this period: Egypt in the south and Assyria (which is later replaced by Babylonia) in the north and east. Jerusalem is caught between these empires—geographically, politically, and economically. Over the centuries, power in the region shifts back and forth, and Jerusalem aligns herself with whichever country offers the most protection. But this protection is not free; Jerusalem has to pay for it. In accepting foreign protection instead of trusting in God, Jerusalem prostitutes

herself to the highest bidder, giving up everything that is valuable and sacred in exchange for eventual exile and slavery.

Eternal One: 35Therefore, harlot, listen to My word! 36Because you *wasted the gifts I gave to you,* spent your lust, and exposed your body in promiscuous acts with *countless* lovers; and *because you devoted yourselves* to despicable idols; and because you gave your children as burnt sacrifices to these *breathless* effigies, 37I am going to round up all of your lovers—all those you have seduced into mutual pleasures, those you have loved and those you have hated. I will gather them from every corner of the earth and set them against you. I will strip you naked before the assembly of your lovers, and they will see every part of you exposed. 38Then I will condemn you to the punishment of an adulterous or murderous woman! I will bring on you the blood of My fury and jealousy. 39Then I will give you over to your lovers, and they will destroy your sacred sites and lofty shrines. They will rip off your *fine* garments and *expensive* jewelry, and they will leave you naked and bare, *just as I found you when you were a baby.* 40They will bring an *angry* mob against you, and the mob will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. 41They will burn down your houses in a fiery blaze and punish you in the sight of many women! *You will be ashamed.* I will put an end to your perverted prostitution, and you will no longer bribe lovers *to come to your bed*! 42Then My fury and jealousy will be satisfied, and I will be at peace and not angry with you any longer. 43Because you failed to remember the days of your youth but instead you infuriated Me with countless perverted love affairs, I will pay you back for every ounce of indecency you instigated. I, the Eternal Lord, proclaim this.

Did you not add vulgar acts to your streak of shocking sins? 44Everyone who likes to quote proverbs will *certainly* be quoting this proverb about you: "Like mother, like daughter." 45You *truly* are the daughter of your *pagan* mother, who loathed her husband and *despised* her children. You *truly* are a sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and despised their children. Your mother was a Hittite, and your father was an Amorite. 46Your older sister is Samaria, who lives to the north with her daughters. Your younger sister, Sodom, lives to the south with her daughters. 47Not only did you imitate the ways and follow the shocking actions of your sisters, but soon you became even more corrupt than they ever were. 48As surely as I live, your sister, Sodom, and her daughters never acted *as badly* as you and your daughters have acted. 49This was the sin of your *warped* sister, Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, gluttonous, and lazy. She never gave help to the poor and needy. 50They were prideful, and they did abhorrent things right in front of Me, *shamelessly and without remorse! As you already know,* I put an end to Sodom and her daughters when I saw their behavior. 51*And don't forget* Samaria! She didn't sin half as much as you. You have committed far more shocking deeds than they ever did. With all the detestable things you have done, you make your sister seem righteous. 52Face your humiliation; your sisters will fare better in judgment in light of your wickedness. Compared with your despicable deeds, they are more righteous than you. You should be ashamed of yourself! You have to live with your disgrace; for compared to you, your sisters seem righteous!

53However, I am going to restore the fortunes of your sisters—Sodom and her daughters, Samaria and her daughters—and I'll restore your fortunes too. 54You still must live with your disgrace and bear the shame for what you have done, for your two sisters will be comforted *in comparison* with your wickedness. 55You and your sisters, Sodom and Samaria, and all of your daughters will become again what you once were. 56In the days when you were prideful, *you looked down upon* your sister, Sodom. You wouldn't even say her name. 57But that was before your evil was exposed! Now you are looked down upon by *everyone*! The daughters of Syria* and all of her neighbors and the daughters of Philistia despise you! 58But you must live with the consequences of your indecent and shocking behavior. I, the Eternal Lord, proclaim this.

59You will get what you deserve from Me because you have despised My oath

* 16:57 Most ancient manuscripts read, "Edom."

and broken our *sacred* covenant. 60But I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were young, and I will establish with you a *new* covenant which will last forever! 61Then you will remember your *evil* ways and be filled with remorse when you receive back your older and younger sisters. I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of our covenant. 62I will *securely* establish My covenant with you, and you will know I am the Eternal One. 63You will remember *your wretched past* and shut your mouth because of the *deep sense of* shame within you when I forgive you for all the evil you have done. I, the Eternal Lord, proclaim this.

17 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a riddle*.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, tell the people of Israel a riddle. 3Tell them the Eternal Lord says that a great eagle with strapping wings, long feathers, and thick plumage of various colors came to Lebanon. The great eagle took the top off of a cedar, 4carried its top growth away to a land of merchants, and planted it in a city of traders. 5Then the great eagle took some of the seed of the land and planted it in *lush,* fertile soil beside abundant waters so it could grow like a willow. 6The seed sprouted *in the soil* and became a flourishing vine, growing low to the ground. The vine's branches grew toward the great eagle, and the roots remained beneath it. The vine produced many sprouts and branches.

7There was another great eagle with strapping wings and thick, *colorful* plumage. From where it had been planted, the vine sent out its roots and branches toward the second eagle, so that eagle could give it even more water. 8The vine had been planted in lush, fertile soil beside abundant waters in order to produce healthy *growth and* branches, bear fruit, and become a magnificent vine *instead of remaining a lowly one*.

9Now I, the Eternal Lord, ask, will that vine continue to flourish? Won't the eagle pull it out *of the lush, fertile soil* by its roots, strip it of its fruit, and leave it to wither? It won't take much strength or many people to pull it up by the roots. 10Now if it is transplanted, will it flourish? When the *angry* east wind strikes it, won't it wither away completely? Won't it shrivel up in the plot *of ground* where it had grown?

11The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 12Ask this rebellious crowd if they know what these stories represent. Give them this explanation: Remember how Babylon's king swooped into Jerusalem *like an eagle* and took its *young* king and *national* leaders back to Babylon. 13He *replaced that young king with* a member of the royal family and made a covenant with him, making the new king swear an oath *of loyalty*. Babylon's king also ordered all the *remaining* leaders of Judah taken into exile 14so that the kingdom would remain *weak and* lowly, not able to rise up against him, and survive only by following *the provisions of* his covenant. 15But Jerusalem's *newly appointed* leader rebelled against Babylon's king by sending his ambassadors to *another king in* Egypt to receive horses and *recruit* a large army. Do you think Jerusalem's king *and his ambassadors* will succeed? Is it possible to get away with such things? Can this *vassal* king break a covenant and escape?

16As surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, I declare that *Jerusalem's* King *Zedekiah* will die in Babylon, the land of the king who gave him Jerusalem's throne and whom he despised when he broke that covenant. 17Pharaoh and his powerful army, a vast company, won't be of any help when Babylon builds ramps and erects siege walls *against Jerusalem*; many will be destroyed *behind those city walls*. 18Jerusalem's king broke his word and betrayed the covenant. Because he pledged his allegiance, yet committed these betrayals, he will not escape.

19Therefore, I say, as surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, what Jerusalem's king despised was My oath and what he betrayed was My covenant. I will make him pay the consequences. 20I will set a trap for him, and he will be caught in it. I will bring him to Babylon and punish him there because of his unfaithfulness *and disloyalty* to Me. 21All of his elite soldiers will be killed in battle, and whoever manages to survive will be scattered to the winds. Then you will know that I, the Eternal One, have promised this.

► This parable dramatizes Babylon's attack on Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, represented by the first eagle, is

indeed the largest predator in the area. He swooped into Jerusalem and exiled the young king, Jehoiachin, who was plucked from the top of the cedar tree. Nebuchadnezzar then planted a new monarch in Jerusalem, Zedekiah, as a vassal of Babylon.

Jerusalem flourishes under Zedekiah but doesn't gain any power, just as the vine is strong but not tall. But when Zedekiah becomes ambitious for sovereignty, he will send envoys to King Hophra in Egypt—represented by the second eagle—looking for mercenaries. This betrayal will lead to Jerusalem's complete destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Since God is using Babylon to punish His disobedient people, and since Zedekiah's betrayal will reflect badly on Him, the coming destruction is none other than divine judgment.

Eternal One: 22-23I personally will take a sprig from the top growth of a lofty cedar—the highest, youngest, and most flexible—and plant it on a high and lofty mountain, on the mountain of Israel. It will produce *healthy* branches and bear fruit and become a noble cedar. All sorts of birds will come and nest in it and find shade in its branches. 24All the trees of the field will know that I am the Eternal; I cut down the tall tree and make the small tree tall; I cause the flourishing tree to wither and the withering tree to flourish. I, the Eternal, have spoken, and I will do exactly as I've promised.

God will plant a sprig that grows into a noble cedar, bears fruit, and provides shelter. All other trees, the nations, will recognize the power and sovereignty of God.

18 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message.*

Eternal One: 2Why do you people continually quote this proverb about Israel:

Fathers have eaten sour grapes,
and their children's teeth are set on edge?

3As surely as I live, I, the Eternal Lord, declare you will not quote this proverb in Israel anymore. 4For every living being belongs to Me—parent and child alike. You will die for your own sins, *not because of what your ancestors did.* 5Imagine a righteous man who always does what is right: 6*First, he worships Me exclusively;* he doesn't feast at *the heathen* shrines atop mountains, nor does he *worship* idols as others do in Israel—he won't even look at them! *Second,* he does not sleep with his neighbor's wife or have sex with a woman when she is menstruating. 7*Third,* he does not *persecute or* abuse anyone; he gives back a debtor's collateral and does not seize *poorer men's* property. *Fourth, he tends to the poor;* he clothes the naked and gives his bread to the hungry 8and doesn't charge those *poor* people who borrow from him interest or keep their profits. *Fifth, he is law-abiding;* he does not participate in wrong deeds and is fair toward all others. 9*Sixth,* he is *obedient to Me,* living by My statutes and faithfully keeping My laws. This man who is righteous—he will surely live.

10-11Now suppose this righteous man has a violent son. The son is a killer and does *wicked* things that the *righteous* father has never done: *He worships other gods,* feasting at *the heathen* shrines atop mountains. He defiles his neighbor's wife. 12He abuses the poor and *persecutes* the needy. He seizes property and keeps a debtor's collateral. He looks up to *breathless* idols, *worshiping them. He breaks the law* and commits shocking deeds. 13He charges those who borrow from him interest and makes excessive profits. Do you think the wicked son will live? Of course not! Because he has done all of these shocking things, he will be put to death, and it will be his own fault.

14Now, suppose the *wicked* son has a son of his own, and this son watches his father's vile lifestyle and chooses not to do as his father has done: 15*He worships Me exclusively;* he doesn't feast at *the heathen* shrines atop mountains, nor does he *worship* idols as others do in Israel—he won't even look at them! He does not defile his neighbor's wife. 16He does not *persecute or* abuse anyone; he gives back *a debtor's* collateral and does not seize *poorer men's* properties. He tends to the poor; he clothes the naked, gives his bread to the hungry, 17does not participate in wronging the poor, nor

does he charge *those who borrow from him* interest or make excessive profit. He is obedient *to Me,* faithfully keeping My laws and living by My statutes. This man *who is righteous* will not die for his father's sins. He will surely live. 18But his father will surely die for his own wicked deeds—taking advantage *of the poor,* seizing property from *poorer* Israelites, and refusing to do good for his people.

19So why do you ask, "Why is the son not also punished for his father's guilt?" *Don't you see? The son did not commit his father's sins.* The son chose to do what is just and right by remembering and following My laws, so he will surely live. 20The person who sins will die. The child will not be punished for the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent be punished for the guilt of the child. The righteous will be credited with righteousness. The wicked will be charged with wickedness.

21*But there is good news even for the wicked.* If the wicked turn away from their sins, choose to uphold My laws, be honest, and live a righteous life, then they will surely live. They won't die. 22I won't remember any of their previous wrongs against them because of the right things they have done. They will *surely* live. 23Do I enjoy watching the wicked die? *No.* I, the Eternal One, would prefer for the wicked to stop doing the wrong things they do and live. 24If the righteous stop doing what is right, choose the sinful path, and commit the shocking things the wicked do, do you think they will live? *Certainly not!* I won't remember any of their righteous deeds because of all the unfaithful and wicked things they do. They will surely die.

25You say, "The Lord's way is not fair *at all*!" Hear Me, people of Israel: You think My way is unfair? You are the ones with unjust ways! 26If a righteous person turns away from the right path and chooses to act wickedly, he will die for it. He will die because of the sin he committed. 27But if a wicked person turns from the wicked path and chooses to be honest and live a righteous life, he will end up saving his life! 28Because he thought about his wrongs and turned away from the wicked things he'd done, *putting them behind him,* then he will surely live. He will not die! 29Yet the people of Israel continue to complain, "The Lord's way is not fair *at all*!" You think My way is unfair, people of Israel? Don't you think you are the ones with perverted ways?

30Therefore, people of Israel, I will judge each of you according to what you have done. Repent! Turn from your wicked ways so that your sins do not trip you up! 31Get rid of all your wicked ways! Acquire a new heart and a new spirit! Why would you *choose to* die, people of Israel? 32I don't enjoy watching anyone die, so turn back to Me and live!

19 **Eternal One:** Sing a dirge over the princes of Israel.

2What was your mother? A lioness
among the pride!
She settled down among the young
lions and reared her cubs.
3She trained one of her own, and he
became a *strong and fierce* lion.
He learned to *hunt and* tear into his
prey; he became a man-eater.
4The nations heard about him and set a
trap for him.
They caught him and led him away
with hooks to the land of Egypt.
5When the lioness realized that her
hopes *for her son* had vanished,
she chose another one of her cubs
and trained him to be a *strong
and fierce* young lion.
6He prowled among the other lions;
he was now a *robust* young lion.
He learned to *hunt and* tear into his
prey; he became a man-eater.
7He seized their widows and left their
cities in ruins.
The whole land—everything in it—
was terrified when he roared.
8Then all the nations in the surrounding
provinces came together to
hunt the great lion.
They set traps for him, and they
caught him.
9With hooks they pulled him into a
cage
and took him to the king of
Babylon.
The great lion was put in a prison
so that his roar was no longer heard
in the mountains of Israel.

► Again God informs Ezekiel and the exiles of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The lioness is Judah, the young lions are the nations

surrounding Judah, and the cubs are her kings. This metaphor is appropriate since the Davidic monarchy comes from the tribe of Judah, characterized as a lion in Genesis 49:9. The first cub is Jehoahaz. This son of the great King Josiah ruled for only three months after his father died in 609 B.C.; he was quickly captured and deported to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco when Egypt made Judah a vassal state. The story of this cub is the historical precedent for what will happen to the second cub, Zedekiah. Prior to 586 B.C. Zedekiah fraternizes with leaders of other nations—represented by the other lions—until he will be imprisoned in Babylon by those other lions, specifically Nebuchadnezzar.

Eternal One: [10]Your mother was like a
vine in your vineyard,
planted near a *rushing* stream;
The vine grew healthy fruits and
branches
because of the abundant supply of
water.
[11]Its branches were strong, like royal
scepters;
but *one branch* grew up into the
clouds,
towering high above everything
else.
It was easily seen because of its great
height,
noticeable for its many branches.
[12]But the vine was uprooted in rage
and thrown to the ground!
The *hot* east wind blew, and *soon* all the
fruits shriveled up;
the strongest branch broke, and *the
leaves* withered;
fire consumed it.
[13]Now *the remains of* it are planted in the
wilderness—
in a dry and thirsty land.
[14]Fire has spread from its branch;
it scorched its shoots and devoured
its fruit.
There is no longer a strong branch left
on the vine
that is fit to be made into a royal
scepter.

This lament is *to be sung once the prophecy comes true.*

The Davidic monarchy is the vine, and the branches are the strong monarchs. Zedekiah is the tallest branch. His failures will consume the dynasty, leaving nothing but charred remains.

20 During the seventh year *of King Jehoiachin's exile,* on the tenth day of the fifth month, some of the elders of Israel approached me and sat down in front of me, wanting *good news* from the Eternal One. [2]The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message for them.*

Eternal One: [3]Son of man, talk to the elders of Israel, and tell them I *have a question*: "Have you come to ask questions of Me? As surely as I, the Eternal Lord live, I will not allow you to question Me."

[4]Will you pass judgment on them, son of man? Will you judge whether they *have been serving other gods*? Confront them about the shocking acts of their fathers, [5]and tell them the Eternal Lord says that on the day I selected Israel, made an oath to the descendants of Jacob's family, and revealed Myself to them in Egypt, I lifted My hand and swore to them, "I am the Eternal your God." [6]On the same day, I swore to them that I would rescue them from the land of Egypt and take them to another land I had looked for and found just for them—a land flowing with milk and honey, the most splendid of all lands. [7]And I said to them, "Get rid of all the vile images that captivate your eyes, and do not degrade yourselves with the idols of Egypt! I am the Eternal your God." [8]But they rebelled against Me and refused to heed My warnings. They kept staring at the vile images and worshiping the idols of Egypt.

I was just about to pour out My anger upon them and express My wrath while they were still in Egypt, [9-10]but for the sake of My *good* name *and reputation, I decided against it.* I thought it better not to profane My name in the eyes of those nations around where My people lived. *After all,* I had revealed Myself to them when I brought My people out of the land of Egypt and into the wilderness. [11]I gave them My laws and commandments so that if they would follow them, they might live. [12]I also gave them My Sabbaths as a sign that they would know

that I, the Eternal One, have made them holy. 13But the Israelites rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They refused to follow My laws and ignored My commandments, even though *they knew* the one who follows them will live. They also polluted My Sabbaths *and treated them like any other day*.

So I said I would pour out My anger upon them and destroy them in the wilderness. 14For the sake of My *good* name *and reputation,* however, I chose not to profane My name in the eyes of those nations who had witnessed Me bringing the Israelites out *of Egypt.* 15Also, I raised My hand and swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land I had given them—a land flowing with milk and honey, the most splendid of all lands! 16*I swore this to them* because they ignored My rules and strayed from My laws and polluted My Sabbaths; for they were completely devoted to their idols. 17I looked on them with mercy, and I did not destroy them in the wilderness.

18I told their children in the wilderness, "Do not follow the example set by your fathers. Do not live by their standards or degrade yourselves with their idols. 19I, the Eternal One, am your God. Follow My laws and remember to obey My rules. 20Keep My Sabbaths holy as signs between us so you will know I, the Eternal, am your God." 21But the children also rebelled against Me. They strayed from My laws and ignored My commandments, even though *they knew* that one who follows My rules will live. They polluted My Sabbaths, and they were not careful to keep My rules. So I told them that I would pour out My anger upon them and express My wrath against them in the wilderness. 22But for the sake of My *good* name *and reputation,* I suspended their punishment. I chose not to profane My name in the eyes of those nations who had witnessed Me bringing the Israelites out *of Egypt.* 23Also, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among those nations and cast them out into *unfamiliar* lands 24because they had refused to obey My rules and rejected My laws. *Instead,* their eyes were devoted to their fathers' *breathless* idols, and they polluted My Sabbaths. 25I handed them over to bad laws and rules that could not lead to life. 26I declared them *ritually* impure because they were giving every firstborn child as a burnt sacrifice *to pagan gods.* I did this to horrify them, so that they would know I am the Eternal One.

27Therefore, son of man, confront the people of Israel and tell them the Eternal Lord says, "Your fathers showed their contempt for Me and betrayed Me. 28When I brought them into the land I had solemnly promised to give them, they offered their sacrifices on every high hill and under every shade tree they saw. *In the land I gave them,* they irritated Me with their offerings. They burned fragrant incense and poured out their drink offerings there. 29I asked them, 'What is this shrine you visit?'"

To this day, a shrine is called a "high place."*

Eternal One: 30Therefore, tell the people of Israel that the Eternal Lord says if you degrade yourselves in the same ways your fathers did—prostituting yourselves to the same foul, *breathless* images, 31giving your children *to them* as burnt offerings, and degrading yourselves with those idols still today—*do you think* I should allow you to ask questions of Me, Israel? As surely as I live, I, the Eternal, say I will not allow you to ask Me anything.

32You entertain thoughts such as, "We want to be like the other nations, like the other people of the world who serve *idols made of* wood and stone." But your *secret* thoughts will never become a reality.

33-34As surely as I live, I, the Eternal Lord, proclaim I will rule as your king with a *fierce and* mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and an overflowing wrath. *With My power,* I will bring you out of the nations and gather you from the *unfamiliar* lands where you have been scattered. 35I will bring you into the wilderness of nations, and I will personally render My judgment upon you. 36I will judge you in the same way I judged your fathers in the wilderness *that lies east* of the land of Egypt.

37I will have you pass under My rod, and I will make you live up to the terms of the covenant. 38I will get rid of the rebels and traitors among you. I may bring them out of the lands where they

* 20:29 Hebrew, *bamah*

are exiled, but I will not allow them back to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One.

39(to the people of Israel) Go ahead and worship your idols—all of you! *Eventually, you will see that what you are doing is pointless.* Then you will start listening to Me and stop profaning My sacred name with your gifts and false gods. 40There upon the high mountain of Israel, which is My holy mountain *residence,* all the people of Israel will *worship and* serve Me when they return to the land. There I will accept them. There I will expect your gifts and your firstfruit offerings, with all of your *other* sacred duties *to Me.* 41When I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the *unfamiliar* lands where you have been scattered, I will accept you as a pleasant aroma. I will put My holiness on display by the way you live as all the world watches! 42You will know that I am the Eternal One when I bring you into the land of Israel—the *splendid* land I solemnly promised to give your ancestors. 43*Then and* there, you will remember your *wrong* turns and all of the *wicked* things you have done to degrade yourselves, and you will hate yourselves every time you see your reflection because of all the evil things you have done. 44You will know, O people of Israel, that I am the Eternal when I deal *fairly* with you in order to protect My *good* name *and reputation,* and not out of *My frustration toward* your wickedness and *mindless* corruption.

So said the Eternal One.

45The word of the Eternal came to me *with a parable.*

Eternal One: 46Son of man, look south! Preach against the south, and prophesy against forests in the Negev. 47Tell the southern forest to listen to the word of the Eternal. The Eternal Lord says, "I am about to set you on fire, and it will *spread and* devour all of your trees—both green and dry. The raging fire will not be put out! Everything *and everyone* from south to north will be scorched by it. 48Then everyone will see that I, the Eternal One, started the unquenchable fire!"

Ezekiel: 49Eternal Lord, they are all talking about me, saying, "He's just speaking in parables."

21 The word of the Eternal *once again* came to me with a *similar* message.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, look toward Jerusalem, and speak against My temple. Prophesy against the *whole* land of Israel, 3and tell the land of Israel what the Eternal One says: "Pay attention. I am against you. I will draw My sword from its sheath and kill both the righteous and the wicked who live within your *borders.* 4Because I am going to kill *everyone, both* good and evil, all flesh from south to north will feel the wrath of My sword! 5Then everyone *all over the world* will know I, the Eternal One, have drawn My sword from its sheath and do not intend to return it."

God tells Ezekiel to act out His message. He must demonstrate what it will be like when the bad news arrives of what has happened back home in Jerusalem.

6Now as for you, son of man, groan as if your heart is breaking. Groan in front of people because of your bitter agony! 7When *they see you,* they will ask you, "Why all this *loud and noisy* groaning?" Answer them this way: "*I am groaning* because of the *horrible* news that is coming. Every heart will melt, every hand will fall limp, every spirit will grow faint, and every knee will become as weak as water. So pay attention. The time is near! It is going to happen soon."

So said the Eternal Lord.

8The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 9Son of man, prophesy, and tell them this message is from the Eternal.

A sword! *Yes,* a sword—
keenly sharpened and polished.
10*A razor-sharp blade* honed to slaughter
anything in its path,
polished to flash like lightning!

Should we celebrate My son's scepter?
The sword repulses every such bit
of wood.

11My sword is sent to be polished *till radiant,*
comfortably wielded.

It is *keenly* sharpened and *brightly*
burnished,
ready for the hand of the slayer.
12Cry out and wail, son of man!
My sword is against My people;
It swings for all the princes of Israel.
I have deserted them all—princes
and people—to *the wrath of* My
sword!
Therefore, beat your thigh, *Ezekiel,*
in front of everyone
So they understand what a tragedy this is.
13For the test will come;
so what happens if the sword
repulses the scepter
And the scepter is gone?
I, the Eternal Lord, say this to you.

14As for you, son of man, prophesy;
clap your hands *loudly*!
Let the sword strike two, even three
times!
It is a sword *honed and polished* to
massacre!
This sword is *ready* for the great
slaughter,
coming after them on all sides.
15Hearts will melt, and masses will fall
because I have placed *the tip of* the
blade at every city gate!
Oh, this *beautiful* instrument flashes
like lightning;
it's wrapped and ready for slaughter.
16*Now, My sword, thrust* to the right—
and *slash* to the left!
Be ready to attack wherever the blade
is turned.
17I will clap My hands together,
and I will cool My wrath *once*
judgment has been executed.
I, the Eternal One, have spoken.

18The word of the Eternal came to me *regarding Babylon's sword.*

Eternal One: 19Son of man, mark out two roads for the sword of Babylon's king to take. Have both roads begin in the same place. Make a signpost, and put it at the fork in the road: 20one road leading the sword to Ammon and its *capital,* Rabbah; the other *road leading* to Judah and its fortified *capital,* Jerusalem. 21The Babylonian king will stop at the fork in the road and look for a sign *to see which way to go*: he will shake the arrows *and draw one,* call to his household gods* *for advice,* and examine an *animal* liver.

► Kings never go into battle without first looking for signs and omens. War is too risky—even for Babylon—not to have the blessings of the gods. The Babylonian king stops at the crossroads: which way should he go? So he calls for his priests to consult the gods for signs. Their mediation may be something like drawing straws. At times it involves the ancient practice of "reading" the liver of a sacrificial animal. When a king wants to make sure his decision is the correct one, he uses several forms of divination. The ancients do not believe in chance; they believe their gods are involved in orchestrating their lives and decisions. In this case, Babylon's king happens to be correct because the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is directing him to take the road to Jerusalem.

Eternal One: 22He reads "Jerusalem" in his right hand, *so he will march first in that direction* with battering rams for the gates and a command to massacre *the city,* sounding war cries and building *siege* ramps and siege walls. 23Everyone *in Jerusalem* will believe the omen to be false because they had pledged loyalty *to Babylon.* But his actions will remind *the doubters* of their guilt, and they will be taken prisoners.

(to the Israelites) 24Because you have reminded Me of your sins and once again exposed your rebellious ways, making every *wicked* thing you ever did obvious, you will be forcefully taken prisoner. 25You are *already* dead, you wicked prince of Israel! Your hour has arrived! Your day of *excruciating* punishment has come! 26This is what the Eternal Lord says: "Remove your *royal* turban and crown. Everything is about to change: the lowly will be brought high, and the high will be brought low. 27Ruination! I will make a total ruin *out of everything*! It will remain in ruins until the one to whom it rightfully belongs arrives, and then I will hand it over to Him."

28But you, son of man, must preach to them what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say about the Ammonites and their insults:

* 21:21 Hebrew, *teraphim*

A sword! *Yes,* a sword
is drawn to slaughter *the*
Ammonites—
Honed to destroy, polished to flash like
lightning.

29"In spite of false prophesies and lying
omens concerning you, the sword will
slice the necks of the wicked. They are as
good as dead. Their hour has come! Their
day of punishment has arrived! 30Put the
sword back in its sheath. In the place
where you were conceived, in the land of
your origin, I will judge you *with My sword*
of judgment. 31I will pour out My anger
over your *head,* I will breathe fiery wrath
on you, I will give you over to barbaric
men (artists of destruction *who love to*
mutilate and kill). 32You will become coals
for a fire; Babylonian blood will flood
the land, and you will be forgotten! I, the
Eternal, promise this."

Babylon's reign of terror is short-lived. God orders the Israelites to put their swords away, go home, and wait. When the time is right, they will get what they deserve.

22 The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, will you
judge this bloody city? Will you? *You*
must! Confront her about her shocking
actions, 3and *speak to her.*

Then the Eternal Lord declared this for
me to say to her:

Eternal One: You are a city of bloodshed,
and your ways will come *back to haunt*
you. You are a city of idols, making them
even though they defile you. 4The blood
you shed *covers* you with *the heaviness of*
guilt. The idols you have made degraded
your spirit. You have reached the end of
your life, so I have made you an object of
scorn to all the nations! 5Those near and
far will mock you—city of infamy and
turmoil!

6Look, the princes of Israel who
reside in your *walls* use their *political*
power to murder. 7*Infamous city of tur-*
moil, your people *mistreat their elders,*
disrespect their parents, take advantage
of foreigners passing through, and treat
orphans and widows with contempt. 8In
you My holy things are desecrated and
My Sabbaths are profaned. 9Your citizens
lie and *give false testimonies at capital tri-*
als, shedding *innocent* blood. Your peo-
ple feast at lofty shrines devoted to false
gods and commit lewd *sexual* acts. 10In
you men expose their fathers' nakedness
by having intercourse with their wives and
engage in sexual relations with women
who are impure because of their men-
strual cycles. 11In you one man commits
unspeakable things with his neighbor's
wife, while another practices incest with
his daughter-in-law or half-sister. 12In
you murder is for hire, exorbitant inter-
ests and profits are taken *from the poor,*
neighbors are oppressed for *personal*
gain; and in you I am forgotten.

13I will strike My hands at your extor-
tion and murderous ways. 14Will you be
courageous and strong when I come to
deal with you? I, the Eternal One, will
do what I've said I will do. 15I will scat-
ter you among the nations and disperse
you throughout *unfamiliar* lands! I will
put an end to your impurity. 16When you
have been defiled in front of the nations,
you will know that I am the Eternal.

17Then the word of the Eternal came to
me *with how He would judge these crimes.*

Eternal One: 18Son of man, the people of
Israel have become dross to Me; all of
them are the dross *metals*—bronze, iron,
tin, and lead—left inside a furnace after
silver has been refined. 19Therefore, I, the
Eternal Lord, say *to them,* "Because you've
become *worthless* dross, I will gather you
up in the middle of Jerusalem. 20-21Just
as men throw copper, iron, tin, lead, and
silver into a furnace to melt *the impurities*
away with fiery blasts, I will gather you
inside *My furnace called Jerusalem,* and
you will experience the fire of My wrath
as it blows across and melts you inside
that city! 22Just as silver is melted in a fur-
nace, you will be melted in My city. Then
you will know I, the Eternal One, have
poured out *the fire of* My wrath upon you."

23The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 24Son of man, say to her,
"You are a land plagued with drought
during My wrath—[not a single drop
of rain has fallen *from the sky*]*." 25Her
prophets* conspire in her midst like

* 22:24 Hebrew manuscripts read, "You have not been purified."

* 22:25 Greek manuscripts read, "princes."

raging lions killing their prey; they have destroyed lives, stolen treasures and *other* valuable things; they have made many *wives* widows all over the city. 26Her priests violate My laws and desecrate My holy things. They fail to distinguish between the sacred and profane. They no longer teach that there is a difference between pure and impure! They completely disregard My Sabbaths; as a result I am defamed among My people. 27Her princes and officials are like *a pack of* wolves tearing apart their prey. They kill *innocent* people and ruin lives just to get what they want! 28Her *false* prophets whitewash these *wicked* acts by *claiming to* receive divine visions, but they are all false! Their divination turns up only lies! They say, "This is what the Eternal Lord says . . . ," when the Eternal Lord has not said anything *to them at all*. 29Her people are *full of wickedness*: *they are* bullies and thieves; they have abused the poor and helpless; they have taken advantage of foreigners and perverted justice. 30I searched for one man among them, a man who could build the wall and stand in the gap before Me and advocate for the land, a man who could convince Me not to destroy it; but I found no one. 31Therefore, I will dump the fires of My fury on them, and the flames of My indignation will devour them. I will give them what they deserve.

So said the Eternal Lord.

23 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a parable about two sisters.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, there were two women born of the same mother. 3They became promiscuous in Egypt at a young age. Their breasts were fondled, and their virgin bodies were caressed. 4The older *sister* was named Oholah, and her younger sister was named Oholibah. They married Me, and they gave birth to *many* sons and daughters.

Oholah is Samaria *(the mother city of Israel),* and Oholibah is Jerusalem *(the mother city of Judah).*

► After King Solomon's death, Israel splits into two kingdoms, the two sisters described in this parable. Israel is ruled from Samaria; Judah is ruled from Jerusalem. Both kingdoms are ruled autonomously until Assyria dominates Israel, forcing her to pay tribute. Eventually the Assyrians conquer Israel in 722 B.C. and annex her land. Throughout this struggle, the various kings of Israel turn for help to everyone they can—everyone, that is, except God. Israel's last cry for help is raised to Egypt in the 730s B.C. by her last king, Hoshea (2 Kings 17:4). Unfortunately, surviving historical records are incomplete, and what happens next is unclear. But in the end, Egypt proves to be no help to Israel.

Eternal One: 5Oholah played the whore while she was still Mine. She coveted many lovers, lusting after her neighbors, the Assyrians—6*sharply* dressed in *handsome* blue, governors and commanders—all attractive young men mounted on *great* horses. 7She offered herself as a prostitute to all of the fine Assyrian men and anyone who desired her. She degraded herself with the idols of her lovers. 8She didn't stop the promiscuity she began in Egypt, for when she was young she slept with men who caressed her virgin breasts and poured out their lust on her. 9So I handed her over to those she loved, the Assyrians whom she desired. 10They stripped her naked, stole her children, and slaughtered her during the war. So among women, her name became synonymous *with disgrace, when they saw* the punishment she received.

Unfortunately Judah, the younger sister, repeats Israel's mistakes. She turns to Egypt against a conquering Babylonian Empire; but this is a grave mistake, for soon she will be completely destroyed.

11Her *younger* sister, Oholibah, witnessed all that happened; yet Oholibah became more corrupt than her sister. Her wanton lust and prostitution were even worse than her sister's. 12She was obsessed with the Assyrians, *too,* lusting after *the elite*—governors and commanders, sharply-dressed warriors—all attractive young men mounted atop

great horses. 13I saw how she degraded herself. Both she and her sister followed the same path, 14but Oholibah's path went further *and she traveled longer. She added the Babylonians to her list of paramours.* She was captivated by images of men painted on a wall: figures of Chaldeans dressed in red, 15with *expensive* belts wrapped around their waists and flowing turbans adorning their heads. All of them looked highly distinguished, like Babylonian *officers* from the land of Chaldea. 16As soon as her eyes met these *portraits,* she lusted after them. And so she sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17And the Babylonians *accepted her invitation and* came into her bed of love, degrading her with their lust. When they had *completely* defiled her, she turned away from them in disgust. 18Because she carried on her whoring so publicly and exposed herself *to so many,* I was repulsed by her just as I was her sister. 19Yet she went deeper into prostitution when she remembered how she played the whore when she was young in the land of Egypt. 20She lusted for lovers whose genitals were as *large as* a donkey's and whose emissions were like a horse's.

21You, *Judah,* longed for the lewd
promiscuity of your youth in Egypt,
when men fondled your breasts and
caressed your virgin body."*
22Pay attention, Oholibah! I will turn
your *forgotten* lovers against you,
the ones whom you turned away
from *in disgust.*
I will bring them against you from
every direction.
23Babylonians and all the Chaldeans,
the people of Pekod, Shoa, and Koa,
and all the Assyrians,
All attractive young men, governors
and commanders,
sharply-dressed officers and high-
ranking officials mounted atop
great horses.
24They will come after you with *lethal*
weapons* *in hand,*
shields *in place,* dressed in armor;
And troops will storm you from every
side
in *war* chariots and wagons.
I will hand you over to their judgment,
and they will punish you according
to their customs.
25I will unleash My jealous fury against
you.
They will slice off your nose and
ears and kill the rest of your
people in battle.
They will steal your children,
and they will burn any who survive
in a fire.
26They will strip you and take away your
clothes;
they will rob you of your expensive
jewelry.
27This is how I will put a stop to the
promiscuities
and prostitution you brought from
the land of Egypt.
You will not admire or remember Egypt
with yearning anymore.

28Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: Pay attention! I am *a moment away from* handing you over to those whom you loathe, the ones whom you turned away from *in disgust.* 29They will treat you with hatred and rob you of your lot. They will rip off your clothes *in public* and leave you naked. *The marks of* your prostitution—your lewd, promiscuous life—will be apparent. 30You have brought this upon yourself because you played the whore with your *neighboring* nations, degraded yourself with *profane images and breathless* idols. 31You have followed the same path as your sister; therefore, I will let you drink from her *very own* cup.

32You will drink from your sister's cup,
a cup deep and wide.
It will bring you shame and scorn
and a lot of it.
33You will drink your fill of drunkenness
and agony,
*with tears of sorrow running down
your cheeks.*
This is the cup of ruination, of
destruction—
the cup of your sister Samaria!
34You will drink it *down* and drain it dry;
then you will smash the cup to pieces
And gnaw on its shattered remains;
you will tear at the breasts *your
enemies once fondled.*

For I, the Eternal Lord, have spoken.
35Because you have forgotten Me
and tossed Me over your shoulder *like*

* 23:21 Hebrew manuscripts read, "because of your young breasts."
* 23:24 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

a piece of trash, you must reap the consequences of your promiscuities and prostitution.

36(to Ezekiel) Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? *You must!* Confront them about their shocking actions—37the adulterous liaisons they commit with bloody hands, even sacrificing their sons and daughters, My children, as burnt offerings to *breathless* idols. 38-39Not only that, but they have also polluted My sanctuary and profaned My Sabbaths by sacrificing their children to the *breathless* idols on the same day they came into My house. This is what they did to Me and My house. This is how they profaned it. 40They even sent a *special* invitation to men who lived far away. When they arrived, you had bathed *in fragrant waters,* painted around your eyes, *dressed in seductive garments,* and adorned your body with shiny jewelry *for your honored guests.* 41You reclined on a silky couch in front of a table set *for your visitors* with the incense and oils that belonged to Me. 42*As for Oholibah,* the mellowed crowd gathered around her—drunkards from the desert and noisy commoners. They adorned the arms of the sisters with bracelets *I'd given them* and placed ostentatious crowns on the heads *of My queens.* 43Then I wondered about this woman who was exhausted from adulterous sex: "Will they still want to sleep with her, here and now?"* 44*Yes,* they all went into her bed, *one after another,* and used her as a prostitute. This is what they did to both these wanton women: Oholah and Oholibah. 45But righteous people will condemn these sisters to punishment befitting adulterous and murderous women! For they are indeed adulteresses and their hands are covered with *innocent* blood.

46This is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: Bring a *vast* army against them! Overtake them with terror and plunder *their goods*! 47Their enemies will crush them with large rocks and hack them down in battle. They will massacre their children—*My children*—and burn down their houses!

(to the sisters) 48This is how I will put an end to the lewdness *practiced* in the land and make you an example to all women, *that they may learn from your mistakes* and never commit the wicked acts you did. 49You will suffer the consequences of your promiscuity; you will bear the penalty for worshiping your idols. Then you will know that I am the Eternal Lord.

* 23:43 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

► This memorable allegory traces the fate of two sisters who represent the two capital cities of Israel and Judah: Samaria and Jerusalem. The graphic portrayals of their sexual exploits are some of the most disturbing in Scripture; they highlight the disgust God and His prophet must feel toward God's wayward people. Anyone who hears Ezekiel speak this message must come to the same conclusion: God must judge His unfaithful wives. It is right. It is just. It is necessary.

24 The word of the Eternal came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, remember this date. Write it down. The Babylonian king laid siege to Jerusalem today. 3Tell this rebellious crowd a parable. Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Put the cooking pot on the fire;
put it on and fill it with water.
4Put the finest cuts *of meat* into it—legs and brisket;
fill it with the best bones.
5Pick out the best from the flock,
stack wood beneath the pot,
Bring it to a rolling boil,
and cook what's in the pot.

No one is safe in the cauldron of Jerusalem.

6Woe to this city polluted with blood—
that pot *thickly* corroded, whose filth is impossible to clean!
Empty the pot one piece at a time;
don't *bother* choosing one or the other!
7The blood she shed is still polluting the city.
She poured it out on bare rock

Instead of into the ground
to be absorbed by the dust *where blood belongs.*
8I have spilled her blood on bare rock
so that it may not be covered,
knowing My anger would be ignited and My revenge accomplished.
9That's why I, the Eternal Lord, speak out:
Woe to this city polluted with blood;
I will stack the wood Myself—
10Stack it high *beneath the pot*
to feed the fire.
Mix spices *and seasoning* into the boiling brew
and cook the meat and then burn the bones.
11Set the empty pot on the coals
until it grows so hot its metal begins to glow,
its filth melts inside, and no trace of corrosion remains.
12But she has thwarted *My* efforts!
Her massive corrosion remains when the fire should have cleansed her.

13*Jerusalem,* I tried to cleanse your lewd impurity, but you would not stay pure. Because of this, you will not be clean again until after you have suffered *the full punishment of* My wrath. 14I, the Eternal One, have spoken. Your day *of judgment* has arrived, and I will act. I will not be easy on you; I will not feel sorry for you; I will not regret *My actions.* You will be judged by what you have done and get only what you deserve.

So said the Eternal Lord.

15The word of the Eternal came to me *regarding my wife.*

Eternal One: 16Son of man, in the blink of an eye, I am going to take away the delight of your eyes. Do not weep or grieve or shed a tear. 17Any groaning must be *inward and* silent, but do not grieve for the dead. Dress *as you always dress*: with a turban on your head and sandals on your feet. *Don't do any of the things mourners do.* Don't eat the food others *bring to comfort you* or cover your upper lip.

18*It happened as such:* I preached to the people in the morning, and that evening, my wife passed away. The next morning, I did exactly as I had been instructed to do.

People: 19Tell us what all of this has to do with us. Why are you acting this way?

Ezekiel: 20The word of the Eternal came to me 21with a message for the people of Israel: "Look! I will desecrate My sanctuary—the magnificent house in which you take pride, the desire of your eyes, your complete delight—and all of the children you left behind *in Jerusalem* will be put to the sword and slaughtered." 22You will do *exactly* as I have done *in hiding your grief*: You will not eat the food others *bring to comfort you* or cover your upper lips. 23*You will dress as you always dress:* with turbans on your heads and sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or grieve. *God tells me,* "Instead, you will rot away *from within* because of your wickedness and moan among yourselves. 24In this way, Ezekiel will be a living example for you. You must do exactly as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Eternal Lord."

Eternal One: 25As for you, son of man, on the day I seize their fortress—the joyous aspect of their pride, the desire of their eyes, their complete delight—and *all of* their children, 26a fugitive *will escape from the destruction and* will come to you *in Babylon* with news of what happened. 27The day you learn *of My judgment,* your mouth will be opened, and your silence will be broken. Then you will be able to converse with the fugitive. You will be a living example to them, and they will know that I am the Eternal One.

25

The word of the Eternal came to me *regarding how He plans to punish Israel's neighbors.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, face the Ammonites and preach against them. 3Tell them to listen to the word of the Eternal Lord:

(to Ammon) Because you delighted in the desecration of My sanctuary, because you rejoiced when Israel became a wasteland, and because you cheered when the Judeans went into exile, 4I will certainly hand you over to the people of the East. They will set up camp all around you, pitching their tents *and settling* among you. They will *feast off of your tables,* eating your fruit and drinking your milk. 5I will transform Rabbah, *your great city,* into a pasture for camels, and Ammon *will be turned* into a resting place for sheep and goats. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One.

6This is what the Eternal Lord has to say *about Ammon*:

Eternal One: Because you have clapped your hands and stomped your feet, delighting with a malevolent heart against the land of Israel, 7I will raise My hand against you and divide you among the nations as prisoners and slaves. I will destroy you completely and make sure you are never a nation again. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One.

8This is what the Eternal Lord has to say *about Moab*:

Eternal One: Because Moab and Seir said, "Look! *There's nothing special about* Judah; she is just like every other nation," 9I will lay bare the western defenses of Moab by exposing its frontier cities—Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriath aim. 10I will hand Moab and *her northern neighbors* the Ammonites over to the people of the East. Then the Ammonites will be entirely forgotten by the nations. 11I will exercise My justice against Moab. Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

12This is what the Eternal Lord has to say *about Edom*:

Eternal One: Edom took revenge on the people of Judah, and her people are undeniably guilty for avenging themselves against My people. 13Because of this, I—the Eternal Lord—will raise My hand to strike Edom and slaughter the people and animals who live there. I will make Edom a wasteland—and everyone from Teman to Dedan will be put to the sword and die. 14I will take My own revenge on Edom and use My own people Israel *as the weapon* against them. Israel will do to Edom everything My anger and wrath require, and Edom will experience My vengeance. This I, the Eternal Lord, declare.

15This is what the Eternal Lord has to say *about Philistia*:

Eternal One: Because the Philistines had an old grudge *against Judah* and acted out of revenge and total malevolence to try to destroy My people, 16therefore I, the Eternal Lord, promise this: I will raise My hand and strike the Philistines, cut off the Cherethites, and slaughter anyone left along the coast. 17I will bring *My* fierce vengeance against them, rebuking them and punishing them in My wrath! When I bring My vengeance against them, they will know that I am the Eternal One.

► Israel and Judah are not the only nations infuriating God with their conduct. The surrounding countries—Ammon in the northeast, Moab in the east, Edom in the southeast, Philistia in the west, and Tyre in the northwest—have often been at odds with Israel and Judah. So when Judah falls, they celebrate in the streets and begin to figure how they might maneuver around these political and economic changes. Judah's fall might be a windfall for them. As the Judean exiles are forcibly marched out of their land, their neighbors mercilessly mock them for their crushing defeat. But God takes all of this very personally. He will not tolerate their disrespect of His people, which amounts to disrespect of Him too. So God takes His own revenge and punishes those who delight in Israel's and Judah's tragedies.

26 During the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, the word of the Eternal came to me *regarding Tyre*.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, Tyre has delighted in the news of Jerusalem, saying,

Hurray! The gateway to the nations is broken,
And now it is open for me *to receive all of her commerce*.
My *markets* will be full now that she is in ruins.

3Therefore I, the Eternal Lord, am telling you that I am your enemy, Tyre, and I will *gather* many nations and march them against you, just as the sea marches its waves *against the unsuspecting shore*. 4The waves *of the nations* will demolish the *city* walls of Tyre and crumble her towers. *After the city is pummeled,* I will sweep away all of her rubble

and leave nothing but a bare rock. 5In *the loneliness of* the ocean, she will become a *desolate* island, used only for drying out fishnets. She will become prisoner and slave to all the nations, 6and her villages on the mainland will be massacred in battle. Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

7I am going to bring the great Babylonian king, the king of kings named Nebuchadnezzar, against Tyre. *He will charge down* from the north with *strapping* horses and *indestructible* chariots, *master* horsemen, and an enormous army. 8He will dispatch his soldiers to destroy your villages on the mainland and then lay siege against you with ramps against your walls and shields raised *to deflect your opposition.* 9He will demolish your walls with his siege machines and dismantle your towers with axes. 10You will be covered with dust from the galloping of his war horses. Your walls will shake from the tumult of the horses, wagons, and chariots when he breaches your walls and comes *storming* into the city. 11His *rampaging* horses will trample all your streets. He will slaughter everyone in the battle and topple every strong pillar to the ground. 12They will loot your wealth and claim your goods! They will tear down your walls and fine houses, and they'll toss the wood and stone and rubble into the sea. 13I will *use My avenger to* silence your *lutes and* harps and put an end to your songs. 14I will leave you a bare rock *in the lonely ocean,* a *desolate* island used only for drying out fishnets. I promise you will never be rebuilt. *Never.* I, the Eternal Lord, declare this.

15(continuing to Tyre) Don't you think the coastlands will shake at the sound of your fall, at the groans of the injured, at the *great* massacre that takes place inside your *walls*? 16Then the princes from the other coastal cities will step down from their thrones, give up their *royal* robes, and remove their embroidered garments. They will clothe *their nakedness* with sheer terror and sit on the ground, constantly shaking with horror at *what happened to* you. 17Then they will sing a dirge over you:

How you are destroyed, O famous city!
City of sea people!
You and your kind were a great force
on the seas;
you terrorized all who lived around
you.

18Now, the coastlands will quake on the
day when you fall,
and the cities along the shore will
be terrified by your passing.

19When I destroy you and empty your streets, when I drown you and bury you within the ocean depths, 20I will sink you down into the pit where those people from long ago *sleep in death.* I will make you stay there, in the lower parts of the earth among the ancient ruins with those who dwell in the pit *of the dead,* and you will never be inhabited again. *You will never resurface* in the land of the living where I rest My glory. 21I will terrify you, and you will meet your end. You will be sought, but you will never be found again.

This is what the Eternal Lord declares.

27 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a lament for Tyre.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, sing a lament over Tyre. 3Sing of Tyre, gateway to the sea, merchant to many ports and many people. I, the Eternal Lord, say to you:

Tyre, you have claimed,
"I am perfect in beauty."
4Your territory *extends* to the heart of
the seas;
your builders have perfected your
beauty.
5*Like a great ship* they have made you
from the finest firs of Senir;
they took a cedar from Lebanon to
make you a *noble* mast.
6They brought oaks from Bashan and
made your oars.
They planked your deck with pines
from the coasts of Cyprus
and inlaid it with ivory!
7Your sail was made of fine linen from
Egypt, embroidered *by hand*;
your blue and purple awning was
tinted with dyes imported from
the coasts of Elishah.
8Your oarsmen were *strong* men from
Sidon and Arvad;
your crew was the most skilled *and
experienced* men, O Tyre.
9Expert craftsmen from Gebal were on
board
to make any repairs needed.
All the ships of the sea and their sailors
huddled around you
to trade for your goods.

10 Soldiers from Persia, Lydia, and Libya* were your army.
Their shields and helmets hung from your ship and announced your splendor.
11 Men from Arvad and Helech patrolled your walls,
and men from Gammad manned your towers.
Their shields hung on all your walls
and announced your splendor.
They have perfected your beauty.

12 Tarshish traded with you because of your great wealth and plentiful goods; they bartered silver, iron, tin, and lead for your wares. 13 Greece,* Tubal, and Meshech did business with you *as well.* They bartered slaves and boatloads of bronze for your wares. 14 The men of Beth-togarmah bartered work horses, war horses, and mules for your goods. 15 The people of Rhodes* traded with you too. You made *the people of* the coastland your own *special* market, and they paid you in ivory tusks and ebony. 16 Aram* traded with you because your goods were plentiful. They bartered precious stones,* purple cloth, embroidered work, exquisite linens, coral, and rubies for your wares. 17 Judah and the rest of Israel did business with you. They paid you fine wheat, fresh produce,* *sweet* honey, *fragrant* oil, and *exotic* balm for your merchandise. 18 Damascus—*the hub of caravan trading*—traded with you because of your great wealth and plentiful goods *as well. They brought* wine from Helbon, wool from Zahar*; 19 Greeks from Uzal* bartered iron, cassia *bark,* and other herbs for your goods. 20 Deban traded in saddle blankets with you. 21 Arabia and all of the Kedar princes certainly traded with you. They traded lambs, rams, and goats. 22 The businessmen of Sheba and Raamah exchanged the finest spices, gems, and gold for your *plentiful* goods. 23-24 Haran, Canneh, Eden, and merchants from Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad did business with you, exchanging exquisite clothing, indigo fabrics, embroidered cloth, carpets dyed of various colors, and tightly braided ropes. 25 Commerce was bustling as Tarshish's ships transported your goods. In the heart of the sea your *docks* were full, *Tyre, and your business* brought you glory and success.

Tarshish was probably located in what is southern Spain today, so Tyre's commercial reach extended to the other side of the Mediterranean.

26 *Expert* seafarers row you out into the high seas;
there, a squall from the east shatters you in the heart of the sea!
27 *All is lost:* your treasures and goods and products
along with all crew aboard—seafarers, pilots, carpenters, traders, and soldiers.
Everyone and everything will sink into the heart of the sea
when the ship is wrecked.
28 The coastal plains shudder
at the shrieks and cries of your pilots.
29 All oarsmen, seafarers, and pilots come down from their ships.
They stand on the shore *and gaze out to your catastrophe.*
30 They mourn over you with bitter cries that drown out your screams.
They throw dust on top of their heads and wallow in *beds of* ashes.
31 They shave all their hair and wear sackcloth around their waists.
They grieve and weep over you, deeply and bitterly.
32 And they shout their dirge over your demise:
"Who is like Tyre, *sunken and* silent in the heart of the sea?"
33 Your goods pleased many people when your sailors went to sea.
Your treasures and products made kings rich all over the world.
34 But now you are shipwrecked, devoured by the great waves.
Your products and all your crew have been swallowed by the sea.
35 All the inhabitants of the coasts are shocked at *what happened to* you;
their kings grimace in fear as they look on.
36 And the traders of the nations jeer at you;
the end of your story is a horror, for you are gone, never to return.

* 27:10 Hebrew, *Lud* and *Put* * 27:13 Hebrew, *Javan* * 27:15 Hebrew manuscripts read, "Dedan." * 27:16 Some manuscripts read, "Edom." * 27:16 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 27:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 27:18 Or, white * 27:19 Or, wine from Isal

28 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message about the prince of Tyre.*

► Tyre's troubles start not long after Judah is destroyed in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar marches there and begins a siege that lasts for almost 13 years. The part of the city on the mainland is captured by Nebuchadnezzar, but the princes of Tyre continue to rule from their island palace for another two centuries. In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great will use the rubble of the mainland city to construct a bridge to the island. Soon the island of Tyre will be in ruins, as it will remain forever.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, go to the prince of Tyre, and give him this message. This is what I, Eternal Lord, have to say:

Your heart is swollen with pride—
a pride that says, "I am a god.
I sit on a divine throne in the heart of the sea."
But *I assure you, prince,* you are nothing more
than a *mortal* man—a man of mortal destiny.
Even though you have the self-confidence of a god,
you are made entirely of flesh and blood.
3But *obviously* you must be wiser than Daniel, *that ancient judge in Ugarit.*
Clearly, you understand every mystery.
4You used your wisdom and discernment to amass a great fortune,
to fill your treasuries with gold and silver.
5Your knack for trade has built your wealth,
but your *success and* riches have made your heart swell with pride.

► Because of Tyre's location off the coast, she receives daily supplies and survives a long war; therefore, her ruler, Ethbaal III, has every human reason to be confident. Such confidence and wickedness is bred into him: Ethbaal's ancestor, Ethbaal I, was a priest of their goddess Astarte and seized the throne for himself. He was a powerful prince, making political connections and spreading the worship of his goddess all over the region. Ethbaal I's daughter, Jezebel, was famous for entrenching pagan worship in Israel, so Tyre is indirectly the root of Israel's wickedness.

6Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: Because you imagine yourself as wise as a god,
7I am going to recruit outsiders—merciless nations—to take you down.
They will draw their swords *and cut you down to size,*
attacking the beautiful things your wisdom *procured* and destroying your splendor.
8They will force you down to the pit,
and you will die the death of those struck down in the heart of the sea.
9At that moment, will you protest to your executioners, "But I'm a god!"?
To those who strike you down you are no god.
To them, you are nothing more than a *mortal* man.
10You will die the death of *all* who are uncircumcised,
at the hand of outsiders.

Like the Israelites, the people of Tyre practice circumcision.

So said the Eternal Lord.
11The word of the Eternal continued giving me His message.

Eternal One: 12Son of man, sing a lament for the prince of Tyre. Tell him this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say:

You were a paradigm of perfection,
human life at its best.
You had *everything a leader needs*: immense wisdom and perfect beauty.
13You lived in Eden, God's garden.
You were clothed in *magnificent splendor,* covered in jewels:

Sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper,
lapis lazuli, turquoise, and emerald.
All the mountings were made of gold,*
prepared for you on the day you were created.
14I anointed you the guardian* *of the garden* and stationed you *at your post* to protect it.
You were on *the divine mountain,* the holy mount of God.
There you walked among the fiery stones.
15You were entirely pure from the day you were created,
until wickedness *crept in and* was found in you!
16Too much buying and selling—*a greedy obsession!*
You became motivated to violence and did wicked things.
Polluted and disgraced, I drove you off the mountain of God!
I expelled you, O guardian protector, from the fiery stones.
17Your heart swelled with pride because of your beauty *and talents.*
Your hunger for fame, your thirst for glory corrupted your wisdom.
This is why I drove you to the ground and made an example out of you before *a company of* kings.
18You desecrated your sanctuaries by pursuing sin after sin and cheating in business.
I set a flame inside of you, and it devoured you completely.
I reduced you to *a pile of* ashes on the ground,
a sight for all to see.

Ezekiel prophesies that the prince of Tyre will die violently without the benefit of a proper burial and find no peace in the afterlife.

19All the nations who know you are appalled at *what has happened to* you.
The end of your story is a horror: you are gone, never to return.

► The prince of Tyre's biography echoes the creation story. Adam, too, is described as a perfect and honored creation of God, given guardianship of the earth and full access to God. Expelled from paradise, wickedness becomes entrenched and spreads until God is forced to execute His judgment.

20The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message against Sidon.*

Eternal One: 21-22Son of man, face Sidon and preach to her. This is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say:

Look, Sidon! I am against you;
My glory will be revealed when I *prevail* over you.
They will know that I am the Eternal One
when I have punished her
and revealed My holy self to her.
23I will rain down disease upon her—*an epidemic of death!*
Her streets will become rivers of blood!
The wounded will fall within her walls,
and the battle *will rage* on every side!
Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

24As for the people of Israel, they will no longer have to deal with the spiteful, thorny neighbors who mocked their *destruction.* Then they will know that I am the Eternal Lord.

25Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: When I gather the people of Israel from the nations where they have been scattered, I will reveal My holiness through them with all the nations watching. They will live in their own land—the land I gave to My servant, Jacob. 26They will live safely there, building houses and planting vineyards. They will live safely there when I punish all of their neighbors who mocked them and treated them shamefully. Then they will know that I am the Eternal their God.

29 In the 10th year, on the 12th day of the 10th month, the word of the Eternal came to me *with a message about Egypt.*

* 28:13 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 28:14 Hebrew, *cherub*

Eternal One: [2]Son of man, face Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and preach against him and against all of Egypt! [3]Tell him this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say:

Look, I am against you,
Pharaoh king of Egypt.
You are like a great river monster,
snaking through the streams *in the Nile,*
declaring, "I own the Nile. I made it, and it is mine."
[4]But I will set a hook in your jaws
and make the fish of the Nile cling to your scales.
I will haul you in out of your waterways,
with all the fish clinging to your scales.
[5]Then I will *take you and* leave you out in the desert,
you and all the fish of your waters.
You'll collapse in the wide open space,
but no one will *bother to* collect your remains
Or bury you *with your ancestors.*
You'll be food for *wild* beasts of the earth and birds in the sky.
[6]Then all who live in Egypt will know that I am the Eternal One.
You have been nothing more than a staff made of *wobbly* reeds to the people of Israel.
[7]When they took hold of you, *looking for support,*
you splintered and tore their hands.
When they leaned on you, you snapped *in two,*
and they wrenched their backs *because of you.**

[8]So this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: "Look, I will march an army against you! It's coming to slaughter your people and your animals. [9]I am going to make the land of Egypt a lonely wasteland; then they will know that I am the Eternal One."

Because of your *arrogant* utterance, "I own the Nile. I made it, *and it is mine,*" [10]I oppose you and your streams. I will turn the land of Egypt into a lonely wasteland from Migdol to Aswan,* all the way to Ethiopia.* [11-12]No people or animals will pass through there. Not a single person will live there for 40 years. I will turn the land of Egypt into a wasteland, *a tragedy among tragedies,* the most devastating of devastations! Any cities still standing *after the war* will lie in ruins for 40 years. I will scatter the Egyptians *to the wind* and divide them among the nations.

[13]After 40 years have passed, I am going to gather the Egyptians from the nations where I scattered them. [14]I will restore their fortunes and lead them back to the land of Pathros, the land of their ancestors. There, Egypt will begin *again, but this time* as an insignificant kingdom.

According to Egyptian legends, their people originate in southern Egypt near Pathros. Ezekiel is apparently aware of these stories and indicates God will give Egypt a new start.

[15]She will be the weakest of any kingdom, never gaining power and never again ruling over other nations. [16]The people of Israel will never again turn to Egypt in a time of crisis *because Egypt's fate* will be a reminder of her sins—when Israel chose to trust a *pagan* nation *instead of Me*. Then My people will know that I am the Eternal Lord.

► The prophet directs his oracle against Pharaoh, but in reality the pharaoh represents all of the people. Pharaoh's audacious claim that he created the Nile stands in clear contradiction to the fact that Israel's God created the heavens and the earth. So God becomes his enemy, fishes the great river monster out of the river—the lifeline of Egypt—and leaves his body as food for the animals and birds of the desert. The "monster" could refer either to the Nile crocodile—a symbol of the Pharaoh's power—or the mythical creature of chaos who opposes God but is ultimately defeated by Him. The other fishes clinging to his scales appear to represent all those who depend on Pharaoh, including the Egyptian people and those foolish enough to align with them.

[17]In the 27th year, on the 1st day of the 1st month, the word of the Eternal came to me.

* 29:7 Hebrew reads, "made their loins shake." * 29:10 Hebrew, *Syrene* * 29:10 Hebrew, *Cush*

Eternal One: [18]Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has exhausted his army *with the long siege* of Tyre. *His soldiers' bodies are spent,* their heads bald and shoulders rubbed raw, *yet they have made little progress.* The king and his army have not been rewarded for all of their hard work against Tyre.

[19]Therefore, the Eternal Lord says:

Eternal One: Look, I am going to hand the land of Egypt over to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. He will take away her wealth—her goods and her population—by force and pay his army with the treasures *he acquires there.* [20]I have given him Egypt's land *as his reward to compensate him* for all the work he has done for Me.

[21]When that day comes, I will make a horn grow for the people of Israel *so that they will be confident that My deliverance is near.* Then I will open your mouth so that they will realize *you have been speaking for Me all along.* Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

30 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a lament for Egypt.*

Eternal One: [2]Son of man, speak! Tell them this is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Weep and wail,
for today is the day you've dreaded;
[3]The day *of God's judgment* is near;
the day of the Eternal is closing in!
It is a day of *dark* clouds *and gloom*
that foreshadows the doom of the nations.
[4]A sword will come against Egypt,
agony will invade Ethiopia,
When the dead cover the land of Egypt,
when her wealth is taken away and
her foundations are leveled.

[5]Every nation in league with her will be destroyed in the war: Ethiopia,* Put, Lud, all of Arabia, and Libya.

[6]Egypt's friends will crumble
along with her arrogance, her proud strength.
From Migdol to Aswan,*
they will fall by the sword.
[7]Egypt will be laid waste, *a tragedy among tragedies, the most* devastating of devastations! Her cities will lie *in ruins,* surrounded by *the empty desolation of* other ruined cities. [8]Then they will *all* know that I am the Eternal One after I burn down Egypt and demolish her allies. [9]On that day *of destruction,* I will dispatch messengers in ships to wake up the sleeping nation of Ethiopia. They will drown in agony when they hear the news of Egypt's doom! *They will know,* "We're next! Judgment *is on the horizon*!"

[10-11]This is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: I will put an end to the *wealth and* population of Egypt
using the power of Nebuchadnezzar *as My weapon.*
I will dispatch the king of Babylon and his armies—
the most ruthless in the world—
to ravage the land!
They will unsheathe their swords against Egypt
and fill the land with the slain.
[12]I will dry up the waterways of the Nile
and sell the land to those who have evil designs.
I, the Eternal, promise to recruit foreigners
to destroy the land and plunder away everything *of value.*

[13]I, the Eternal Lord, have this to say:
I will demolish the *breathless* idols
and destroy the *vulgar* images in Memphis.*
There won't be a prince left in *all* the land of Egypt anymore;
I will infect the entire nation with *a plague of* fear!
[14]I will crush Pathros *in the south,* set fire to Zoan *in the delta,*
and deliver *a horrific* punishment to Thebes* *and all its temples.*
[15]I will drown Sin*—the great fortress of Egypt—in My wrath
and put an end to the *wealth and* population of Thebes.
[16]I will set fire to *all* of Egypt!
Sin will writhe in pain.
Thebes will be torn apart;
day after day Memphis will live in fear.
[17]The young soldiers of Heliopolis* and Pi-beseth will die in the battle;
the women will go into captivity.

* 30:5 Hebrew, *Cush* * 30:6 Hebrew, *Syrene* * 30:13 Hebrew, *Noph* * 30:14 Hebrew, *No* * 30:15 Egyptian city of Sais.
* 30:17 Hebrew, *On*

In the ancient world, conquered peoples become the victors' property. While the men are often killed, the women are taken away and used as slaves for various purposes.

18 An *unnatural* darkness will cover
Tehaphnehes
when I destroy the dominion of
Egypt.
I will put an end to her arrogance, her
proud strength!
Dark clouds will veil her,
and her daughters will be led away
as slaves.
19 This is how I will deliver *My punishing*
judgments against Egypt;
then they will know that I am the
Eternal One.

20 During the eleventh year, on the seventh day of the first month, the word of the Eternal came to me *with a message about Egypt*:

Eternal One: 21 Son of man, I've broken the arm of the Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Look! The bone has not yet been set, and his arm has not been splinted in order to promote healing. Therefore, he won't be able to handle a sword *to defend the nation's power*. 22 So this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: Look! I oppose Pharaoh, king of Egypt. I will break both arms—the strong one and the already-broken one. I'll make sure he'll not be able to handle a sword! 23 I will scatter the Egyptians *to the wind*—dividing them among the nations. 24-25 Meanwhile I will strengthen the arms of Babylon's king, and I will place My sword in his hand. But I will break Pharaoh's arms, and the king *of Egypt* will groan with the pain of his injury before Nebuchadnezzar. So I will make the arms of Babylon's king strong, even as the arms of Pharaoh grow weak and fall limp *at his side*. Then Egypt will know that I am the Eternal One—when I place My sword in the hands of the Babylonian king and he wields it against the land of Egypt. 26 When I scatter the Egyptians *to the wind* and divide them among the nations, they will know that I am the Eternal One.

► Egypt is the last in this series of oracles against the nations. The imagery is just as profound and poetically graphic as in the other oracles. The terror of Tyre and Sidon's defeat is fresh on the minds of Jerusalem's citizens, and they wonder, what else will Nebuchadnezzar do to the Egyptians and their forces? The prophet has the answer. Like a locust hopping from city to city, the Babylonian army will move from the northern capital, Memphis (in lower Egypt), to the southern capital, Thebes (in upper Egypt). God proclaims through His living example, Ezekiel, that He has put His sword in Nebuchadnezzar's hand to punish Egypt. If Egypt with all its history and splendor will fall to Babylonia, what chance do other nations have?

31 During the eleventh year, on the first day of the third month, the word of the Eternal came to me *with a message about the Pharaoh*.

Eternal One: 2 Son of man, tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and all his subjects,

Who is comparable to your greatness,
Pharaoh?
3 Think about Assyria—*a land once
broad and handsome.*
Like a cedar in Lebanon offering shade
and beauty,
it grew high enough to reach the
clouds!
4 *Heaven's* waters made it grow, *kept it
healthy*;
the deep waters made it grow
tall,
Causing the rivers to flow around
where it was planted,
channeling water to all the *thirsty*
trees of the field.
5 It towered high above all the other
trees in that place.
Its boughs increased in number;
Its branches grew *stronger, thicker, and*
longer—
nourished by the generous waters
beneath it.
6 All the birds of the air built their nests
in its *strong* limbs;
all the *wild* beasts of the earth
gave birth beneath its *mighty*
branches;
all the great nations flourished in
its *long* shadow.

7It was magnificent in its beauty,
grand in its form, and long in its branches;
For its roots grew deep and tapped *the sources of* many waters.
8No cedar trees in God's garden could rival it;
no junipers could grow as many boughs;
no *oriental* plane trees could match its many branches;
No trees in God's garden could rival its *magnificent* beauty!
9I made it *mighty and* beautiful;
I molded its limbs, *leaves, and branches*
To be the envy of every tree in Eden, of each tree in God's garden.

10Therefore, this is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: Because it is *a giant tree,* towering high *above the rest,* because its upper branches reach the clouds and it boasts of its unrivaled, stately stature, 11I will hand it over to the ruler of the nations for him to deal with it according to its wickedness. I have cast it aside. 12Foreigners who strike terror *in the heart* of the nations chopped it down and left it *to rot.* Its *mighty* branches crashed to the ground upon mountains and valleys. Its limbs shattered in ravines *and littered rivers and streams. The tree was no longer a giant* and no longer provided cool shade, so all the nations of the earth abandoned it. 13Birds of the air perched on the trunk of the fallen tree. Wild beasts made homes within its limbs. 14Consequently, no trees should ever boast of their stately stature, nor have their branches reach the clouds, nor tower high above the rest. There will be no more giants nourished by the deep waters *of the earth,* for they're all destined to die and be for the world below. They will go down to the pit with all the people of the earth.

15So I, the Eternal Lord, say that on the day when *Assyria,* the giant cedar, went to the place of the dead, I filled the deep waters with mourning. I halted the flow of its rivers and streams and veiled Lebanon's *hills and mountains* with *black for* mourning. All the trees in the woodland withered away because of its demise! 16-17I caused the nations to shake at the sound of its fall when I sent the giant tree to *the destiny of all mortal things*—death. All the trees of Eden, the finest and most well-watered trees in all of Lebanon, were comforted in that place of death. They accompanied it to the pit along with all those slain in battle—those who once kept it strong and rested in *the cool of* its shade along with the rest of the nations. 18Which of the trees in Eden could rival your magnificent beauty and stately glory? But even you will perish and be taken to the earth below, along with *other* trees of Eden. You will lie *in the grave* beside the uncircumcised who were slain in battle. This is *the fate of* Pharaoh and all his people.

So said the Eternal Lord.

32 During the twelfth year, on the first day of the twelfth month, the word of the Eternal came to me *with a lament over Pharaoh and his people.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, sing a lament over Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Tell him,

You imagine yourself a lion *moving mightily* through the nations,
but you're really like the *great* sea monster
Rampaging through the waterways—muddying up the streams
and fouling the rivers with your feet.

3So I, the Eternal One, say:
I will use a company of many people to cover you with My net
Using the nations to make the trap.
Once you are caught, they will haul you up in My net.
4I will leave you on *dry* land
and cast you in an open field.
I will summon the birds of the sky to land on you *and feast on your flesh.*
I will bring the wild beasts of the earth to satisfy their hunger with you.
5I will scatter bits and pieces of you on the hills
and fill the valleys with your remains.
6I will see that the land drinks your flowing blood
as it streams to the mountains and fills the dry riverbeds.
7When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and dim the stars;

I will hide the sun behind a cloud,
and the moon will not shine.
8I will darken the lights that shine in the heavens
and shroud your land in darkness.

9I will disturb the hearts of many people across the world with *accounts of* your destruction. *The news will travel* to places you have never *heard of or* knew existed. 10I will shock many peoples with your story; kings will be terrified to remember your fate when I wave My sword at them. On the day of your destruction, they will tremble constantly, fearing your *tragic* destiny might also be theirs.

11I, the Eternal Lord, say that the sword of the Babylonian king will strike against you, *Egypt*. 12I will use the swords of mighty warriors—all from the most ruthless nation on earth—to strike down your vast population.

They will hack the pride of Egypt to pieces
and slaughter her vast population.
13I will destroy all her livestock that drink from the abundant rivers and streams
so they will no longer be muddied by the feet of man or beast.
14*Once they are gone,* I will settle the waters of Egypt
and let them flow as *smoothly* as *olive* oil.
15After I make the land of Egypt a wasteland,
strip the land bare, and crush all of her inhabitants,
Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

16This is the lament they will sing over her. The daughters of the nations will mourn
and sing for Egypt and for all her people.

So says the Eternal Lord.

17In the twelfth year, on the fifteenth day of the *first* month, the word of the Eternal came to me *regarding Egypt.*

Eternal One: 18Son of man, grieve for the vast population of Egypt. Deliver Egypt and her foreign allies to the lowest regions of the earth, to the pit where they may join the rest of the dead.

► In Ezekiel's day the Israelites believe that after death, all people go down to the pit, often called "Sheol." The Hebrew word comes from a root that means "to ask a question" because no one knows exactly what happens on the other side. The afterlife remains an open question for Ezekiel's contemporaries. The Bible describes it as a dark, shadowy place, located perhaps in the lowest regions of the earth. It stands in sharp contrast to the descriptions Jesus' apostles will give of heaven and hell later in the New Testament. The Scriptures do not reveal everything at once. They invite the reader to keep digging and keep seeking to find answers.

Eternal One: 19*Ask Egypt,* "Who compares to your beauty *now*?
Go down *into the pit* and rest among the uncircumcised *pagans*."
20They will fall and be buried with those who died in battle. The sword is drawn *and at her throat*! They have dragged her and all her vast population away. 21The mighty rulers in the place of the dead will hail them: "*Welcome to the world of the dead!* Come on down and take your place among the uncircumcised *pagans* and those killed in battle."

The Egyptians practice circumcision and are careful in burying their dead. They consider it an insult to be laid to rest with the uncircumcised and those never properly buried.

22Assyria is in the pit—she and her entire company. She is encircled by the graves of her people—all of them slain, fallen by the sword. 23Their graves are in the lowest regions of the pit; a vast company encircles her grave; all of them are slain, fallen by the sword. Their reign of terror among the living has ended *in an eternity of dishonor*.

24Elam is there, too, with all her population around her grave. They all died *in battle,* slaughtered by the sword. They descended to the lowest regions of the pit uncircumcised. 25Their reign of terror among the living has ended *in an eternity* among the disgraced in the pit. They

have made her a bed among those killed *in battle*. The graves of her people surround her. They were slaughtered by the sword and descended into death without being circumcised. Their reign of terror among the living has ended *in an eternity* among the disgraced in the pit. They have taken their place among the slain.

26Meshech and Tubal take residence *in the lowest parts of the pit as well*. The graves of their people surround them. Although they terrorized the living, they have all died in battle without being circumcised. 27But they won't share a space with the other uncircumcised *pagan* warriors (who *also* reigned down terror on earth) inhabiting the place of death *honorably,* buried with their weapons. Meshech and Tubal won't rest on their swords *in valor*; instead, the punishment for their wickedness will rest on their bones. 28*Pharaoh,* you, too, will lie *with the other residents of the underworld*. Your place is set beside the uncircumcised and those who died in battle.

29Edom is there, too, with all her royalty and leadership. Even though they possessed great power *while on earth,* they dwell with others in the pit. They lie beside the uncircumcised and those who died in battle.

30All the northern princes and all the Sidonians will end up in the pit too. They used their power to terrorize others *in the land of the living*. But now they dwell in shame with others in the pit. They lie beside the uncircumcised and those who died in battle.

31I, the Eternal One, declare that Pharaoh will see and take comfort in the company of all his people—especially his army—slaughtered by the sword. 32Even though I used him to terrorize the living, I am consigning him and all his people to lie *in the deepest parts of the pit* beside the uncircumcised and all those who died in battle.

So says the Eternal Lord.

33 The word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, talk with your fellow exiles, and tell them, "If I wage war against a country and the people appoint one of their own to be a lookout, 3and if the lookout sees an army advancing toward the land and blows a trumpet to warn the people, 4-5and if someone hears the alarm and ignores it, allowing that army to come and capture him; then it is his own fault *for not taking appropriate action*. His blood will be on his own hands. If he had done something, he could have saved his life *and the lives of others*. 6But if the lookout sees an army advancing and does not sound the alarm to warn the people and if some are *captured or* killed, then their blood will be on the hands of the lookout."

7Son of man, I have appointed you as a lookout for the nation of Israel. You must listen to what I have to say, then go and pass My warning on to your countrymen. 8If I have a message for the wicked such as, "Wicked one, you are going to die," and you don't warn him to change his ways, then he will surely die because of his wickedness; but I will hold you responsible for his death. 9If you do warn him to change his ways and he doesn't do anything about it, then he will die because of his wickedness; but you will have saved your own life.

10Son of man, you must tell the people of Israel, "You keep saying, 'Our crimes and sins are weighing us down! We are rotting away! How can we live?'" 11Tell them, "As I live," says the Eternal Lord, "I don't enjoy watching the wicked die; I want the wicked to stop doing what they're doing and live! Repent! Turn from your wicked ways. Why would you choose to die *instead of live,* people of Israel?"

12Son of man, tell your people, "The righteousness of the righteous won't save him on the day he breaks My law, and the wickedness of the wicked won't cause him to *stumble and* fall if he turns away from his wickedness. The righteous is not able to depend on his *former* right actions to save him when he decides to sin. 13If I assure life to the one who does what is right, but he depends on his *reputation for* doing right and ends up sinning, then none of his former right actions will be remembered *or tallied in his favor*. He will surely die because of his sins. 14If I tell the wicked, 'You are certainly going to die,' but he turns from his wicked path and chooses to be honest and do what is right, 15if he gives back a *debtor's* collateral, if he returns what he has stolen, if he lives by the laws that offer true life and abandons his evil ways; then he will certainly live. He will escape death. 16Not one of his former sins will be remembered *and tallied*

against him. He has lived by what is right and true, and he will certainly live."

17Still your own people say, "The Lord's way is not fair *at all*." But they are the ones with perverted ways. 18If a good person turns from the good path he is on and chooses to act wickedly, he will die for it. 19If a wicked man turns from the wicked path he is on and chooses to live by what is right and true, he will save his life. 20But you, people of Israel, continue to complain, "The Lord's way is not fair *at all*." I will judge each of you according to what you have done.

21During the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth day of the tenth month, someone who had survived the *Babylonian* attack on Jerusalem brought me news *as God said he would*:* "The city has been captured!" 22The evening before the *Judean* refugee came to me, the Eternal took hold of me; and by the time the refugee arrived the next morning, He had opened my mouth, renewed my voice, and broken my silence.

23Then the word of the Eternal came to me *with a message for the survivors.*

Eternal One: 24Son of man, the survivors dwelling in the rubble in the land of Israel are *speaking nonsense,* saying, "Abraham was but one man, yet he took possession of the land. We are many; *surely* the land has been given to us to own." 25Because *they continue in their false hope,* go give them this message from the Eternal Lord: "You eat *raw* meat with blood still in it, you worship idols, and you shed *innocent* blood. Do you really think you are *worthy of* owning the land *of Israel*? 26You rely on your own strength in battle, you do shocking things, and you all partake in adulterous sex with your neighbors' wives. Do you really think you are *worthy of* owning the land?" 27Tell them the Eternal Lord says, "As surely as I, *the Eternal* live, those dwelling in the rubble will be killed in battle, those who live out in the open will be fed to *wild* beasts, and those hiding in fortresses or caves will die of disease. 28I will turn this land into a wasteland, and *no one will step foot there*. Her pride in her power will be knocked out from under her, and Israel's mountains will become so desolate that no one will dare to pass through them. 29When I have made the land nothing more than a wasteland of rubble because of their shocking actions, they will know that I am the Eternal One."

30But you, son of man, your own people are talking about you *everywhere*—in the streets and at doorsteps—saying to their kinsmen, "Come listen to *what Ezekiel is saying. He has* a word from the Eternal." 31They come to you, just as people flock *to see someone famous.* My people sit at your feet and *seem to* hang on your every word, but they never apply those *sacred* instructions to their own lives. For they act as they speak—with lustful desire—and think only of how they'll make a profit. 32To them you are nothing more than a gifted singer of lustful songs, *a teller of tales,* a master of instruments! They hear what you say but fail to put any of it into practice. 33But when the messages *you've given them* actually come true—and I assure you, everything you tell them is going to come true—they will realize a *true* prophet has been among them.

► The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. must confound Ezekiel. While he is, of course, devastated by the destruction of his homeland and the deaths of his countrymen, their defeat vindicates him and his life's work. Everyone now knows that Ezekiel is a true prophet of God, and his years of suffering to bring his fellow exiles God's message are rewarded by the people fawning over him. Unfortunately, the people's sudden attention to Ezekiel's words is akin to a person's adoration of his favorite entertainer. They love to be in his presence, but they take him no more seriously than they ever have. Ezekiel's popularity will be short-lived.

34 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message for Israel's leaders.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, preach against Israel's shepherds! Speak directly to the shepherds and tell them this is what the Eternal Lord has to say: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel whose only concern is to *protect and* nourish themselves!

* 33:21 Ezekiel 24:26

Isn't a shepherd's job to look after the sheep? 3*Yet you exploit them in every way.* You devour their fat, make *soft* clothes *and blankets* out of their wool, and slaughter the best sheep *for your table*. Meanwhile you don't take care of the sheep *at all*. 4You have not sought to nurse the weak. You have not *gone out to* tend to the sick. You have not bandaged the injured. You don't bring back the strays or look for the lost. You have *led them with neglect,* ruled them with harshness, *shepherded them* with cruelty! 5They had no *real* shepherd, so they have scattered; the *entire* flock was prey for wild beasts. 6My sheep drifted *aimlessly* through all the mountains and up and down every hill. My flock was scattered all over the world, *scattered like the stars in the night sky,* and not a single shepherd went looking for them."

God condemns the shepherd-rulers of Israel for neglecting their duties and exploiting their human flock. Heaven will not remain silent at this injustice. A change is coming.

7Now pay attention, shepherds, to My word: 8As surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, because My sheep are without a shepherd, because they have become prey for all the wild beasts to feed upon, because my shepherds have not gone in search of My sheep but have only looked out for themselves and not *watched after and* cared for My flock; 9I encourage you, shepherds, to listen to the word of the Eternal.

10-11Those *self-centered* shepherds are My enemies! *As far as I am concerned,* they are no longer shepherds. They will not help themselves to My sheep any longer. I will recover My flock from those *corrupt* shepherds. I will snatch My sheep from their mouths! My sheep will no longer provide milk, *clothing,* or meat to them. I will personally go out searching for My sheep. I will find them wherever they are, *and I will look after them.* 12In the same way one shepherd seeks after, *cares for, and watches over* his scattered flock, so will I be the guardian of My sheep. I will be their Rescuer! *No matter where they have scattered, I will go to find them.* I will bring them back from the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. 13-14I will call them out from the nations, gather them from the countries, and bring them into their own land. I will feed them in the *high* mountain pastures and meadows of Israel. I will feed them on good pastures; they will graze on the mountain heights of Israel. They will lie down *to rest* on this good ground, and they will feed *on succulent grasses* in bountiful pastures on the slopes of Israel's *sanctuary* mountains. 15I Myself will *watch over My sheep and* feed My flock. *Whenever they are tired,* I will lead them to rest *on the cool mountain grass.* 16When they are lost, I will seek them and bring back every last stray. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. However, I will destroy the fat and powerful. I will feed them *a healthy portion* of judgment.

17As for you, My flock, this is what the Eternal Lord has to say: "Watch carefully! I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and male goats." 18Are you not satisfied grazing in *blooming* pastures, *feasting off rich mountain lands*? Do you have to trample all of the pastures with your feet? Are you not satisfied drinking out of clear *mountain* streams? Do you have to muddy all of the *mountain* streams with your feet? 19Why should *the rest of* My flock have to graze on trampled pastures and drink from muddied streams because of your *careless* feet?

20So this is what the Eternal Lord has to say to them: "Watch *carefully*! I will personally judge between the fat sheep and the skinny sheep." 21Because you *fat sheep* bully the weak, push them around, and threaten them with your horns until you scatter them to distant *mountains,* 22*I will step in and save them.* I will rescue them, and they will no longer be hunted *and hassled.* I will judge between one sheep and another. 23I will designate one shepherd over the entire flock: My *faithful* servant, David. He will *watch over them and* care for them. He will be their shepherd. 24I, the Eternal, will be their God; and My *faithful* servant, David, will be their prince.

I, the Eternal One, have spoken.

25I will establish a covenant of peace with them and drive away all the dangerous *wild* animals from the land. Then they will be able to live safely in the wilderness and sleep *soundly* in the forests. 26I will make them and the area around My *holy* hill a blessing. At My direction, there will be plenty of rainfall when it is needed. There will be showers of blessing! 27The trees of the fields *and orchards* will bear *abundant* fruit, the soil *of the*

After God declares His opposition to the shepherd-rulers who neglected and exploited their human flock, God pledges to get involved personally. He will search for the lost sheep, return the strays, and care for them tenderly back in the beautiful land of Israel, the land of promise.

But in God's human flock are trouble and competition. Even as God lovingly supplies His flock with plenty of good food, clear water, and pleasant pastures, some trample what they can't control and foul what they can't consume. Some bully and push their weight around, while others move aside or run for the hills. Again God sees the problem and promises to step in, personally, to rescue His hassled people and put an end to injustice. So God promises to send another shepherd-ruler, in the spirit of King David, who will love and care for the flock as God Himself does. This Davidic shepherd will be unlike the wicked, neglectful shepherd-rulers in Israel's past; this son of David will rule as their prince in submission to Israel's one True God.

But there is more. In the final movement of this oracle, God announces a new covenant—a covenant of peace. Its scope is beyond human community and politics. It is a renewal of life in the land of Israel and, by extension, in the rest of creation.

fields will produce ample crops, and My people will rest securely within their land. They will know that I am the Eternal when I destroy the dominion *of their oppressors* and liberate them from those who made them slaves. 28Foreign powers won't ravage them anymore, and wild beasts will no longer feast on their flesh. They'll be safe *and free* and fearless. 29I will make their land famous for its *beauty and* productivity. Never again will famine strike their land. Never again will other nations sneer at them. 30They will know that I, the Eternal One their God, am on their side and that they, the people of Israel, are My people.

The Eternal said this, 31then added,

Eternal One: As for you, you are My sheep, the human flock of My pasture, and I am your God.

35 The word of the Eternal came to me *with a message for Edom.*

Eternal One: 2Son of man, turn toward Mount Seir and preach against it. 3Tell *the Edomites* that this is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Pay attention! I oppose you, Mount Seir!
I will raise My hand against you, *strike you,*
and leave you an empty wasteland.
4I will turn your cities to rubble,
and you will lie desolate *and deserted.*
Then you will know that I am the Eternal One.

5You held an old grudge against the Israelites, and you handed them over to death and defeat when they were in the midst of disaster, at a crucial moment of their final punishment.

► Israel has no more implacable enemy than Edom. As the descendants of Esau, whose brother Jacob stole his birthright and his father's blessing, the Edomites view the Israelites as illegitimate rulers and thieves. So shortly after Nebuchadnezzar razes Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Edom seizes its opportunity for revenge and swoops in to fill the political vacuum that results. The Edomites are not operating as God's instruments. They attack Israel out of their own greed, thinking no one is left to oppose them. They are wrong. The land of Israel never belongs to the people themselves; it belongs to God. When the Edomites sneak in to pillage the land of Israel, they find the stewards of the land gone or severely weakened, but the true Owner is at home and is ready to prosecute them for their actions.

Eternal One: 6As surely as I, the Eternal Lord, live, *what you have given, you will receive*! I will hand you over to bloodshed, and it will come after you. Because you have been quick to shed blood, I will make your blood flow! 7I will leave Mount Seir an empty wasteland and destroy any who come and go. 8I will spread your corpses upon the mountains; all those slaughtered in battle will fill the hills and valleys and riverbeds! 9I will turn you into an eternal wasteland; your cities *and towns* will lie empty *and silent*. Then you will know that I am the Eternal.

10You keep saying, "We will take possession of these two countries and two nations—*Israel and Judah*. We will own them." And *you have the nerve to say this* right in front of Me! 11Consequently, *as surely* as I, the Eternal Lord, live, the rage and jealousy you have shown as a result of your hatred of them will be returned to you. When I judge you, I will show them who I am *and remind them they are still mine*. 12*When that day arrives,* you will know that I, the Eternal One, have overheard all the despicable threats you made against Israel's mountains: "They're nothing but rubble! They're as good as ours; let's take what we want!" 13You said so many haughty things against Me, and I heard *every word of it*.

14This is what the Eternal God has to say.

Eternal One: While everyone else in the world sings *songs* and has happy *feasts,* I will leave you *empty and* desolate. 15Since you celebrated the destruction of the land Israel was meant to inherit, I'm going to treat you the same way. O Mount Seir, you and the rest of Edom will be turned into an empty wasteland! Then you will know that I am the Eternal One.

36 **Eternal One:** Son of man, preach to Israel's mountains. Tell them to heed the word of the Eternal.

2Here is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: The enemy rejoiced over you and said, "Finally! The ancient highlands are ours." 3Because they rejoiced, I, the Eternal Lord, say, "Your enemies crushed you from every side and left you *nothing but* an empty wasteland. They have carried you off *in pieces, divided you up,* and made you a remnant among the nations; and you became the topic of everyone's gossip and malicious attacks."

4Because of this, you mountains of Israel, heed the word of the Eternal Lord. The Eternal Lord says this to the *ancient* mountains and hills, to the riverbeds and valleys, and to the empty wasteland and deserted cities that have been plundered and mocked by every nation around you.

Eternal One: 5With fiery passion I have spoken against the rest of the nations, *but most especially* to Edom, who with malicious joy took My *precious* land for themselves and divided it up as their spoil. 6Therefore speak out about the land of Israel to the *ancient* mountains and hills and rivers and valleys.

The Eternal Lord gave this message to me.

Eternal One: Look! I have spoken with fiery anger and jealousy because you have been scoffed at by the nations. 7Therefore, I, the Eternal Lord, lift My hand and swear *to you* that those nations around you *will suffer as you have;* they'll be *mocked and* put to shame.

8But you, Israel's mountains, will shoot forth new branches and bear fruit for My people Israel. They will be home soon. 9I, of course, care about you and will turn My attention on you. Therefore, your soil will be plowed and *your fields* sown. 10I will increase the population *and replenish* the whole community of Israel. I will bring life back into the *desolate* cities, and heaps of rubble will be turned into *grand* structures. 11I will increase the population of people and animals that live on your slopes once again; they will be more numerous, and you will become more productive than ever before! *After all these things come to pass,* you will know that I am the Eternal. 12I will settle My people Israel on you, and they will possess you, and you will be the land they pass from one generation to the next. You will never again take their children.

13This is what the Eternal Lord said.

Eternal One: Because some say, "The land of Israel is known for devouring its people and depriving them of their children," 14I declare that you will never devour any of My people again or deprive them

of their children. 15I will see to it that you
do not have to listen to the *other* nations
scoff at you anymore, and you will no
longer suffer humiliation or be the cause
of your own nation's faltering.

So said the Eternal.

16*Again* the word of the Eternal came
to me.

Eternal One: 17Son of man, when Israel's
people lived in their own land, they des-
ecrated it with their *foul* lifestyles. Their
actions were as impure as a woman's
menstrual cycle. 18Because they *infected*
the land, pouring out innocent blood
and filling *their hearts and* homes with
idols, I poured out My wrath upon them.
19I scattered them among the nations
and dispersed them through *many* lands.
I judged them based on their lifestyles
and actions. 20Whenever they settled
among the nations *of their exile,* they
defiled My sacred name. Everywhere
they went people were saying, "These
are the Eternal's people, yet they have
been forced out of His land." 21I became
concerned for My sacred name, for
everywhere they went the people of
Israel were giving Me a bad name.

22Consequently, tell the people of
Israel that the Eternal Lord says, "When
I act, people of Israel, it won't be for your
own good, but for the sake of salvaging
My own reputation, which you have
slandered in front of those outside our
covenant.* 23I will restore My great name
to its holy state which has been des-
ecrated in every nation by you! *After all
these things come to pass and* I reveal My
holiness through you right before their
eyes, then these nations will know that
I am the Eternal. 24I will take you away
from the nations, gather you from all
the foreign soils, and bring you back to
your own land. 25I will sprinkle you with
clean water, and you will be clean. I will
wash away all of your dirtiness, and you
will be clean *and pure,* free from *the taint
of* idols. 26I will plant a new heart and
new spirit inside of you. I will take out
your *stubborn,* stony heart and give you a
willing, tender heart of flesh. 27And I will
put My Spirit inside of you and inspire
you to live by My statutes and follow My
laws. 28Then you will live in the *same*
land I gave your ancestors; you will be
My people, and I will be your God. 29-30I
will rescue you from your impurity. I
will summon the grain to produce large
harvests and never bring a famine upon
you *again.* I will increase your harvests
of fruit and grain, so that you will never
have to face the disgrace of famine again
among the nations. 31Then you will
recall your evil ways and wicked deeds.
You will recognize how bad they were
and hate yourselves for all the shock-
ing and despicable things you did! 32But
I, the Eternal Lord, am not doing this
for your own good. You should still feel
shame and humiliation for all you've
done, people of Israel!"

33This is what the Eternal Lord has to say.

Eternal One: On the day I cleanse you
from all your sins, I will bring people
back into your *desolate* cities, and heaps
of rubble will be turned into *grand* struc-
tures. 34The wasteland will be plowed
and sown—a vast change from the emp-
tiness those passing by are used to see-
ing. 35They will *be amazed,* saying, "This
place used to be an empty wasteland.
Now it's like the garden of Eden! The
cities were *demolished,* lying in ruins and
completely abandoned. Now they are
all restored, strong and full of people!"
36Then the nations near you will know
that I, the Eternal, am the One who
rebuilt *and restored* the ruined cities and
replanted the empty wilderness. I, the
Eternal One, promise to do exactly what
I've said.

37This is what the Eternal Lord has to say.

Eternal One: I will *soothe Israel's desire and*
do as they have asked Me to do: I will
make their population grow like a flock
of sheep. 38Just as flocks *of sheep* fill Jeru-
salem before the sacrifices at the public
feasts, the cities filled with rubble will
be filled with flocks of people. Then they
will know that I am the Eternal One.

37 The Eternal had a hold on
me, *and I couldn't escape it.*
The divine wind of the Eternal
One picked me up and set me down in
the middle of the valley, but this time it
was full of bones. 2God led me through
the bones. There were piles of bones
everywhere in the valley—dry bones *left
unburied.*

* 36:22 Romans 2:24

This oracle may be one of the best known in Ezekiel's prophecy. God's promise of a new heart and a new spirit echoes Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy (Jeremiah 31:31-34). What God's people need more than anything is for God to do a work of grace within them. Like other prophets of his day, Ezekiel is convinced that heaven must intervene in order to fix what is wrong on earth. It is not enough for people to try harder and do better. This work of grace begins with God cleansing His people with fresh water. Idolatry and various sins have made them impure and unclean, so before they can be restored, they must be made pure by the washing of water. Then, once God gives them a new heart, His people will become willing covenant partners; they will give up on their rebellious, hurtful ways and embrace God's designs for their lives. With a new spirit—which seems to be nothing other than God's Spirit living in and among them—they will have the desire and ability to live out God's reasonable demands on them.

God insists that all He intends to do to save and redeem His people is not for their good; He is working to restore His good name. God's covenant people have given Him a bad reputation among the nations, so God must act in His own interest to make sure His name is given the honor it is due.

Eternal One *(to Ezekiel)*: 3Son of man, do you think these bones can live?

Ezekiel: Eternal Lord, *certainly* You know *the answer better than I do.*

Eternal One: 4-5*Actually, I do.* Prophesy to these bones. Tell them to listen to what the Eternal Lord says to them: "Dry bones, I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. 6I will attach muscles and tendons to you, cause flesh to grow over them, and cover you with skin. I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. *After this happens,* you will know that I am the Eternal."

God is not only the Creator of life, but He is also the Restorer of life.

7So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied *to the bones.* As I was speaking, I heard a *loud* noise—a rattling sound—and all the bones began to come together and form complete skeletons. 8I watched and saw muscles and tendons attach to the bones, flesh grow over them, and skin wrap itself around the *reforming* bodies. But there was still no breath in them.

Eternal One: 9Prophesy to the breath. Speak, son of man, and tell them what the Eternal Lord has to say: "O *sweet* breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these who have been killed. Make these *corpses* come alive."

10So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied *to the breath. As I was speaking,* breath invaded the lifeless. The bodies came alive and stood on their feet. *I realized then I was looking at* a great army.

Eternal One: 11Son of man, these bones are the entire community of Israel. They keep saying, "Our bones are dry *now, picked clean by scavengers.* All hope is gone. Our nation is lost."

12-13He told me to prophesy and tell them what He said.

Eternal One: Pay attention, My people! I am going to open your graves *and bring you back to life*! I will carry you *straight* back to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One. 14I will breathe My Spirit into you, and you will be alive *once again.* I will place you back in your own land. After that you will know I, the Eternal, have done what I said I would do.

So said the Eternal One.

15*Again* the word of the Eternal came to me.

Eternal One: 16Son of man, find a stick and write *these words* on it: "For Judah and the people of Israel associated with him." Then go find another stick, and write *these words* on it: "For Joseph—the stick of Ephraim—and the entire community of Israel associated with him." 17Now take both sticks and join them together in your hand as if they are one. 18When your compatriots question you *about what you are doing,* asking, "Will you not

tell us *plainly* what these actions mean?" 19tell them I say, "Watch as I take Joseph's stick (the one held by Ephraim) and the *ten* Israelite tribes *of the North,* your compatriots, and put it *end to end* with Judah's stick. The two sticks will become one in My hand." 20*Make sure* the people are able to see what you have written on each stick. 21Then tell them what I say: "Look! I'm gathering the Israelites up from the countries where they've been *scattered* and putting them back in their own land." 22I will form them into one nation upon Israel's mountains, and they will live under the reign of one king. They will no longer live as two *separate* peoples, split into two *different* kingdoms. 23From then on, they will not defile themselves with idols and abhorrent images and strange perversions. I will rescue them from all the places where they've lived and sinned. I will make them *pure and* clean *again*! They will be My people, and I will be their God.

24My *beloved* servant, David, will be their king. They will all live *peaceably* under one shepherd. They will live according to My laws and obey My statutes and do them. 25My people will dwell in the same land I gave to Jacob, My servant.

► How could David be the king of Israel's new nation? He died 500 years earlier! Certainly God does not mean that David comes back from the dead to reign; He means that David is the archetype for the eternal king. This new king will carry David's name because He will be a descendant of David. He will rule a united kingdom just as David ruled a united Israel in his day. He, too, will be a shepherd of God's people.

These hopes and aspirations will remain in the psyche of God's people for hundreds of years. When Jesus begins His ministry, His followers will be certain they have found the good shepherd.

Eternal One: It will be the same land where your ancestors dwelled, *but their past wickedness will be forgotten there.* They, their children, and their children's children will live there forever; and My servant David will be their prince forever. 26I will establish a covenant of peace—an everlasting promise—with them. I will make them *strong* and numerous in the land *I gave them.* My sanctuary will be at the heart of their community forever. 27I will make My home with them. I will be their God, and they will be My people.* 28After *all these things come to pass and* My sanctuary is at the heart of their community forever, *all* the nations will know that I, the Eternal, am the One who makes Israel holy.

38 The word of the Eternal came to me.

Gog likely refers to Gyges who ruled Lydia in Asia Minor. As a contemporary, Ezekiel accords him larger-than-life, nearly cosmic significance.

Eternal One: 2Son of man, turn your face toward Gog in the land of Magog, the highest ruler of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him, 3and tell him what the Eternal Lord has to say: "Beware, Gog, highest ruler of Meshech and Tubal. I oppose you. 4I am going to turn you around, insert *sharp* hooks into your jaws, and haul you off with your entire army—horses and riders outfitted with armor, breastplates, body shields, and swords. 5Persia, Ethiopia*, and Libya* will be there, too, *marching behind* with shields and helmets, 6along with Gomer's troops and Beth-togarmah's troops from the far north. Numerous nations will be a part of your coalition.

7"Get prepared. You're in command of all the armies who've come to help you. Now watch over them. 8After many days, you are going to be summoned *to fight. Sometime* in the latter years, you are going to seize a nation that has been reconstructed after a war—*a nation of people* gathered from many countries and brought to Israel's mountains—the mountains that were, for many years, nothing but rubble. They were gathered from the nations, and now they all live safely. 9You, your troops, and all of your armies will go up *and attack that nation.* You'll be like a *fierce* storm whose clouds cover the land."

* 37:27 2 Corinthians 6:16 * 38:5 Hebrew, *Cush* * 38:5 Hebrew, *Put*

10This is what the Eternal Lord continued to say:

Eternal One: On that day, you will begin pondering an evil plan. 11You'll think *to yourself*, "I will go up and invade an open country of unprotected villages and will assault the tranquil, unsuspecting people living safely *there* without walls, without gates, without bars. 12I will pillage and plunder the entire place! I will tear down the rubble that's been rebuilt and attack the people who have been gathered from the *farthest* nations to live at the center of the world. All their animals and goods—*I will steal*." 13Sheba, Rhodes, and the traders of Tarshish and their villages will ask you, "Did you come here simply to steal everything? Did you assemble so great an army to plunder their goods, to seize their silver and gold, to carry off their livestock and valuables?"

14The Eternal Lord told me, the son of man, to prophesy and tell Gog:

Eternal One: When *you see* My people Israel living safely, will you not take note? 15You and your vast army recruited from the many nations, all mounted on horses, will march as one force down from the far north. 16Like *a storm whose* clouds cover the land, you will go up and attack My people Israel. In the last days, Gog, I will summon you to storm My land. Then, right in front of everyone's eyes, I will exhibit My holiness through you.

17This is what the Eternal Lord continued to say:

Eternal One: Are you not the one I was talking about all those years ago through My servants, the prophets of Israel? For years, they prophesied that I would summon you to march against them. 18On the day *the prophecy is fulfilled*, when Gog comes against the land of Israel, most certainly My wrath will come like a fire. 19My jealousy and burning anger guarantee that all of Israel will quake on that day! 20Creatures of the sky, earth, and sea—all people and beasts—will shake *with awe* in My presence. The mountains will be knocked down! Great cliffs and every fortress will crumble to the ground. 21I will summon the sword against Gog upon all of My *hills and* mountains. *Confusion will abound;* Gog's soldiers will turn and fight each other. 22I will *come down and* render My judgment *in person.* Disease and massacre will be their sentence. I will *command heaven to* throw everything it has upon Gog and all his armies, pouring down rain, hail, lightning, and burning sulfur. 23They will see just how great and holy I really am. I will make Myself known to the nations of the world. Then they will all know that I am the Eternal One.

39 **Eternal One:** Son of man, prophesy against Gog, and tell him that this is what the Eternal Lord has to say: "I oppose you, Gog, highest ruler of Meshech and Tubal. 2I will turn you around and lead you. I will bring you from the remote regions of the north and send you up against Israel's mountains. 3*But just when you think you've had success,* I will knock the bow out of your left hand and the arrows out of your right hand. 4*Right then and there,* on the mountains of Israel, you will meet your end—you and all your troops and everyone in your coalition. I will feed your remains to the predatory birds and wild beasts *and deny you an honorable burial.* 5You will fall *and be defeated* out in the open fields." I, the Eternal Lord, have spoken. 6I will pour fire on Magog and on *the heads of* all those who *believe themselves* to be living safely on the coastlands. Then they will know that I am the Eternal One.

7Everyone in Israel will know My holy name! No longer will I allow My name to be profaned! *All* the nations will know that I, the Eternal, am the Holy One of Israel. 8Pay attention! The time is coming! *I promise* it will happen *just as I have said.* This is the day I've been talking about *for so long.*

► The Lord's slaughter of Gog and his forces serves two purposes. Obviously, it reminds Israel and the other nations of God's ultimate power, but more importantly, it solidifies His new covenant with Israel. In ancient Israel, when two people made a covenant with one another, they would slaughter an animal, cut it in half, lay the two halves parallel to each other on the ground, and walk between them. This action indicated, "If I break this

covenant, then you may do this to me." The covenant partners would then share a meal together. In this case, God makes Gog's armies the sacrifice that establishes His covenant with Israel. He, of course, will never break the covenant, and He warns Israel that He could destroy them if they abandon Him again.

Eternal One: [9]Those dwelling in the cities of Israel will leave and make *huge* bonfires with all of *Gog's* weapons—body and chest shields, bows, arrows, clubs, and spears. *The troops will be so numerous and their weapons so many that* Israel will have fuel to burn for seven years. [10]No one will have to go into the fields or woods to fetch kindling or cut down trees because they'll use their *enemies'* weapons for fuel. They will strip the ones who stripped them and rob the ones who robbed them. I, the Eternal Lord, declare it so.

[11]On that day, I will set aside a burial ground for Gog in Israel in the valley of the travelers east of the *Dead* Sea. No one will be able to pass through there anymore once Gog and all of Gog's armies are buried there. The place will be renamed the valley of Hamon-gog, *which means, "the hordes of Gog."* [12]It will take seven months for the people of Israel to bury Gog and Gog's armies in order to cleanse the land *of death's defilement*. [13]Everyone in the nation will participate; and on the day I display My glory, their name will be famous. This I promise. [14]At the end of the seven months *of burial,* men will be designated to patrol the land and bury any of the bodies that remain on the ground and the bodies of any others who may die while traveling across *Israel*. This is how they will keep the land clean. [15]As they search through the land, anyone who happens upon even one bone will set up a marker beside it, *and it will remain untouched* until the buriers *find it and* lay it to rest in the valley of Hamon-gog. [16](There will be a town called Hamonah there.) This is how the Israelites will purify the land *from death's defilement*.

[17-18]Then the Eternal Lord told me, "Son of man, I am telling you to send My message to every bird and wild beast":

Eternal One: Come together, *all you creatures of the sky and earth—birds of the air, beasts of the forests and field!* From all around, gather around My sacrifice. I am preparing an enormous feast for you atop Israel's mountains. You will eat the flesh of great men and drink the blood of princes as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls—all the finest, meatiest animals in all of *lush* Bashan! [19]I will sacrifice *all these people* for you, and you will eat fat until you are stuffed and drink blood until you are drunk. [20]At the table *of My feast,* you will devour horses and charioteers *from Gog's forces,* heroes and champions of every kind!

[21]I will exhibit My glory for all the nations to see, and they will all recognize the results of My judgment. They will understand *that Gog was destroyed* by My own *powerful* hand. [22]From that day on, the people of Israel will know I am the Eternal One, [23]and all the nations will know the people of Israel were exiled because they acted wickedly and willfully turned their backs on Me. *This is why* I turned My back on them and allowed their enemies to do with them as they pleased. As a result, all of them fell by the sword. [24]I judged them according to their impurities and crimes, and I kept My back turned on them *because they violated our covenant.*

[25]So this is what the Eternal Lord continued to say:

Eternal One: I am going to restore the fortunes of Jacob and have compassion upon all My people Israel, for I am eager to defend *My reputation* and to protect My holy name. [26]Once they are living comfortably back in their *ancestral* lands without anyone terrorizing them, the memory of their shame and faithlessness toward Me will fade. [27]By gathering them from the enemy nations and bringing them home, I will reveal My holiness right in the sight of all the nations. [28]After *all these things take place,* My people will know that I, the Eternal, am their God. Even though I banished them to exile in other lands, I gathered them and put them back in their own land. No one was left behind. [29]I will not turn My back on them ever again, for I have poured out My Spirit upon the community of Israel.

So said the Eternal Lord.

The description and measurements of the new temple are both complex and staggering. The outer walls form a square with priestly kitchens for preparing sacrifices and food on each corner. On the four sides of the temple complex, a total of thirty chambers line the perimeter wall. The actual temple and inner courtyard is a smaller version of the outer walls, three gates (east, north, and south), and outer courtyard. As Ezekiel walks in a westerly direction from the outer east gate, he ascends a set of stairs that leads to the outer courtyard where he then goes up another staircase to the inner courtyard and altar where he then finds a third staircase leading to the temple portico and the two holy and most holy chambers of the Eternal's sanctuary.

Ezekiel's mysterious tour guide first begins at the eastern outer gate facing the rising sun. Then he takes Ezekiel to the outer courtyard where he measures the north gate before taking him to the south gate for its measurements. They then enter the inner courtyard via its south gate. Now at the inner courtyard, they follow the same path of measuring the east and north gates. Finally, after exiting the north gate of the inner courtyard, they move to the original east gate of the outer courtyard where Ezekiel witnesses the awesome return of the Eternal's presence.

40 During the 25th year of our exile (which was the 14th year after *Nebuchadnezzar* conquered Jerusalem), at the beginning of the year on the 10th day of the month, the Eternal took hold of me and brought me to the *ruined* city. 2In the visions God showed me, He carried me into the land of Israel and put me on top of a very high mountain. Southward, there was a building that looked like a city *unto itself.* 3God led me to that place, and there I saw a man whose appearance gleamed as if he were *made of* bronze. He stood at the structure's gate with a linen tape *for long measurements* and a reed for *short* measurements.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)*: 4Son of man,
sharpen your senses! See with your eyes,
and listen with your ears! Take notice
of everything I am about to show you,
because you are here to see what I do
and to relay it all to the people of Israel.

► The measuring reed is a long cubit, at 20 to 21 inches, rather than a short cubit at 18 inches. The sheer grandeur of this new temple and city and its surrounding land—along with its most prominent, divine dweller—calls for nothing less than royal measurements.

5I saw a wall surrounding the temple. The measuring reed in the man's hand was about 10½ feet long. He measured the wall and found it to be about 10½ feet thick and 10½ feet high. 6He walked around to the wall of the eastern gate and climbed its steps. He measured the depth of the gate's entrance, and it was 10½ feet deep *as well.*

7*Inside the gate,* the *side* guard chambers *on each side* were about 10½ feet square, with 8¾-feet-thick walls between each of them. The threshold of the gate entrance nearest to the portico that faced the temple was about 10½ feet deep. 8Then he measured the portico that faced the temple; it was also 10½ feet deep. 9But the portico on the inner side of the gate complex was 14 feet with columns of 3½ feet. 10The eastern gate had 3 chambers on each side. All 3 chambers, as well as all of the columns, had the exact same measurements. 11Then he measured the entrance of the *east* gate: it was 17½ feet wide and 22¾ feet long. 12The short barrier stood in front of each guard chamber; it was 21 inches high on both sides. The chambers themselves were 10½ feet square. 13He then measured the distance between the top of the back wall of one chamber to the top of the wall opposite of it: 43¾ feet. 14Then he measured the length of the gate-complex portico at 35 feet, which stretched to the outer courtyard.* 15*The measurement* from the outer courtyard gate entrance to the farthest end of the outer courtyard at the inner portico of the inner east gate was 87½ feet. 16This

* 40:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

inner gateway complex had windows with multiple recessed frames toward the side chambers and columns, as did the portico. And all the columns were decorated with palm trees.

17Then the man *with the appearance of bronze* led me to the outer courtyard. There, I saw a paved walkway all around the courtyard. Thirty chambers had been built *on all four sides of the outer courtyard* facing the walkway. 18This lower walkway for the outer courtyard *was laid in front of the chambers and* connected all the gates and was as wide as the gates were long. 19The man then measured the area between the inner entrance of the lower east gate and the outside of the inner courtyard upper gate. It was about 175 feet on the east and the north.

20Then *I followed* my guide to the north gateway at the outer courtyard and measured its length and width. 21It had 3 chambers on each side, and all of their columns and porticos had the exact same measurements as the first east gate: 87½ feet long and 43¾ feet wide. 22All its windows, its porticos, and its decorations of palm trees had the *exact* same measurements as the east gate. There were 7 steps *from the outside of the gate complex* leading up to it, and the portico was on the opposite side *of the gate* from the steps. 23Facing the *lower* north gate was another gate that led to the inner courtyard, just as *an inner court gate faced* the *lower* east gate. The man measured *the distance* between one gate and the one opposite of it, and the distance was 175 feet.

24Then I followed him south *along the wall* where I saw the south gate. He took measurements of its columns and porticos and found that they were the same size *as the other gates'*. 25The gate complex and its porticos had the same kind of windows *with multiple recessed frames* all around it as the other ones did. It was 87½ feet long and 43¾ feet wide. 26There were 7 steps leading up to it, and the portico was on the opposite side *of the gate* from the steps. The columns on both sides were adorned with palm trees. 27There was also a *lower* south gate that led to the outer courtyard facing the *upper* south gate, and the man measured *the distance* between one gate and the one opposite of it, on the southern side. The distance was 175 feet.

28Then I followed him to the inner court across from the south gate. He took measurements of the gate complex and discovered it had the *exact* same dimensions as the others. 29Its chambers, columns, and porticos were the *exact* same as the others. The gate and its porticos had *the same kind of* windows *with multiple recessed frames* all around. It was 87½ feet long and 43¾ feet wide. 30The interior gate had porticos all around that were 43¾ feet wide and 8¾ feet deep. 31Eight steps led up to its porticos, which faced the outer courtyard. Palm trees decorated the columns.

32Then I followed my guide to the inner courtyard on the eastern side, and he took measurements of the gate complex and discovered it had the exact same measurements as the others. 33Its chambers, columns, and porticos were the exact same as the others. The gate and its porticos had *the same kind of* windows *with multiple recessed frames* all around. It was 87½ feet long and 43¾ feet wide. 34Eight steps led up to its porticos, which faced the outer courtyard. Palm trees decorated the columns.

35Then I followed the man *around the inner court* to the *interior* north gate. He took measurements and discovered it had the exact same measurements as the others. 36Its chambers, columns, and porticos *were the exact same as the others.* The gate had windows *with multiple recessed frames* all around. It was 87½ feet long and 43¾ feet wide. 37Eight steps led up to its porticos, which faced the outer courtyard. Palm trees decorated the columns.

38Near the porticos in each of the inner gates was a chamber with a doorway. There the burnt offerings were cleansed *after their slaughter but before their offering.* 39Inside of the portico, there were *four* tables (two on each side) where the *whole* burnt offerings, the sin offerings, and the guilt offerings were slaughtered. 40There were also two tables outside at each outer wall of the portico where one would climb up to the north gate. 41*This means* there were eight tables in all—four inside each gate and four outside. These tables were where the offerings were slaughtered. 42-43There were also four tables carved from stone used for the burnt offerings. They were 31½ inches square and 21 inches high and held the flesh of the offerings. The tools used to slaughter the sacrificial animals for burnt offerings rested on these tables. Hooks, about 3 inches long, were attached to the walls around the stone tables. The meats for the burnt offerings were prepared on these tables.

44There were two chambers for the
singers *and the priests* within the inner
court, just outside the inner gate. One
chamber was on the side of the north gate
and faced the south. The other chamber
was on the side of the south* gate and
faced the north.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)*: 45The chamber that
faces south is designated for the priests
who take care of the temple. 46But the
chamber that faces north is set aside for
the priests who take care of the altar.
They are *all* sons of Zadok and are the
only Levites allowed to approach the
Eternal and to minister before Him *at
the altar*.

47Then the man took measurements of
the *inner* courtyard: it was 175 feet square.
The altar sat in front of the temple *in the
inner courtyard*.

48Then I followed him to the temple's
portico, and he took the measurements of
the portico's columns. They were 8¾ feet
wide on both sides. The gate entrance was
[24½ feet deep, and the walls were]* 5¼
feet wide on both sides. 49The portico was
30 feet long and 18 feet wide. There were
steps leading* up to the portico, as well as
columns *like the Jachin and Boaz columns
of Solomon's temple* on both sides.

41 Then I followed the man *whose
appearance was like bronze* to
the outer nave *of the temple*; he
took measurements of the pillars. Each
was 10½ feet wide on each side.

► Now Ezekiel is at the outer porch or nave of the actual temple structure. He watches as the man measures the holy place and then proceeds deeper into the recesses of the most holy place. Ezekiel cannot enter these areas because he is not one of the "sons of Zadok" (40:46).

2The entrance was 17½ feet wide. The
walls on both sides of the entrance were
8¾ feet wide. He measured the outer nave
of the temple and discovered it was 70
feet long and 35 feet wide. 3Then he went
inside *by himself* and took measurements
of the columns of the entrance *to the inner
sanctuary*. Each column was 3½ feet wide,
the entrance was 10½ feet wide, and the
[walls on each side of it were]* 12¼ feet
long. 4Then the man took measurements
of the inner sanctuary, which was 35 feet
long and wide.

The Man: This *inner sanctuary* is the most
holy place *in all the temple*.

5Then he walked over to the temple wall
and took its measurements and the mea-
surements of each chamber surrounding
the temple. The wall of the temple was
10½ feet thick, and each side chamber
was 7 feet wide. 6-7The side chambers
were built in 3 stories (one right on top of
the other), and there were 30 chambers on
each level. The chambers on the second
story were wider than those on the first,
and the chambers on the third story were
wider than the second's. *To keep the sec-
ond and third stories* from overhanging the
temple's *sacred space,* the wall separating
the temple's inner chamber and the side
chambers widened from top *to bottom.*
One entered the third story *by climbing
stairs* through the first and second stories.
8I noticed the temple floor was higher
than the rest of the complex. This raised
foundation was also the foundation of
the side chambers, and it was 10½ feet
thick. 9The wall on the outside of the side
chambers was 8¾ feet thick. The open
area between the *temple's* side chambers
10and the *priests' chambers* circumscribed
the temple, 35 feet around. 11In that open
space were two entrances to the temple's
side chambers. One of the entrances was
on the north side, and the other one was
on the south side. The open area was
exactly 8¾ feet wide all around *the temple.*

12On the west end *of the complex*
there was a structure that faced the
temple courtyard. It was 122½ feet wide
and 157½ feet long. Its walls were 8¾
feet thick. 13Then the man measured the
temple *and discovered that* it was 175 feet
long. The courtyard of the temple plus the
western structure and its walls measured
175 feet as well. 14The eastern courtyard
in front of the temple was 175 feet wide.
15Then he measured the length of the
western structure and the galleries on both
sides that faced the courtyard west of the
temple. It, too, was 175 feet.

* 40:44 Hebrew manuscripts read, "east." * 40:48 Hebrew manuscripts omit this portion. * 40:49 Hebrew manuscripts read, "and by these steps." * 41:3 Hebrew manuscripts read, "width of the threshold was."

The temple's nave and outer portico* [16]were paneled.* The recessed windows were trimmed in wood. The interior walls and the space between the floor and the windows were all covered with wood. [17-18]*Images of* winged guardians* and palm trees were carved into the wood above the entrance that led to the sanctuary and also all over the walls of the inner and outer sanctuaries. The two symbols alternated palm tree, guardian, palm tree, etc. Each winged guardian was carved with only two faces: [19]the face of a man peered in the direction of the palm tree on one side, and the face of a lion gazed in the direction of the palm tree on the other side. This relief encompassed the entire temple. [20]Carvings of winged guardians and palm trees covered the wall of the sanctuary in the space between the floor and the top of the entrance.

[21]The doorframes leading into the outer sanctuary were square, as were the ones leading to the inner sanctuary. [22]The altar was made of wood. It was 5¼ feet high and 3½ feet square. *All of it*—its base, horns, and sides—was made of wood.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)*: This is the table that sits before the Eternal.

[23]The outer nave and the *inner* holy place each had a double door. [24]Each door was made of two panels hinged together.* [25]On the doors of the outer sanctuary were carvings of winged guardians and palm trees—the *exact* same images that were on the walls. A wooden roof hung over the front of the outside portico. [26]On both side walls of the portico were windows that had carvings of palm trees. There were roofs over all the side chambers of the temple.

► Ezekiel's descriptions of the Jerusalem temple are often difficult to comprehend. Since Jerusalem's temple was completely destroyed, archaeology is helpful in reconstructing Ezekiel's description of it. In Northern Syria lie the ruins of a temple at 'Ain Dara' that closely resemble the biblical descriptions of God's temple. It, too, had three rooms, winged beings guarding the holiest place, and an eastern gate through which a deity entered. But what might be the most helpful parallel between it and Jerusalem's temple are its windows. Carved into the stone are false windows, each with three successively smaller window frames—the largest frame on the outside and the smallest on the inside. Apparently this architectural detail was popular in ornate Near Eastern buildings during the first millennium B.C., especially in temples, and it sheds light on Ezekiel's obscure description.

42 Then the man *whose appearance was like bronze* took me north into the outer courtyard. He brought me to the chambers that were opposite the open area *around the temple* and opposite the outside wall on the northern end. [2]This building with its north-facing door was 175 feet long and 87½ feet wide. [3]Facing a 35-foot-wide section of the inner court and facing the paved area of the outer court were rows of chambers 3 stories high. [4]An interior passageway ran in front of each chamber. It was 17½ feet wide and ran *the entire length of the gallery,* 175 feet. The doors faced north. [5]All the upper chambers were narrower because the galleries took up more space than they did on the first and second levels. [6]There were no columns for the chambers on the third level—no columns like the ones in the courtyards—so the chambers on the third level were set back further than the chambers on the first and second levels. [7]The wall behind the chambers ran parallel to them and the outer courtyard for a distance of 87½ feet. [8]*On* the side next to the outer courtyard, the row of chambers was 87½ feet long. On the side nearest to the sanctuary it was 175 feet long. [9]The chambers on the first level could be entered from the east when coming in from the outer courtyard.

These chambers on the wall surrounding the inner courtyard are where the priests prepare themselves for their sacred duties.

* 41:15 Hebrew manuscripts read, "and the porticoes of the court." * 41:16 Hebrew manuscripts read, "the thresholds." * 41:17-18 Hebrew, *cherubi* * 41:24 Each had two portions that opened: either they were swinging doors allowing for a double opening divided in the middle or they were bi-fold doors that could be opened half way or completely creating a larger passageway.

10There were *rows of* chambers on
the south* side of the temple, just like on
the north, separating the inner and outer
courtyards. 11There was a walkway in front
of them. These chambers were exactly like
the chambers on the northern side—same
measurements and architecture. 12In front
of each walkway in the south chambers
was a doorway near the wall that could
be entered from the east when coming in
from the outer courtyard.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)***:** 13The north and
south chambers that face the courtyard
around the temple are sacred, set apart
for the priests who come near to the
Eternal to eat the holiest of offerings. In
those sacred chambers, the priests store
the holiest of offerings—grain offerings,
sin offerings, and guilt offerings. 14As
soon as the priests enter into the sacred
areas, they can't leave and go into the
outer courtyard until they *first* take off
their *holy* clothes in which they have
ministered *to the Lord.* These *ministerial
clothes* are sacred. They must put on
other clothes before they go anywhere
other people are allowed to be, *because
their priestly garments can't come into
contact with anything impure.*

15When the man completed taking mea-
surements inside the temple, he took
me out through the *lower* eastern gate
and began measuring around the temple
complex. 16He took his measuring reed
and measured the entire east side. It was
875 feet long. 17-19He measured the north,
south, and west sides; and they, too, were
each 875 feet long. 20He measured the
temple complex on all four sides. The wall
around it *formed a square* 875 feet by 875
feet. It served to separate the sacred from
the common.

43 Then the man *whose appear-
ance was like bronze* led me to
the gate that faced the east.
2There, I witnessed the glory of the God
of Israel storming from the east. His voice
thundered like a great waterfall. The *entire*
earth reflected His shining glory.

Just as God's glorious presence departs Jerusalem for Babylon in the east (Ezekiel 10), so He returns with spectacular fullness to the eastern gate of a restored temple.

3The vision I saw then was just like the
vision I saw when He arrived to destroy
the city and was kindred to the vision I
had near the Chebar Canal. I fell on my
face *to the ground.* 4The glory of the Eternal
entered the temple by the east gate, 5and
the Spirit picked me up and brought me to
the inner courtyard so I could watch as the
Eternal's glory filled the temple.

6While the man stood beside me, I
heard a voice addressing me from inside
the temple.

Eternal One: 7Son of man, this temple is
the home of My throne *on earth* and the
place where I'll rest My feet. I will dwell
here among My people Israel forever.
Never again will the Israelites or their
kings desecrate My holy name. Never
again will they prostitute themselves by
worshiping *false gods* or erecting monu-
ments to their dead kings. 8They defiled
My name and committed disgusting acts
right next to My *sacred* space by putting
their thresholds and doorposts right
next to Mine with only a wall separat-
ing Me from their idols. This is why I
consumed them in My wrath. 9Now it's
time for the people *to change*—to put
away their whoring and the monuments
to their dead kings. *If they do that,* then I
will dwell among them forever.

10Son of man, go to the people of
Israel, and give them a *detailed* descrip-
tion of the temple *you have seen* so that
they will feel ashamed of their abhorrent
living. Give them *some time to* study the
plan. 11If they express shame for all they
have done, explain to them the temple
design, the structure, the complex's
entrances and exits, its rules and regula-
tions. Write it down so that everyone
can see the design and the regulations
and be sure to follow the specifications
and rules *when the time comes.* 12Now
here is My directive concerning the
temple: the mountaintop and everything
around the temple must be regarded as
sacred ground. *Pay strict attention to* this
directive concerning the temple.

13The following measurements are the
dimensions of the altar. They were taken
with the long measure, which is 21 inches
long. The gutter *at the base of the altar*
is 21 inches deep and 21 inches wide
and has a 9-inch rim around the edge
of it. These are the heights of *each part*

* 42:10 Hebrew manuscripts read, "east."

of the altar: 14The altar rises from the ground 3½ feet to the lower ledge that is 21 inches wide; from there it rises an additional 7 feet to an upper ledge that is also 21 inches wide. 15The altar's hearth rises another 7 feet and has 4 horns that protrude from each of its 4 corners. 16The altar's hearth is square, 21 feet by 21 feet. 17The *upper* ledge is *square, too,* 24½ feet on each side. The rim around it is 10½ inches, and the base is 21 inches wide all around. The steps of the altar face east.

► Burnt offerings are arguably the most important sacrifices and the centerpiece of the temple practices. They are performed every morning and evening without fail, at every festival holiday, and by individuals for various personal reasons. The burnt offerings differ from other offerings because they are totally consumed in the fire. No meat is left over to serve the priests and Levites or to be the main course in a festival meal; everything is offered up to God. The burnt offerings attract God's attention to the temple because they rise up to heaven with a pleasing aroma. Before the people can begin their steady stream of offerings to God, the altar itself must be consecrated to Him.

Eternal One: 18Son of man, this is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say regarding the regulations for the altar after it is built; *these apply* to burnt offerings and sprinkling blood on the altar. 19For a sin offering, give a young bull to the Levitical priests who belong to Zadok's line; these *are permitted to* come before Me to serve. 20Take some of the young bull's blood and wipe it all over the altar's four horns, the four corners of the *upper* ledge, and its rim. This ceremony will cleanse the altar and cover any of the impurities. 21Then take the young bull to the appointed area outside the temple complex and burn its carcass. 22On the second day, offer another sin offering—a perfect male goat—and cleanse the altar the same way you cleansed it with the bull. 23After you have finished this *part of the* cleansing *ritual,* find a perfect young bull and a perfect *young* ram from the flock and bring them *to the altar.* 24Present them to the Eternal, and the priests will throw salt on them and give them as a burnt offering to the Eternal. 25Then every day after that for seven days, you are to offer a male goat *at the altar* as a sin offering. Along with the male goat, you are to prepare a perfect young bull and a perfect ram from the flock. 26Present these offerings for seven days *in a row,* and they will cleanse and cover the altar, dedicating it for service. 27After the seven days *of cleansing* are over, the priests will offer your burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar. This will begin on the eighth day and continue forever. Then I, the Eternal Lord, will accept you *and your offerings.*

44 Then the man *whose appearance was like bronze* led me back to the eastern gate *where the Eternal One had entered,* but *I could see that* the outer gate was now closed.

Eternal One *(to Ezekiel)***:** 2This gate must remain closed. It will never be opened again for anyone to walk through. The Eternal God of Israel has entered through this gate, so it must remain shut *for all time.* 3Only the prince is allowed inside the gateway to sit and feast before the Eternal. He will *not* go all the way *through the gate but only* through the portico of the gateway *where he will stop and sit.* He'll exit the same way he came in.

4Then he led me back through the *inner* northern gate to stand in front of the temple. *From there* I witnessed the Eternal's glory illuminating His temple. I fell and buried my face *in the ground.*

Eternal One: 5Son of man, look closely and listen carefully. Pay attention to all I am about to tell you. I am going to lay out the rules and regulations for My temple. Take note of *those having to do with* entering the temple and exiting the sanctuary. 6Tell the rebellious people of Israel *living in exile* what the Eternal Lord says: "I've had it with your disgusting actions, people of Israel! 7Not only do you engage in shocking behaviors, but you *have the audacity to* bring the uncircumcised—in heart and in flesh—into My sanctuary, knowing they'll contaminate it. *You allowed them in* even as you

offered My food, the fat and blood *of the sacrifices, on the altar*. In doing so, you shattered our pact. 8When you should have been *upholding your side of the covenant and* taking care of My holy things yourselves, you put outsiders in charge of My sanctuary."

9This is what I, the Eternal Lord, have to say: "Do not let any foreigner—even if he lives among the people of Israel—come into My sanctuary because foreigners are uncircumcised in both their hearts and their flesh. 10The Levites who abandoned Me when *the rest of* Israel strayed and pursued their idols instead of Me will bear the consequences for the wicked things they have done. 11They are still allowed to minister in My sanctuary, guard the temple outer gates, and serve in the temple proper. They are allowed to slaughter the burnt offerings and *other* sacrifices for the people, and to help serve them. 12But because they acted as a stumbling block to Israel and helped the people worship their *worthless* idols, I have made an oath that they must pay for the wicked things they have done. This I, the Eternal One, promise. 13They are not allowed to approach Me as the priests do. In fact, they aren't permitted anywhere near *Me or* any of My sacred things and holy offerings. They must endure the shame of their shocking and deplorable actions. 14But I will still allow them to be in charge of the maintenance of the temple and keep it running *day to day*.

15"As for the Levitical priests who are the descendants of Zadok—the ones who took care of My holy place even as the rest of Israel strayed—they will draw near to Me and serve Me. They will stand before Me *in the sanctuary* and present offerings of fat and blood. 16They are permitted to enter My sanctuary, draw near to My *holy* table, and accomplish all that priestly service requires. 17When the Zadokite priests enter a gate to the inner courtyard, they should already be clothed in linen. They are not allowed to wear any wool clothing while serving inside the temple or inside any gate to the inner courtyard. 18I want them to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments. They should not wear any clothing that will cause them to perspire. 19When they enter the outer courtyard where all the people congregate, they should remove the *linen* clothes they wore while serving and leave them in the sacred chambers. They are to dress in regular clothing so that they do not pass on holiness to the people *who may come in contact* with their clothing. 20They are not allowed to shave their heads or have long hair. They are always to keep their hair *neatly* trimmed. 21Priests are not allowed to consume wine before they enter the inner courtyard. 22The priests are not allowed to marry widows or women who are divorced. They are only allowed to marry virgins of Israelite ancestry or widows of other priests. 23They are responsible for teaching My people Israel the line between the sacred and common. They are to instruct My people on how to detect what is ritually pure and impure. 24I want the priests to act as the judges to resolve any dispute *among My people*. They are to judge and make their decisions according to the statutes I've outlined. The priests must uphold My rules and regulations regarding all My required feasts and all My holy Sabbaths. 25Priests are not allowed to defile themselves by being in the presence of a dead person. The only exception is when the corpse is that of a *close relative*: mother or father, son or daughter, brother or *unwed* sister. In that situation a priest may *be near and* defile himself. 26After the priest has been *ritually* purified *from death's defilement,* he is required to wait seven days *before returning to his duties*. 27When he does return to the sanctuary, he is to enter the inner court and *first* present a sin offering for himself before ministering *for others*.

28"The priests are to have only one inheritance: *Me*. I am their inheritance. You are to allot them only one possession in Israel: Me. I am their possession. 29*As for the food they eat,* they are to consume the grain offerings, the sin offerings, and the guilt offerings brought *to the temple by the people*. Everything devoted to Me will be theirs. 30The priests are to receive the first *and finest* gifts of your firstfruit offerings, even your grain offerings, so that your household will be blessed. 31The priests are not allowed to eat any *animal*—bird or beast—that dies of natural causes or is torn apart *by a predator*."

45 **Eternal One:** When you divide the land *among the people* to determine inheritance, you must set aside a plot of land for the Eternal as His sacred ground. It is to be

8⅓ miles long and 6⅔ miles* wide; every bit of it will be regarded as holy. 2Within this *sacred ground,* designate a 875-foot square for the temple. Leave a strip of land 87½ feet wide around the perimeter of the temple. 3And from these sacred grounds allot a section of land 8⅓ miles long by 3⅓ miles wide to place the sanctuary, *which will contain* the most holy place. 4These sacred lands will be set apart for the priests who serve in the sanctuary and draw near to the Eternal. They will build their homes there, not far from the holy precincts of the sanctuary. 5*As for the other half of the sacred ground—an area* of 8⅓ miles long and 3⅓ miles wide—it will be designated for the Levites who serve in the temple. They will live there and possess those cities. 6Next to this sacred land, you are to set aside a strip of land 8⅓ miles long and 1⅔ miles wide to build a city. This will *be common land that* belongs to all the people of Israel. 7The prince is to have possession of the land on either side of the sacred grounds and the common property of the city. His land will run westward from the west side and eastward from the east side occupying an area equal to one of the tribal inheritances. 8This will be the prince's own section of land in Israel. Never again will My princes *rob and* oppress My people. Then they are to divide the rest of the land between the tribes of Israel.

► Ezekiel's vision of the land of Israel once the Jews return from exile has several significant features: each tribe receives a similar allotment of land, the rulers are given property of their own (so the tribes don't have to support them), the temple is situated in the exact center of the country, and the priests and Levites all live around the temple itself (instead of being scattered among the tribes). These changes in the nation's political and social structure reflect many of the changes that take place during the exile.

Eternal One *(to the princes of Israel)***:**
9That's enough *tyranny,* you princes of Israel! Stop your abuse and persecutions! Do the right thing; choose to be just in your actions. Stop cheating and depriving My people *of their land.* I, the Eternal Lord, insist!

10I command you to be honest *in your commerce.* You are to use accurate and fair weights and measures. 11Regarding measures, the standard dry measure and liquid measure are to have a similar volume, about 6 bushels or 55 gallons, making the standard dry unit of measurement ⅗ of a bushel and the standard liquid unit of measurement 5½ gallons. 12Regarding weights, one small counterweight will weigh ⅖ of an ounce, and one large counterweight will weigh 1¼ pounds.

13You are to offer the following: 1⁄60 of your wheat, 1⁄60 of your barley, 14one percent of your oil, 15and one sheep from every flock of two hundred that wanders the *rich* watering places of Israel. I, the Eternal Lord, declare that these gifts will act as the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will cover the wrongs of the people *and will be offered on your behalf by the priests.* 16Everyone in Israel will be required to give these offerings to the prince in Israel. 17Then it will be the prince's responsibility to provide the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings at all the *sacred* festivals, the new moon festivals, the Sabbaths, and all the rest of the feasts appointed for Israel. *Using the animals and produce he's collected,* the prince will provide the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings to cover the wrongs done by the people of Israel.

(to Ezekiel) 18On the first day of the first month, take a perfect young bull and purify the sanctuary. 19The priest will smear some blood of the sin offering on the temple doorposts, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the gateposts of the entrance to the inner courtyard. 20On the seventh day of the month, do this same ritual for anyone who strays from Me unknowingly. Cover the impurities of the temple this way.

21On the fourteenth day of the first month, I want you to observe the Passover for seven days. *During the feast,* I want you to eat only yeast-free bread. 22When that day arrives, it is the prince's responsibility to provide a bull for himself and for all the people of the land as a sin

* 45:1 Hebrew manuscripts read, "three miles."

offering. 23Every day for the seven days of the feast, the prince is to bring seven perfect bulls and seven perfect rams as a burnt offering to the Eternal. Also, he will present a male goat each day as a sin offering. 24The prince is also to provide a grain offering: ⅜ of a bushel *of grain mixed with* one gallon of oil for each bull and each ram. 25The *seven-day* feast begins on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. On each of the seven days, the prince is responsible for providing the same sin offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings (*made from grain* and oil).

46 This is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: During the six working days *of each week*, I want you to close the east gate of the inner courtyard; but keep it open on the *seventh day,* the Sabbath, and on the new moon. 2The prince is to enter from the outside through the portico of the gateway and stand directly outside the gate where *he can watch* the priests offer his burnt offerings and peace offerings. He is to worship *as his offerings are being made,* and then exit *the same way he entered.* The priests won't shut the gate until the evening. 3On Sabbaths and new moons, the rest of the people are to worship the Eternal at the entrance to that gate. 4I want the prince to give this burnt offering to Me, the Eternal, on the Sabbath: six lambs and a ram—all perfect. 5I want him to give a grain offering along with it *as is customary*: ⅜ of a bushel of grain and a gallon of oil with the ram and as much grain *and oil* as he is able for each lamb. 6During each new moon celebration, I want the prince to offer a young bull, six lambs, and a ram—all perfect. 7He is to provide a *customary* grain offering as well: ⅜ of a bushel of grain and one gallon of oil for each ram and bull, and as much *grain and oil* as he can for each lamb. 8The prince is to enter *the temple* through the portico of the *eastern* gate and exit the same way.

9When the people of the land come together to worship the Eternal at the regularly scheduled feasts, all those who come in through the north gate are to go out through the south gate, and all those who come in through the south gate are to go out through the north gate. They will exit *the temple* through the opposite gate so they continue to move straight ahead. 10*During these feasts,* the prince will walk with everyone else, entering and exiting at the same time and in the same way as the commoners.

11At *all* the feasts and the regularly scheduled festivals, the *customary* grain offering is *to always be the same*: ⅜ of a bushel of grain plus one gallon of oil for each bull and each ram, and as much *grain and oil* as is available for each lamb. 12Whenever the prince gives a voluntary offering to the Eternal, be it a burnt offering or a peace offering, *he will have the same privileges* as he does for all Sabbath offerings: the east gate will be opened for him. He will offer his burnt offering or peace offering as he does on the Sabbath. After he leaves, the priests are to close *the east gate.*

13Every single morning, I want the priests to offer a perfect one-year-old lamb to Me as a burnt offering. 14Along with it each morning you are to offer a grain offering: ⅒ of a bushel of grain mixed with ⅓ gallon of oil in order to moisten the flour. This grain offering is to be an ordinance you observe for all time. 15The lamb, the grain, and the oil are to be offered every single morning as a regular burnt offering.

16This is what the Eternal Lord has to say:

Eternal One: If the prince gives one of his sons *a piece of property* as his inheritance—*the property I allotted him on either side of My land*—that piece will belong to all the descendants of that son and never leave the family. 17But if the prince gives a piece of property to one of his servants, it will be leased by the servant only until the *fiftieth* year—*the jubilee year* when liberty is granted; then the inheritance will return to the prince. The prince's inheritance belongs to his sons alone. It is never to leave the family. 18*Similarly,* the prince must never demand possession of other people's property and evict them from their own land. He is to give his sons their inheritance from his own property. This way, none of My people will be separated from his property.

19The man *whose appearance was like bronze* then took me through the entrance next to the gateway and led me to the priests' sacred chambers, which faced northward. *He took me* to a place on the far western side.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)*: [20]This is where the priests are to boil the *meat of the* guilt offerings and sin offerings and bake *the bread made from* the grain offerings, so that they won't have to transport the gifts through the outer courtyard and *accidentally* transmit holiness to the people.

[21-22]Then my guide brought me to the outer courtyard and took me to each of its four corners. In each corner were smaller, confined courts, each measuring 70 feet long and 52½ feet wide. [23]There was a stone shelf that ran along the inside wall of each of the four courts. Beneath these stone shelves were hearths.

The Man *(to Ezekiel)*: [24]These are kitchens. Everyone who serves in the temple will boil the peoples' sacrifices here.

47 The man *whose appearance was like bronze* led me back to the temple's entryway. There I observed a stream of water *bubbling up* from beneath the temple threshold, flowing eastward in the same direction the temple faced. The water was running parallel to the temple's wall south of the altar.

This flowing, running, living water cleanses, heals, and restores everything in its path.

[2]My guide led me through the north gate and took me around the outside wall to the east gate. I looked and could see the water trickling out from the south end *of the east gate*.

[3]The man walked toward the east with a measuring line in his hand and measured off 1,750 feet *or about ⅓ mile*. Then we walked together through the ankle-deep water. [4]He measured off another 1,750 *feet,* and we walked together now through water that was knee-deep. He measured as we walked another 1,750 *feet,* and we waded together through water that was waist-deep. [5]Then he measured off another 1,750 *feet,* but this time I couldn't wade any farther because the water was too deep. Now the stream of water had become a river, deep enough for swimming.

The Man: [6]Son of man, have you seen *anything like* this?

Then my guide brought me back to the river's edge. [7]When we got back there, I looked and saw orchards along both sides of the river.

The Man: [8-9]This river flows eastward and runs down into the *Jordan* Valley to the place where it flows into the *Dead* Sea. The moment it meets the sea, the *salty* water becomes fresh. Swarms of creatures will flourish wherever this river flows. Schools of fish will swim through currents of fresh water, for wherever this water flows everything will come alive! [10]From Engedi to Eneglaim, fishermen will stand upon the shore and spread out their nets! They will *come there because the waters contain* many fish of various kinds, just as the Mediterranean Sea* does. [11]However, the swamps and marshes won't become fresh; these will *continue to* provide salt. [12]All kinds of trees will flourish along both sides of the river. Their leaves won't wither, and their fruit won't fail. Every month they will bear *a fresh crop of* fruit because they are nourished from the water that flows from the *temple* sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves will be for healing.

The Eternal Lord has this to say *regarding the land*:

Eternal One: [13]Here's how *I want you* to divide up the land for the inheritance of the twelve tribes of Israel (Joseph's *descendants are* to be given two portions *of land*). [14]I want you to divide it up equally. I made an oath to your ancestors that this land would be your inheritance, and I am keeping My promise.

[15-16]Here are the boundaries of the land: The northern boundary will run *east* from the Mediterranean Sea through Hethlon and along to Lebo-hamath and then Zedad. From there it will go through Berothah and Sibraim (which lie on the border between Damascus and Hamath), *all the way* to Hazer-hatticon (near the border of Hauran). [17]This northern boundary will stretch from the Mediterranean Sea to Hazar-enan (on the northern border of Damascus) and the border of Hamath on the far north. [18]The eastern boundary will run *south* between Hauran and Damascus along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel to the *Dead* Sea, all the way to Tamar. [19]The southern boundary will run west

* 47:10 Literally, Great Sea

The distribution of land to resident aliens is a marked change in Israelite custom. Prior to the exile, foreigners and outsiders had a special status among the Israelites. They were considered members of the community, participating in civic (though not governmental) activities, allowed to worship at the temple in a restricted capacity, and protected under God's law. Leviticus 19 explains that Israelites were to love their foreign neighbors, treating them with special care because they were disadvantaged—as widows and orphans were—because they were not allowed to own land in Israel and therefore often couldn't provide for themselves.

But God's new law changes this. For the first time, resident aliens who adopt the worship of Israel's God may legally join with the tribes and enjoy all of God's blessings in Israel. This only makes sense for the exiles who return to the land from all over the world and have difficulty proving their Israelite heritage. As generous as this law may seem, it is not the first instance of God's grace to those outside Israel; His kindness is demonstrated over and over again in the pages of Scripture. The very monarchy of Israel is descended from a resident alien, Ruth, the grandmother of King David. Certainly God loves equally all who know and worship Him.

from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, then along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. 20The western boundary will run along *the coast of* the Mediterranean from *south to north,* opposite Lebo-hamath.

21I want you to divide up this land among the tribes of Israel. 22Allocate it to yourselves and to the foreigners who have chosen to live among you and raise their children. Consider them native Israelites. They are to be given a portion of the land as their inheritance no different than the tribes of Israel. 23They are to receive land in the area of the tribe with whom they immigrate.

So says the Eternal Lord.

48 **Eternal One:** Here are the tribes *and their allocated regions* from north to south: Dan will have the land in the far north. It will run west to east along the road from Hethlon to Lebo-hamath to Hazer-enan (on the border of Damascus and next to Hamath). 2Asher will get the territory *south* of Dan's border from east to west. 3Naphtali will be allotted the region immediately *south* of Asher's border from east to west. 4Manasseh will have the land *south* of Naphtali's border from east to west. 5Ephraim will get the territory that borders Manasseh *on the south* from east to west. 6Reuben will be allotted the region immediately *south* of Ephraim from east to west. 7Judah will have the land south of Reuben's border from east to west.

8The land adjoining Judah's *southern* border from east to west is to be set aside *as sacred ground.* It will be 8⅓ miles wide and as long as the other tribal regions from east to west. The temple complex will sit at the center, 9in an area dedicated to the Eternal One that is 8⅓ miles long and 3⅓ miles wide. 10-11The priests will be allotted an area that is 8⅓ miles wide along its northern border, 3⅓ miles wide along its eastern and western borders, and 8⅓ miles wide along its southern border. The temple of the Eternal will sit at the center of the sacred ground. It will be *set aside specifically* for the priests who descended from Zadok, the only people who remained faithful to Me when all of Israel, including the Levites, abandoned Me. 12-13This sacred ground will be allotted to them when the rest of the land is distributed *to the other tribes. To its north* will be the Levites' sector. It will be *the same size and shape* as the land given to the priests: 8⅓ miles long and 3⅓ miles wide. 14Neither the priests nor the Levites may sell or trade any of this land. No one is to put it to any other use, for this land is holy to the Eternal One.

15Another strip *of land* will be available to the rest of Israel for building houses and pasturing *their animals.* It will be 8⅓ miles long and 1⅔ miles wide. A city will be built in the heart of this land. 16It is to be arranged as a square, measuring 1½ miles on each side: north, south, east, and west. 17Around the perimeter of the city will be an open area extending 150 yards to the north, south,

east, and west. 18The rest of the land running *south* of the priests' allotment will be used to grow food for those who work in the city. It will stretch 3⅓ miles to the east and 3⅓ miles to the west *of the city*. 19Anyone who works in the city—regardless of his tribal affiliation—will be allowed to farm the land. 20The entire area will be a square that measures 8⅓ miles on every side; you are to set aside this ground as holy *for the priests and Levites, for the temple,* and for the city *as I've directed.*

21The land located on both sides—east and west—of the sacred ground and the city is to be given to the prince. It will stretch 8⅓ miles to the east and 8⅓ miles to the west of the Levites', priests', and the city's squares of land. So the prince will have two areas of land adjoining the sacred ground containing the temple complex at its center. 22The prince gets one share (in two sections adjacent to the sacred ground) between Judah's *southern* border and Benjamin's *northern* border.

23Here are the remaining tribes *and their allocated regions*: Benjamin will have the territory directly south *of the prince's and the city's lands* from the east to the west. 24Simeon will get the land that borders Benjamin's *southern* border from east to west. 25Issachar will be allotted the region *south* of the border of Simeon from east to west. 26Zebulun will have the land adjoining Issachar's *southern* border from east to west. 27Gad will get the territory *south* of Zebulun's border from east to west. 28The southern border of Gad will run from Tamar *in the east* to the waters of Meribath-kadesh and along the brook of Egypt all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.* 29This is how I want you to divide the land between the tribes of Israel. Their portions will be their inheritances.

30-31As for the exits from the city—the city gates—they are to be named after the tribes of Israel. On the north wall, which is 1½ miles long, the three gates are to be named after Reuben, Judah, and Levi. 32On the east wall, which is 1½ miles long, the three gates are to be named after Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan. 33On the south wall, which is 1½ miles long, the three gates are to be named after Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun. 34On the west wall, which is 1½ miles long, the three gates are to be named after Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. 35The total distance around the city will be 6 miles. From that day forward, the name of the city will be The Eternal One Lives There.

* 48:28 Literally, Great Sea

DANIEL

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Stories and visions of freedom and faithfulness for a nation in captivity

The story of Daniel, a wise man who found favor

The Book of Daniel has two sections: accounts of the life of Daniel, a gifted young Jew taken into exile (chapters 1–6), and reports of the visions of Daniel (chapters 7–12). Throughout the book, Daniel—whose Hebrew name means "God is my judge"—models how Jews are to live when they are the minority group living among powerful pagan influences. Resistance to assimilation is not futile; Daniel's life demonstrates that those who are devoted to God not only survive but succeed despite their status.

As a story, the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends contrasts the foolishness of powerful emperors and idolaters. The courage these Jews exhibit is matched only by the wisdom and deliverance God grants them. As an apocalypse, the Book of Daniel records visions that reveal what heaven has in store for earth. While Daniel is himself a gifted dream interpreter, he needs assistance unpacking the meaning of his night visions that coincide with the rise and fall of various empires in the Near East, including Babylon, Persia, and Greece. Although rooted in historical events, Daniel's visions provide an outlook that transcends history because the inexact setting allows the faithful of many generations to interpret these visions in light of their own lives.

Because the book relates a message of hope and rescue in a pain-filled world, it was studied widely by Jews throughout the ancient Near East. The prophecies were particularly comforting for the Jews living in Jerusalem during the Maccabean Period, when the book was probably completed. Like Daniel, these Jews experienced constant threats and persecution by powerful, cruel leaders such as the Syrian king, Antiochus IV. The popularity of Daniel and these accounts is proven in various ways, in particular the discovery of many fragments of this text in the Near East and the writing of other books inspired by Daniel's larger-than-life persona.

The Book of Daniel makes various contributions to the New Testament and early Christians. It is the only Old Testament book to reference the resurrection of the dead. In addition, the heavenly "son of man" (chapter 7) provides New Testament writers with language suitable for expressing key aspects of Jesus' significance.

1 Now it happened during the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign over Judah, *the armies of* King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched *against him* and laid siege to Jerusalem, *Judah's capital.* 2The Lord *gave Nebuchadnezzar the victory and* allowed him to take King Jehoiakim of Judah as his prisoner. *At the same time, He permitted the Babylonian king* to rob God's temple of some of its *sacred* vessels and carry them away to Babylonia (called Shinar), *which was* the land *between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,* to fill the treasury of his own gods, *Marduk and Nebo*.

3After *the king returned home,* he commanded Ashpenaz, chief of the royal eunuchs, to bring some of the Israelites *who had been taken captive to the palace*. These included members of Judah's royal family and the nobility. 4*He was looking for* potential candidates *from the exiles* to serve in his court, fit young men with no *physical or moral* infirmities, handsome, skilled in all wisdom, knowledgeable, discerning, and understanding. Those selected would be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans, *the people who lived in Babylonia*. 5*As part of their assimilation into Babylonian court life,* the king offered them a daily portion of food and wine from his own table. They were to be educated for three years before serving in the king's court. 6From among Judah's *exiles,* Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah *were selected*. 7*Ashpenaz,* chief of the royal eunuchs, gave them *Babylonian* names *to signify their new identities in a foreign place*: Daniel he renamed Belteshazzar; Hananiah, Shadrach; Mishael, Meshach; and Azariah, Abed-nego.

► Nebuchadnezzar seizes the wisest, strongest, and most powerful people in each land he conquers and deports them to Babylonia. This serves three purposes: it gives the government an unending supply of capable people; it further cripples the conquered nation, rendering them helpless; and it ensures the conquered nation will not want to retaliate because their own loved ones live in the conquering land.

Daniel and his friends are among these deportees. When they arrive in Babylonia, they are expected to assimilate to the Babylonian way of life; this includes changing their names. Nebuchadnezzar renames the deportees to complete their conversion to the Babylonian society and to demonstrate his status as their master.

8*Although the king ate only the finest Babylonian fare,* Daniel was determined not to *violate God's law and* defile himself by eating the food and drinking the wine that came from the king's table; so he asked the chief of the royal eunuchs for permission not to eat the food.

Daniel's concern is the food has been offered up to Marduk and does not meet Israelite dietary laws.

9Now God had given Daniel *special* favor and fondness in the eyes of the king's chief eunuch. 10Still the eunuch *was concerned.*

Ashpenaz *(to Daniel)*: *Belteshazzar, your request puts me in a difficult position.* I am afraid of what my lord the king might do. He has ordered that you are to eat the food and drink the wine *prepared for his table*. What will happen if he sees you and your friends *over time* in poorer health than the other young men your own age? *I am certain* he will have my head.

11*When Ashpenaz refused,* Daniel reasoned with the guard whom the chief of the royal eunuchs assigned to watch over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Daniel *(to the guard)*: 12Please, *do us a favor.* Put us, your servants, to the test for the next 10 days. Give us a vegetarian diet and water. 13When the time is up, you can see for yourself our condition and compare it to the condition of the other young men who are eating from the king's table. Then, *after you have seen what has happened,* do whatever you think is best with us, your servants.

► Daniel and his companions ask for a diet consistent with God's instructions to His covenant people: vegetables and grains, without the rich cuts of meat that are normally a staple of those who eat at the king's table. They also want to exclude any

wines or mead because they intend to avoid any unnecessary entanglements with Babylonian culture. Most of those meats and wines have been offered to the Babylonian gods, and Daniel wants no part of that. Daniel and his exiled friends may have to live in Babylon, but they don't have to be absorbed into the culture. Every bite of every meal reminds them that they are different.

14So the guard agreed to do as Daniel
requested. He tested them *on a diet of only*
vegetables, grains, and water for 10 days.
15When the 10 days were up, *he looked*
them over and noticed that Daniel and his
friends were better off than all the young
men eating from the king's best foods.
They looked healthy and well nourished,
16so the guard continued to hold back
their royal rations and replaced them
with a strictly vegetarian diet. 17*Through*
all of this, God conferred upon these 4
young men superior abilities in literature,
language, and wisdom. God had given
Daniel an additional gift, too: the ability to
interpret visions and dreams. 18When the
3-year period of training and conditioning, *as set by the king,* was over, the king
sent for the candidates; the chief of the
royal eunuchs himself escorted them to
Nebuchadnezzar. 19The king interviewed
all of them and found that none of the
candidates were any better than Daniel,
Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; so they
were each assigned an important place in
the king's court. 20When the king inquired
further into their grasp of wisdom and
understanding, he discovered that they
were better prepared than all the magicians and enchanters in his empire, *even*
10 times better. 21This is how Daniel came
to serve *the royal court,* a position he *safely*
held until the first year of King Cyrus *when*
his Persian army conquered Babylonia.

Cyrus allows some of the Judean exiles to return home around 538 B.C.

2 In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign,* the king had a dream
that disturbed him so much that
he was unable to fall asleep. 2So the king
sent for his usual advisors—magicians,
enchanters, sorcerers, and other Chaldean
wise men—to come and help him understand the dream. They came and stood
before the *troubled* king.

Nebuchadnezzar *(to his advisors)***:** 3I've
had a dream *that has disturbed me.* I
know I am not going to have any peace
until I know what it means.

Wise Men *(in Aramaic)***:*** 4Long live the
king! We are your servants. Tell us your
dream, and we will tell you what it
means.

The king has his suspicions about his advisors, so he purposely makes the task more difficult.

Nebuchadnezzar: 5*My mind is made up;*
my decree is firm. If you do not tell me
what I dreamed and what it means, you
will be torn apart, limb from limb, and
those houses of yours will be turned into
piles of rubble. 6But if you do tell me
what I dreamed and what it means, then
you can expect to receive great honor,
gifts, and other rewards as I see fit. So
tell me the *details of the* dream and what
it means.

Wise Men: 7*Perhaps* the king should *first*
tell his servants what he dreamed; then
we can tell him what it means.

Nebuchadnezzar: 8It's obvious to me
that you are just buying time, *hoping to*
figure a way out of this, because you can
plainly see I *will do as* I've said. 9If you do
not tell me what I dreamed, then there
can be only one fate for you: *death as I*
have decreed. You have conspired to lie
and deceive me until the situation turns
around. *But it won't. I will not change*
my mind. So tell me, *right now,* what I
dreamed. If you can do that, then I will
have some assurance that you can tell
me what it means.

Wise Men: 10No one on earth is able to
do what the king demands. And never
in history has a great and powerful king,
such as yourself, asked this sort of thing
of any magician, enchanter, or wise
man. 11What the king requires is far too

* 2:1 About 604 B.C. 2:4 The language shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic through 7:28. This was the language of commerce and diplomacy in the ancient Near East that became the spoken language of the Jews and displaced Hebrew after their return from Babylon in the late sixth century B.C.

difficult *for any human being.* Only the gods can reveal it to the king, and they do not live among *us* mortals.

12When the king heard their reply, he was absolutely outraged and ordered that all the *so-called* wise men of Babylon be put to death. 13So the decree was issued, *and the king's officials began* to round up all the wise men in Babylon for execution; officers were sent to find and kill Daniel and his friends, too, *for they were renowned for their wisdom.* 14As Arioch, the chief of the royal guard, was searching for the wise men of Babylon to kill them, *he came across Daniel.* Daniel responded to the situation shrewdly and with discretion.

Daniel: 15*What has happened?* Why has the king issued such a harsh decree?

Arioch *did his best to* explain the situation to Daniel. 16So Daniel entered *the palace* and asked the king to give him *a little more time* so that he could *come back and* tell the king *both what he dreamed and* what it all meant.

17After *Daniel made his request,* he returned home and told his friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—what was going on. 18He asked them to *pray and* plead for mercy so that the God of heaven might reveal this mystery. *If Daniel and his friends could tell the king what he wanted to know,* then they would not be put to death along with the other wise men of Babylon. 19Then, one night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision, and so Daniel offered this blessing to the God of heaven:

Daniel: 20Praise the name of God forever
and ever,
for *all* wisdom and power belong
to Him.
21He sets in motion the times and the
ages;
He deposes kings and installs
others;
He gives wisdom to the wise
and grants knowledge to those with
understanding.
22He reveals deep *truths* and hidden
secrets;
He knows what lies veiled in the
darkness;
pure light radiates from within Him.
23I recognize who You are, and I praise
You, God of my ancestors,
for You have given me wisdom and
strength.
And now You have graciously revealed
to me what we asked of You,
for You have revealed to us the
king's dream and its meaning.

24So Daniel went back to Arioch, the officer charged with *rounding up and* executing *all* the wise men in Babylon, and tried to stop him.

Daniel: Stop what you are doing. It is not necessary to execute the wise men of Babylon. *Instead,* take me to the king, and I will tell him what the dream means.

25Arioch did not waste any time in bringing Daniel before the king.

Arioch *(to Nebuchadnezzar)***:** *Mighty king,* I have found a man from among the exiles from Judah who says he is able to tell the king what the dream means.

26The king turned to Daniel, who *you remember* had been given the *Babylonian* name, Belteshazzar.

Nebuchadnezzar: So, *Belteshazzar,* are you able to tell me what I dreamed and what it all means?

Daniel: 27*The Chaldeans were correct.* There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or sorcerers *in all the world* who are able to reveal the mystery the king requested. 28But there is a God in heaven who can reveal such mysteries. The dream you dreamed and the visions you saw, King Nebuchadnezzar, unveil *the future* and disclose what will happen at the end of the age. Now I will tell you what you dreamed and the visions you saw as you slept in your bed.

29*Good* king, as you lay in your bed *that night,* thoughts about the future sprang up in your mind, and the revealer of *all* mysteries unveiled to you what is going to happen. 30I am here today, not because I have greater wisdom than any other in the land, but because God *in His wisdom* has revealed this mystery to me. *It is God's plan* that the king knows the meaning *of this dream* and understands the thoughts *that raced* through your mind.

► Daniel agrees with the counsel given to the king by his own advisors. No worldly source can possibly answer

the king's challenge. To know the content of the dream without any prior information is beyond anyone but the God of Israel.

Daniel: 31*In your dream,* you were looking, O king, and suddenly a great statue *of what appeared to be a man* stood before you. It was enormous in size, shining bright *as the sun at midday.* Its appearance was frightening. 32The head of the statue was fashioned of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its trunk and thighs of bronze, 33its calves of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34As you were watching, a *special* stone was *quarried and* cut, but not by human hands. *The divinely hewn* stone *began to move;* it struck the statue on its iron and clay feet and smashed them *to* pieces. 35Suddenly *the entire statue collapsed*—its iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold were all broken into pieces *and turned to dust,* like the chaff carried away by the wind from the threshing floors in summer. Soon not a trace of the statue was left. But the *divinely hewn* stone that struck the statue became a mountain that filled the whole earth. 36That, *good king,* was your dream.

If you allow, we will now tell you what it all means. 37You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has conferred upon you the kingdom *you now rule, along with* the power and strength and glory *to subdue it.* 38He has placed all people everywhere and all the beasts that roam the fields and all the birds *that fly* in the sky under your control. He has made you ruler over them all: you are the head of gold. 39After your reign is over, another kingdom will rise, but its *glory* will never match yours. *This lesser kingdom is the chest and arms of silver. When that kingdom has come and gone,* a third *and even less majestic* empire will rise, which will rule over the whole earth. This kingdom is *the trunk and thighs of* bronze. 40Then, *when those days are past,* a fourth kingdom will come to power with the strength of iron, *though lacking in grandeur.* Just as iron breaks and shatters everything, so this kingdom will break and shatter all these former realms. 41-42But as you saw *in your vision,* this kingdom will be divided, with feet and toes made of both clay and iron. The strength of iron runs through it, but as the toes are made partly of iron and partly of clay, the kingdom, too, will be partly strong and partly fragile. 43Your dream envisions that this kingdom of iron mixed with clay will be of peoples mixed but not united, *the kingdoms joined in the bonds of marriage but not* true allies, for iron and clay form no alloy.

These four kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze, and iron/clay are probably the Neo-Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek kingdoms, respectively.

44In the days when these kings *of iron and clay* reign, the God of heaven will set up *another kingdom,* a kingdom that can never be destroyed, a kingdom that will never be ruled by others. It will crush all the other kingdoms and bring them to an end. This kingdom will last forever. 45It will be as you have seen *in your dream,* that a *special* stone *quarried and* cut from the mountain—but not by human hands—will crush the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God, *the one True God of heaven,* has revealed to the king what will happen in the future. You can be sure that the dream and its meaning are true.

46When Daniel had finished, King Nebuchadnezzar *did something remarkable.* He fell on his face before Daniel, worshiped him, and ordered *his officials* to offer grain offerings and burn incense to him *as they would to a god.*

Nebuchadnezzar: 47I am now certain that your God is the God of *all* gods, the Lord of *all* kings, and the Revealer of mysteries, for *unlike the other wise men in my service,* you were able to reveal *to me* this mystery. *You told me not only what I dreamed but what it all means.*

48The king bestowed *high honors and* many gifts on Daniel. He promoted him *to new positions in his court* and made him governor over the whole province of Babylon and head over all the wise men in his realm. 49Daniel approached the king and requested that he put his friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—in charge of affairs in the province of Babylon while Daniel remained in the royal court.

3 *One day* King Nebuchadnezzar *ordered his craftsmen to* make a statue *plated* with gold that was 90 feet high and 9 feet wide.

This giant idol clearly is meant to intimidate.

When finished, it was set up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon, 2-3and King Nebuchadnezzar planned an *elaborate* ceremony to dedicate the statue. He sent out invitations to *his officials. At the appointed time,* his officers, prefects, governors, trusted advisors, treasury officials, judges, magistrates, and all the rest of his provincial leaders arrived and gathered near the statue for the dedication ceremony.

► The Babylonian Empire has a complex governmental structure. At the top is the king, a man descended from Nabopolassar, the Babylonian who wrested the region from Assyrian control about 612 B.C. A resident of the Chaldean region of the Babylonian Empire, he brings his friends with him to the top, making the Chaldeans the most powerful group of people in the empire. As the empire grows, the king needs friends under him to rule the far-flung provinces, so he appoints satraps, guardians of large portions of the empire and representatives of the king in his absence. Within each large portion, prefects rule the conquered cities and report to the satraps. In every part of the empire, the power of the king is felt through his servants who administer justice, protect the lands from invasions, and collect hefty taxes.

Herald *(shouting)*: 4People of all nations and languages: *by order of the king,* you are commanded 5to bow down and worship the golden statue erected by King Nebuchadnezzar every time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments. 6Anyone who does not *obey the king's command and refuses to* bow and worship will be taken immediately and thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.

7So, *on cue,* the moment all the people in the crowd heard the sound of the musical instruments—horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the rest—all of the people, regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language, bowed down and worshiped the golden statue erected by King Nebuchadnezzar.

8Meanwhile, certain Chaldean leaders stepped forward to make accusations against the Jews.

Chaldeans: 9Long live the king! 10You, *good* king, have made a decree that every person who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments is supposed to bow down and worship the golden statue *you erected. You have also decreed* that 11anyone who does not *obey the king's command and refuses to* bow and worship will be *taken immediately and* thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12*It has come to our attention that* certain Jews whom you appointed to govern in the province of Babylon are ignoring your order, O king. They refuse to serve your gods, *our gods,* and they do not fall and worship the golden statue you erected. Their names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

13When Nebuchadnezzar heard this, he flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego be brought in *for questioning*; so his officials *went out, found them, and* brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar: 14*It is reported to me* that you, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, refuse to serve my gods and do not *bow and* worship the golden statue I had set up. Is that true?

Before they have a chance to answer, Nebuchadnezzar decides to see for himself what they will do.

15If you are ready to *comply with my order and* fall down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, lute, harp, pipe, and all the other musical instruments, then things will go well for you from here. But if you refuse to worship, you will be taken immediately and thrown in a furnace of blazing fire. What god could possibly rescue you from my hands then?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: [16]Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to defend our actions in this matter. *We are ready for the test.* [17]If you throw us into the blazing furnace, then the God we serve is able to rescue us from a furnace of blazing fire and release us from your power, Your Majesty. [18]But even if He does not, O king, you can be sure that we *still* will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue you erected.

► Daniel's friends are men of conviction. They are ready for anything the king throws at them and know that God can release them from the king's angry grip. They just don't know if He will. That line—"But even if He does not"—resonates with faith. Everyone wants to follow a God who does miracles-on-demand. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego know the one True God does not always rescue His martyrs. Still they will not back down; they will not compromise. They will follow Him and not serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

[19]At this Nebuchadnezzar flew into such a rage at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego that *onlookers saw* his face twisted and distorted. *With fury burning in his eyes,* he ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than usual. [20]He commanded some of his strongest soldiers to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego so they could be thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. [21]So the Jews were taken and tied up so quickly that they were still wearing the clothes they had on *when they arrived*—pants, cloaks, hats, and all.* Then they were *picked up and* thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. [22]The furnace was so hot and the king's command carried out so quickly, *without any precautions,* that the soldiers who took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego up *to the furnace* were themselves killed by *the heat of* the raging fire. [23]And the three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, tied *and bound,* fell into the furnace of blazing fire.

[24]*Nebuchadnezzar could hardly believe his eyes.* Shocked, the king jumped up and asked his advisors,

Nebuchadnezzar: Didn't we tie up and throw three men into the heart of the fire?

Advisors: Yes, O king.

Nebuchadnezzar: [25]Then why do I see four men, completely unbound, walking around in the middle of the fire? They don't appear to be hurt at all. And the fourth . . . he appears to be like a son of the gods.

[26]Then Nebuchadnezzar moved as close to the door of the furnace *as he dared without being scorched.* He shouted over the roar of the blazing fire.

Nebuchadnezzar: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, *right now*. Come here!

So the three men made their way out of the fiery *furnace*.

[27]The officers, prefects, governors, and king's advisors moved closer to see *what had happened to* these men. *They, too, could hardly believe their eyes*. The fire had done nothing to harm these men. Their hair was not singed. Their clothes were not scorched. They didn't have the faintest smell of smoke on them.

Nebuchadnezzar: [28]Praise is certainly due the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego *today*. He sent His heavenly representative and rescued His servants who put their trust in Him. They *had the audacity to* disobey the king's order and surrendered their bodies *to the fire* rather than serve and worship any god other than their own God. [29]Therefore, I decree that any people—regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language—who speak against the God worshiped by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego shall be torn apart, limb from limb, and their houses reduced to rubble; for no god *I have ever heard of* is able to rescue as this God has rescued *His servants today*.

[30]Afterward the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego *to even higher positions* in the province of Babylon.

4 *One day* King Nebuchadnezzar *sent out a herald with a message* for all the peoples, nations, and languages of the earth.

* 3:21 Meaning of the Aramaic is uncertain.

Message: May peace and prosperity be yours!
2I am pleased to be able to tell you
about all the signs and miracles the
Most High God has done for me.

3How great are His signs;
how powerful are His miracles!
His kingdom will endure forever;
His reign will last from generation
to generation.

4I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace; things were going well, and I was prospering. 5Then *one night* I had a dream that terrified me. As I rested *that night* on my bed, the images *in my mind*—the visions in my head—disturbed me greatly, *and I could not shake the fear*. 6So I ordered *my servants to gather* all the wise men of Babylon and bring them before me in order to tell me what this dream might mean. 7So they came: magicians, enchanters, Chaldean *astrologers,* and diviners. And though I told them the dream, they could not tell me its meaning. 8Finally, Daniel came before me. This man had been given the *Babylonian* name Belteshazzar after the name of my own god, *Bel,* and *it certainly seems* the spirit of the holy gods is with him. I told him my dream:
9"Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, it is clear to me that the spirit of the holy gods is with you and no mystery is too difficult for you *to figure out*. Listen to my dream, then tell me what it means. 10Here is the vision I saw as I lay upon my bed:

"A tree stood in the middle of the land;
it was *huge,* rising high *in the sky*.
11The tree grew tall and strong,
and it reached right up to the top
of the sky.
It was so large that it could be seen
from one end of the earth to the
other.
12It had beautiful leaves and plenty of fruit.
In fact, it provided sustenance for
everyone.
Wild animals came and rested in its
cool shade.
Birds *flew in and* built nests on its
sturdy branches.
Every living creature plucked its
fruit *and was satisfied*.

13"*But that was not all.* The visions kept coming as I lay there on my bed, and I saw a heavenly messenger, a holy watcher coming down from heaven. 14He shouted out *orders regarding the tree.*

"'Cut down the tree, and lop off its
branches.
Strip off its leaves, and scatter its
fruit.
Let all the *wild* animals beneath it run
away
and all the birds on its branches *fly
away*.
15But leave its stump *intact,*
its roots in the ground,
Strapped down with iron and bronze,
surrounded by the *tender* grass of
the field.
Let the dew of heaven fall *heavy* on it
every night and make it wet,
and let him live off the plants of the
earth among the wild animals.
16Let his human heart be changed,
exchanged for the heart of a
wild animal
until seven times have come and
gone.
17The verdict comes down as the
watchers decreed;
the sentence is passed by order of
the holy ones
So that all who live *on the earth*
may know that the Most High *God*
is the true sovereign over all
kingdoms of the earth;
He grants authority to anyone He wishes
and installs the lowliest of people
into positions of power.'

(to Daniel) 18"This is the dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, dreamed, *the vision I saw*. None of the other *sages and* wise men in my kingdom are able to tell me what it means. But *I believe* you, Belteshazzar, can because the spirit of the holy gods is with you *and you have a special gift*. Now tell me what it means."

19*As the interpretation of the king's dream became clear,* Daniel (who was also called Belteshazzar) became *visibly* upset for a while. His thoughts troubled him. The king *noticed, and he* spoke to Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar: Belteshazzar, don't let my dream or its meaning alarm you. *Tell me what you know.*

Belteshazzar: My lord, I wish the dream described those who hate you and its meaning concerned the fate of your enemies! 20The tree you saw *in your*

vision, the one which grew tall and strong so that its top reached up to the sky and could be seen from one end of the earth to the other, 21the tree whose leaves were beautiful and fruit plentiful and provided sustenance for everyone, the tree under which the wild animals came to rest *in the cool shade* and in which the birds built their nests on its *sturdy* branches—22that tree is you, O king! You have become great and strong. Your greatness has grown tall and reached the sky; your authority *and power* extend to the end of the earth. 23*But that is just one part of your dream.* The king saw the messenger, the holy watcher of heaven come down from heaven and declare, "Cut down the tree, and destroy it, but leave its stump *intact,* its roots in the ground, strapped down with iron and bronze, surrounded by the tender grass of the field; let the dew of heaven fall *heavy* on it *every night* and make it wet, and let him live among the wild animals off the plants of the earth, until seven times have come and gone." 24Here is the interpretation, O king. It is a decree the Most High *God* has issued against you, my lord and king. 25You will be driven away from all that is human and live in the company of wild animals; you will be forced to eat grass like oxen, and *night after night* the dew of heaven will fall on you and make you soaking wet. Seven times will pass until you *learn your lesson and* acknowledge that it is the Most High *God, and no other,* who is the true sovereign over all kingdoms on earth, and He grants authority to anyone He wishes. 26The *watcher's* order to leave the stump and roots of the tree *intact* means that your kingdom will be restored to you when, *and only when,* you acknowledge that Heaven *alone* is sovereign over the earth. 27So, O king, please accept my advice to you. Make a *clean* break with your sins and invest in what is right. Bring an end to your wicked deeds and show mercy to those you have beaten down. *If you do,* perhaps *your future will be different and* your prosperity will continue.

28But King Nebuchadnezzar *forgot Daniel's advice, so* everything *Daniel had predicted* happened. 29Twelve months later, as the king was strolling across the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, 30the king uttered *foolish words*:

Nebuchadnezzar: Isn't Babylon a great city? I have built this royal residence *from the ground up* with my own might and ingenuity to honor my own majesty.

31The words had scarcely left his lips when another voice thundered from heaven.

Voice: King Nebuchadnezzar, these *solemn* words are for you. The kingdom has been taken away from you. 32You will be driven away from all that is human, and you will live in the company of wild animals. You will be forced to eat grass like oxen. Seven times will pass until you *learn your lesson and* acknowledge that it is the Most High *God, and no other,* who is the true sovereign over all kingdoms on earth, and He grants authority to anyone He wishes.

33Instantly the *heavenly* decree against Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from all that is human and began to eat grass as oxen do. The dew of heaven fell and drenched his body. In time his hair grew as long as the feathers on an eagle and his nails grew *long and curved back on his hand* like the claws of a bird.

Message: 34When these days *of exile* came to an end, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven and came to my senses. I blessed the Most High *God* and praised and gave glory to the One who lives eternally:

"His reign will endure forever;
His kingdom will last from
generation to generation.
35Among all the people of the earth,
there are none *who compare.*
He does as He wishes with the armies
of heaven
and those who live on earth.
No one can stop His hand *from acting*;
no one dares to ask, 'What have
You done?'"

36It was in that moment that I came to my senses. *Soon* my honor and splendor were restored *as Daniel predicted,* and the *former* glory of my kingdom returned. Those who had served me before, my advisors and officials, sought me and returned me to the throne *of Babylon. In time* my kingdom and power grew even greater than it was before. 37Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, acknowledge the *true* King of heaven. I praise, lift up, and glorify Him because all He does is true, all His ways are just, and He is able

to cut down those who strut about in their pride.

► A theme found throughout Scripture is that God humbles the proud and exalts the humble. Nebuchadnezzar is stronger than anyone else, and he knows it. He willingly accepts credit for all that has happened in his life, so God moves decisively to show how insignificant Nebuchadnezzar truly is. It takes little to reduce him to an animal-like state, a wild man living at the margins of humanity, his power and prestige eroded overnight. If one of the greatest kings in history degenerates so completely, what can be done to common folks? Seven years of living as an animal go by, however, and he comes to his senses. He recognizes the truth of who he is and who God is. That realization is his salvation.

5 1-2*A few decades later,* the king, Belshazzar, held a state banquet and invited a thousand of his officials.

► The regent stands in for the king and performs his duties while King Nabonidus spends 10 years campaigning abroad, that is, fighting to expand the kingdom. In this case, the regent is Nabonidus' son Belshazzar.

As he was tasting the wine, he ordered servants to bring in the gold and silver vessels his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the temple in Jerusalem *many years earlier*. He wanted his officials *to join him,* his wives, and his concubines in drinking *a royal toast* from them. 3*A little later* his servants returned carrying in the gold* vessels that had been taken from the temple, the house of the one True God in Jerusalem. The king, his officials, his wives, and his concubines began to drink from them. 4As they drank the wine, they offered praise to their idols crafted in gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

5Suddenly the fingers of a hand—a human hand—appeared and began to write on the plaster of one of the palace walls *lit* by a nearby lampstand. The king *stood transfixed,* watching the hand as it wrote. 6Then his face changed. He grew pale *and began to feel sick.* His thoughts frightened him: *what was this strange vision?* His legs felt weak and wobbly. His knees knocked together. 7The king cried out to *his servants, ordering them* to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldean *wise* men, and the diviners.

Belshazzar *(to Babylon's wise men)***:** *A great reward awaits* the *first* person who can read this writing and tell me what it means. He will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around his neck, and *ascend in rank and privilege to* be the third-highest-ranking ruler in the kingdom.

8All the king's *purported* wise men came forward *to examine the wall,* but no one could read the writing or tell the king what it meant. 9*When it became clear that none of his sages could help him,* King Belshazzar became even more frightened. His face grew even paler, and his officials were dumbfounded.

10*Belshazzar's mother,* the queen, overheard some of the discussions between the king and his noble guests, so she entered the banquet hall.

Queen: Long live the king! Don't let this *strange* incident frighten you or let your face grow pale. 11*Need I remind you that* there is a gifted man in your kingdom who possesses the spirit of the holy gods. *Years ago,* in the time of your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, he was discovered to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. That is why King Nebuchadnezzar put him in charge of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldean *astrologers,* and diviners *in his kingdom.* 12This man Daniel, whom King *Nebuchadnezzar* named Belteshazzar, has special abilities, knowledge, and wisdom; he is able to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve problems *no one else can. Why don't you* call for Daniel? He will tell you what the writing means.

13-14*With no other options, Belshazzar gave the order, and* Daniel was brought before him.

* 5:3 Other manuscripts add, "and silver."

Belshazzar *(to Daniel)*: Are you that Daniel I've heard *so much* about, one of the exiles brought here from Judah by my predecessor, *King Nebuchadnezzar?* I have been told that you possess the spirit of the *holy* gods—that you have insight, understanding, and exceptional wisdom. 15Before you arrived, I had the wise men and enchanters brought before me to see if they could read this writing *on the wall* and tell me what it means, and not one of them was able to tell me. 16But it has been reported to me directly that you can offer *accurate* interpretations and solve problems *no one else can.* Now *I will offer you what I offered the others*: if you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around your neck, and *ascend in rank and privilege to* be the third-highest-ranking ruler in the kingdom.

Daniel: 17Keep the gifts for yourself, or else award them to another. *That is up to you.* Still, I will *agree to* read the writing *on the wall* and tell you what it means.

18O king, the Most High God gave sovereignty, greatness, honor, and splendor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. 19God made him so great *and powerful* that all peoples, regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language, trembled *in fear* before him. He did as he pleased: executing or sparing, honoring or shaming anyone as he wished. 20But *there came a point* when his heart was so proud and his spirit so haughty that he acted arrogantly; he lost his royal throne and was stripped of his royal honors. 21He was driven away from all that is human, and he took on the base instincts of an animal; he lived in the company of wild donkeys and *bent over* to eat grass like the oxen; *every night* the dew of heaven fell *heavy* on his body and made him wet until he learned *his lesson* and acknowledged that the Most High God is the *true* sovereign over all earthly kingdoms, and He grants authority to anyone He wishes.

22But even though you knew all this, you, Belshazzar, his descendant, have *followed in his ways and* not lived humbly. 23On the contrary, you have risen up against the *true* Lord of heaven. *By demanding that* the sacred vessels from His temple be brought before you and having you, your officials, your wives, and your concubines drink from them, *you have issued a challenge you cannot win.* You have *made toasts and* offered praise to the idols crafted in silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—*idols* which cannot see you, hear you, or know *anything at all.* And you have failed to honor in all you do the one True God who holds the breath of life in the palm of His hand and makes possible all your days. 24He is the one who sent this hand and inscribed this message *on the wall,* 25and this is what the inscription says: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN."

The cryptic word play is short and sweet. MENE, MENE; TEKEL; PARSIN: Numbered, numbered (your days); weighed (deficiently); divided (your empire).

26Here is what these words mean:
MENE: God has numbered the days
of your reign and brought it to an end;
27TEKEL: You have been weighed on
the scales and found defective;
28PERES: Your kingdom has been divided and
handed over to the Medes and Persians."

29*True to his word,* Belshazzar gave the order and Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and the king proclaimed that he *ascend in rank and privilege to* be the third-highest-ranking ruler in the kingdom.

30That very night, *under the cloak of darkness,* Belshazzar, the Chaldean king *of Babylonia,* was killed. 31Then Darius the Mede, in his 62nd year, gained control of the kingdom.

► Belshazzar makes a promise he cannot keep. The night that he gives the order to reward Daniel for his service is his last night on earth. By sunrise a new king—even a new empire—rules Belshazzar's kingdom. But Daniel doesn't mind because the true King is with him. Darius, Belshazzar's successor, will recognize Daniel's obvious talents and one day promote him to the same rank Belshazzar promised.

Belshazzar's story is a great reminder that people—regardless of their rank—who insult God or try to render God irrelevant are doomed to fall. They may not fall as quickly as Belshazzar, but they will fall.

6 Darius decided to rule by stationing 120 officers *strategically* over the entire empire. 2Over the officers he appointed 3 governors, including Daniel, and required each officer to report directly to them. This way the *new* king hoped not to lose *any territories from his recent conquests or the revenue they provided.* 3Because of Daniel's exceptional abilities, it wasn't long before he distinguished himself over the other governors and officers. So the king decided to appoint him as head over the entire realm. 4*This appointment did not sit well with the other leaders,* so the governors and officers tried to find reasons to level charges against Daniel for the way he supervised the kingdom. *Though they tried,* they could find no basis for charges or any corruption *in his office.* Daniel was loyal and attentive in his duties.

Conspirators: 5We will never find any credible basis for charges against Daniel *for how he conducts his office.* Perhaps we can uncover some *suitable* charge in regard to the law of his God.

6The governors and officers agreed and went to the king *with what they thought would be a way to entrap Daniel.*

Conspirators *(to the king)***:** May King Darius live forever! 7All the leaders of the empire—the governors, prefects, officers, advisors, and other administrators—*have consulted together and* are in *complete* agreement that the king should issue an edict and enforce it strictly to the effect that anyone who prays to another—whether divine or human—except for you, *of course, good* king, for a period of 30 days, will be thrown into the lions' den. 8Now, O king, *we ask that you* establish such an ordinance and sign it *into law,* so that it cannot be changed. For the laws enacted by the Medes and Persians cannot be rescinded.

9After considering their proposal, King Darius signed the ordinance *and made it law.* 10Even though Daniel was aware the king had signed the ordinance *into law,* he continued to do what he always did. He would go home, *ascend the stairs* to the upper room—which had windows facing toward Jerusalem—and get down on his knees three times a day and pray to his God and praise Him. 11*One day* the conspirators came *to his house* and found Daniel on his knees praying and seeking God's help. 12So they went back to the king and asked to speak to him about the edict he had made.

Conspirators: O king! Did you not sign an edict expressly forbidding anyone, *regardless of his nationality,* to pray to another—whether divine or human—except for you, *of course, good* king, for a period of 30 days or else he would be thrown into the lion's den?

Darius: Indeed. I did sign it, *and I intend to enforce it* according to the laws of the Medes and Persians. It cannot be rescinded. *Why do you ask?*

Conspirators *(to the king)***:** 13*Well, recently we found your servant,* Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, *kneeling and* praying *at his home* three times a day *to his God.* He is ignoring you, O king, and the edict you signed *into law.*

14When the king heard the charge, he was very upset. *He thought a great deal of Daniel,* so he tried to figure out a way to help him. All day long until evening he looked *for some loophole in the law* to keep Daniel from falling victim *to his edict.* 15The conspirators returned to *press the matter further.*

Conspirators *(to the king)***:** We have no need to remind the king that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, no edict established by the king can be *revoked,* changed, *or ignored.*

16*With his honor at stake,* the king *had no choice. He* gave the order for Daniel to be captured. *Before* Daniel was thrown into the pit with the lions, the king spoke to him.

Darius: May your God, the God you have served so faithfully, rescue you!

17*Daniel was thrown into the lions' den and* a stone was brought in and placed over *the opening to shut* the mouth of the den. The king *himself* sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his nobles. That way *no one could tamper with the pit and* nothing could happen to change Daniel's fate. 18The king retired to his palace and spent the night fasting. *That evening he stayed to himself,* turning down his *regular evening* musical entertainment. *When he finally went to bed,* he could not sleep.

19When first light of morning finally arrived, the king got up and didn't waste any time returning to the lions' den.

Darius can hardly wait to see what has happened to Daniel, who has become indispensable to the king.

20As he drew near the den, with anguish in his voice he called out to Daniel, *hoping somehow he was still alive.*

Darius: Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, the One you have served so faithfully, been able to rescue you from these *hungry* lions?

Daniel *(to the king)*: 21Long live the king! 22*As soon as you shut the mouth of this den,* My God sent His heavenly representative to shut the mouths of these *hungry* lions so that they could not hurt me. *He has rescued me* because I am as innocent before Him as I am before you, O king. I have done *you* no harm.

23The king could hardly contain his *excitement and* joy. He ordered that Daniel be taken up out of the *lions'* den. He was removed and *examined carefully, but* not even a scratch was found on him—all because he put his trust in His God. 24The king gave yet another order; *this time he demanded* that those who accused Daniel *of wrongdoing* be *captured and* thrown into the lions' den—but not only them—their wives and children too. *As they were being pushed* into the den, before they even hit the bottom, the lions *jumped on them,* overpowered them, and crushed their bones *in their powerful jaws.*

25Afterward King Darius sent a message to all the peoples through the world, regardless of their heritage, nationality, or language.

Message: May peace *and prosperity* be yours! 26I decree that all people everywhere who live under my sovereign rule ought to tremble before and fear the God of Daniel.

For He is the living God,
and He will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be overthrown;
His reign will know no end.
27He saves and rescues *those who fear Him,*
performing signs and wonders in
heaven and on earth;
For He has rescued *His servant* Daniel
from the power of the lions.

28*With his enemies defeated,* Daniel *continued to* thrive during the reign of Darius and into the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

7 In the first year of Belshazzar's reign over Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he slept in his bed. *When he got up, he remembered* the dream and wrote it down. This is the beginning of his record:

These events most likely take place in 554 B.C. They are a flashback to before the feast in chapter 5.

Daniel: 2As I dreamed that night, I saw a vision: I was looking and saw the four winds of heaven *blow in from all directions and* sweep across the surface of the Mediterranean Sea,* whipping up *waves and turmoil within the deep.* 3Four great beasts rose up from the *churning* waters, each one different from the other. 4The first *to surface* was like a lion. It had *giant* wings like an eagle's *protruding from its shoulders.* I watched as *suddenly* its feathers were plucked and its wings removed. The great beast was lifted up from the earth so that it could stand on two feet like a human being. Then it was given human intellect. 5After this I looked and saw a second beast *rising from the sea,* this one resembling a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and in its mouth, *gripped tightly* between its teeth, were three ribs. And the bear was told to get up and devour even more flesh. 6After witnessing this, I continued to look and saw another beast appear *from beneath the waves.* This one was *fierce and fast* like a leopard. It had a bird's wings *like the lion,* but two pairs *instead of one* coming out of its back. It had four heads, *and men bowed to this beast,* and it was permitted to rule *over them.* 7While I continued to gaze at this vision that night, a fourth beast arose. *As if from a nightmare,* it was terrifying, more awful and more powerful *than anything I had ever seen.* Its enormous iron teeth devoured and shattered *its prey.* Everything was crushed beneath its *massive* feet. And this fourth beast was unlike the previous three, having ten horns *protruding from its head.* 8As I *stared at the creature and* wondered about the *ten* horns, suddenly

* 7:2 Literally, Great Sea

another horn grew *out of its head,* smaller than the rest. Three of the first horns were pushed up from their roots to make room for the little horn. It *appeared to* have eyes like a human and a mouth that boasted and bragged of *its great exploits.*

9As I watched *the vision unfold,*
 thrones were set in place,
And the Ancient of Days took His
 throne *above all.*
 His clothes were *the purest* white, as
 white as snow,
 and the hair of His head was like
 the finest wool.
His throne was a flaming fire,
 set on wheels that blazed *like the sun.*
10A stream of fire emerged and flowed
 from His presence.
 Thousands upon thousands *of*
 heavenly beings were there to
 serve Him;
 millions upon millions stood by to
 attend Him.
The *heavenly* court sat *to hear a case,*
 and the books *of judgment* were
 opened.

11I continued to look *on the scene* and heard the clatter of arrogant words spoken by that *smaller* horn. And as I watched, *the verdict was given, and the sentence enacted:* the *fourth* beast was slain, and its body was destroyed, delivered over to the consuming fire. 12As for the other beasts, their power and position were taken away, but they were allowed to live for a little while longer.

13I saw *another spectacle* in the night
 visions:
 I looked and saw someone like a
 son of man
 coming with the clouds of heaven.*
He approached the Ancient of Days
 and was ushered into His presence.
14To Him was given authority, honor, and
 a kingdom
 so that all people of every heritage,
 nationality, and language might
 serve Him.
His dominion will last forever,
 His throne will never pass away,
 and His kingdom will never be
 destroyed.

15As for me, Daniel, I was deeply disturbed by all that I saw; these night visions terrified me. 16So I approached one of the heavenly beings standing before *the flaming throne* and asked him to explain exactly what had happened. So he did. And this is what he told me it all meant, the interpretation he gave me to all I had seen and heard:

Heavenly Being: 17The four great beasts *you saw that rose from the wind-whipped sea* are four kings who will rise from the earth *and come to rule vast empires.* 18But the holy ones of the Most High God will receive that kingdom which will last for all the ages to come, forever and ever.

Daniel: 19But *I wanted to know more.* I wanted to understand the *whole* truth about the fourth beast. It was different from the other three, so fearsome with its iron teeth and bronze claws devouring and shattering *its prey* and trampling everything in its path beneath its *massive* feet.

► The beasts can be identified by a careful study of history. The lion, bear, leopard, and fourth terrifying beast represent Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. Persia had four kings, so the leopard had four heads. The ten horns of the fourth beast with iron teeth represent the ten dominant Seleucid kings after Alexander the Great's empire splintered into four regions. The smaller horn is Antiochus IV who put down three potential Seleucid leaders (horns) before him.

Daniel: 20*I was intrigued* with the 10 horns on the beast's head and that *11th* horn that grew up and uprooted the other 3 horns, that horn with eyes *like human eyes* and a mouth that uttered arrogant words, that horn that looked greater than the rest. 21I looked on as that *11th* horn waged war against the holy ones; *for a while it seemed it might* triumph over them, *that is,* 22until the Ancient of Days arrived and ruled in favor of the holy ones of the Most High. Now the appointed time had come when the holy ones took possession of the *eternal* kingdom. 23The heavenly being told me,

* 7:13 Mark 13:26; 14:62; Revelation 1:7; 14:14

Just because a prophecy has been fulfilled once, it doesn't mean the prophecy is no longer instructive. Daniel's prophecies are excellent examples of this idea. Written from the perspective of the Babylonian exile, these prophecies describe the coming suffering of God's people under foreign rule and look forward to a time when God will liberate them. During the next 300 years, the Jews watch Daniel's prophecies unfold. The Persian Empire is conquered by a Greek, Alexander the Great, in 333 B.C. Alexander's short reign is followed by the division of the empire into four districts governed by his politically inexperienced generals; Israel is ruled by a string of cruel men—culminating in the reign of Antiochus IV who attempts to turn Jerusalem into a Greek city, bans the Torah, and even builds an altar to Zeus in God's temple. In the face of such pagan influence, God instigates the Maccabean Revolt of 167-165 B.C. At that time, Jerusalem's God-fearing traditions return, and Israel is ruled by the Jews. But these historical facts are not the end of God's message. Within Daniel's prophecies is a description of the end of the age, a time when evil will be punished and the Liberator will reign.

"The fourth beast, *like the other three,*
represents a fourth kingdom *that will rule* on earth.
This kingdom will be different from the rest;
it will devour the whole earth
And crush everything *beneath its feet*
and shatter it all *to pieces.*
24 The 10 horns are 10 kings
that will arise from this *fourth* kingdom.
After these another king will come to power
who will be very different from the kings before him,
seizing power until he subdues three kings.
25 This king will speak out against the Most High,
and *try to* wear down His holy ones;
He will seek to alter the *sacred* times and *special* law *God gave them,*
and they will be under his control
for time, times, and half a time.
26 After this, the *heavenly* court will sit in judgment,
his authority will be taken *from him,*
and *his supremacy over the earth* will come to a permanent end.
27 Then the great ruling authority of the kingdoms under the heavens
Shall be handed over to the *covenant* people,
the holy ones of the Most High;
Their kingdom will last forever,
and all the *remaining* kingdoms will worship and serve Him."

28 This is the end of his record.

Daniel: My thoughts on these matters upset me greatly. My face grew pale, but I kept it all to myself.

Daniel awakens from these night visions shaking and pale, but he is never able to shake these thoughts. They are always on his mind.

8 **Daniel:** In the third year of Belshazzar's reign *over Babylon,* I, Daniel, saw *another* vision.

These events most likely happen around 552 or 551 B.C.

This vision followed the first I had *just a couple of years* earlier. 2 In my vision, I looked and suddenly found myself in the fortress-city of Susa in the province of Elam. I was standing next to the Ulai Canal. 3 When I looked up, I saw a ram *near me* standing on the bank of the canal. The ram had two horns, both of which were long, but one was even longer than the other. *I watched as the horns grew,* and the longer came up after the other, *the shorter horn.* 4 As I looked, the ram charged to the west, the north, and the south. It defeated all the other beasts in its path, and there was no one *great enough* to rescue *its victims* from the ram's power. It did whatever it liked, and *with each conquest,* it grew stronger.

5 As I was *trying to figure out what I was* seeing, suddenly a male goat came from the west *to challenge the ram.* It moved *so quickly* across the face of the entire earth that *it seemed* his feet never touched the ground. On its head the goat had a prominent horn *sticking out* between

its eyes. 6He approached the ram with the two horns—the same one I had seen standing by the Ulai Canal—and charged at it with a violent rage. 7I saw the goat in *reckless* fury butt the ram and shatter his two horns. The ram had no power to stand against its foe, so it was thrown to the ground and trampled *to death*; there was no one *great enough* to rescue the ram from the goat's power. 8*With this conquest,* the male goat *with the prominent horn took the place of his rival and* grew more powerful. But at the height of his power, the great horn was broken off, and four prominent horns grew in its place, each one pointing toward *one of* the four winds of heaven.

9A *fifth,* smaller horn grew out of one of these new horns. Its power grew, and its influence reached toward the south and toward the east and toward the beautiful lands *of promise.* 10Then it grew straight up to *challenge* the army of heaven; it knocked some of the heavenly beings and stars to the ground and trampled them *beneath it.* 11The horn grew even greater, and *in its arrogance* came up against the Prince of the *heavenly* army. It halted the daily sacrifices to Him and took control of His established sanctuary. 12As a result of *this great* rebellion, the heavenly army and the daily sacrifices were handed over to the horn. *For a time* it cast truth to the ground and succeeded in everything it tried.

13Then I heard two heavenly beings in conversation with each other.

Heavenly Being *(to its companion)***:** *When will it all end?* How long will these events—the desecrating rebellion, the *perverted* daily sacrifices, and the trampling of the sanctuary and heavenly army—how long will they continue?

Second Heavenly Being *(to me)***:** 14*The world will see* 2,300 mornings and evenings *before all this will pass. After this the trampling will cease,* and the holy sanctuary will be set right.

15As I, Daniel, was trying to understand the meaning of this vision I had seen, suddenly, someone who looked like a human stood in front of me. 16I heard a human voice call out, *coming* from *somewhere* between *the waters of* the Ulai *Canal.*

Voice: Gabriel, explain to this man what he has seen.

17So the one *called Gabriel* moved closer to me; as he did, I became very scared. I fell *to the ground,* my face down.

Gabriel *(to Daniel)***:** Son of man, *allow me to help* you understand this vision. All you have seen has to do with the time of the end.

► Some Jews and Christians have read this cryptic language, "time of the end," to refer to the end of the world; but others believe the context points to the "time of the end" of the exile of God and His people from the full and final restoration of temple worship in Jerusalem.

18As he was speaking, I slipped into a deep sleep—my face *pressed* to the ground. But Gabriel touched me and helped me stand to my feet *where I was before.*

Gabriel: 19I *have been sent* here to help you understand the things that will take place later in the final time of wrath; for everything you have seen refers to the appointed time of the end. 20The ram you saw *by the Ulai Canal, the one* with the two *long* horns, represents the kings of Media and Persia. 21The shaggy *male* goat *represents* the king of Greece. The great horn *that stuck out* between his eyes *symbolizes* the first king *of Greece.* 22The breaking off of the *first* horn and its replacement by four *prominent* horns depicts four kingdoms that will arise from this *one* nation, none of which will have as much power as that first king.

23When their reign has come to an end,
when their rebellion has run its course,
A *new* king will rise to power,
defiance written across his face,
expert in riddles *and ruses.*
24This king will grow strong—
but not on his own power.
He will stun *the world* with his dreadful destruction
and succeed in everything he tries.
He will wipe out *a vast circle of* mighty *leaders*
and *turn his deadly hand against* the holy people *of God.*

25He will use his skill *and power* to stir
up deceit;
in *the darkness of* his heart he shall
believe himself great.
When all seems well, he will destroy
many people,
and will even stand up against the
Prince of princes.
But *when the time is right,* he will be
broken,
though not by a human hand.

26What you have seen and heard about the *2,300* evenings and the mornings is true. It will happen, but not for a long time. So seal up this vision *and keep it a secret, for now*.

Daniel: 27With this I, Daniel, was completely exhausted. I was ill for several days, *unable to get out of bed*. But after a time I *grew stronger,* got up, and resumed my service to the king. But I was very upset by the vision, *for though I tried,* I could never really understand it.

9 **Daniel:** 1-2In the first year that Darius the Mede (Ahasuerus' son) ruled over the Babylonians, I, Daniel, was studying the word of the Eternal One according to the prophet Jeremiah and discovered in the scrolls the number of years that Jerusalem must lie desolate *before it is restored,* that is, seventy years.

Darius is a title and may refer to Cyrus about 539 B.C. or Artaxerxes I (Ahasuerus' son) in 465 B.C.

3After learning this, I turned to the Lord God, praying diligently, begging *for His mercy, grieving and* fasting in sackcloth and ashes. 4I prayed to the Eternal One my God, *praising His greatness and* confessing *our sins*: Lord God, You are great and awesome! You are always faithful to the covenant You made *with us.* Your unfailing love *extends* to all who love You and keep Your commandments. 5But we have sinned and wronged You. We have acted wickedly in our rebellion, going so far as to disregard Your commandments and regulations. 6We have ignored *the message given through* Your servants, the prophets, who spoke on Your behalf to our kings, princes, ancestors, indeed every last person of the land. 7O Lord, You always do what is right. It is Your due, but we deserve nothing this day but *public and* open shame. The people of Judah, Jerusalem—indeed of all Israel, those who are in neighboring regions and those who are in the farthest reaches, driven into exile by You for all the treacherous acts they committed against You—*we all deserve nothing but shame.* 8Eternal One, *public and* open shame is our due, for we have sinned against You, all of us, our kings, princes, and ancestors. 9But You, O Lord our God, still show us compassion and forgiveness even though we have *openly* rebelled against You. 10We have not obeyed the voice of the Eternal our God, for we have failed to live by the teachings You gave us directly through Your servants, the prophets. 11All the people of Israel have abandoned Your teachings, deserted *Your covenant,* and refused to obey Your voice. This is why the curse and the oath inscribed in the law of Moses,* the servant of God, has been poured out on us—for we have sinned against You. 12By unleashing on us this great calamity, You have carried out Your *solemn* words warning us and our leaders who led us *astray*. Under all of heaven, nothing like what happened to Jerusalem has ever happened before. 13All the calamity that has befallen us fulfills the warnings written in Moses' law; but *despite our adversity,* we have not sought the favor of the Eternal our God by walking away from our sins and pursuing insight into Your truth. 14And now we have *earned* the misery that the Eternal has stored up for us. Truly, the Eternal our God was right to do all He has done, for we refused to obey His voice.

15Now, Lord our God, You have made Your name great *among the nations* to this day by liberating Your *enslaved* people from the land of Egypt with powerful deeds; *yet* we have sinned *against You, our Liberator,* and we have acted wickedly. 16Lord, the reputation of Your city Jerusalem has suffered, and Your people are mocked by those around us because we and our ancestors have done wrong. I beg You to spare *Your city* Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; turn away Your *burning* anger and *fiery* wrath *from Your people* according to all Your covenant mercies. 17Now, God, please hear the prayers and petitions *voiced today* by your servant. Shine Your face on Your *destroyed and* desolate sanctuary for the

* 9:11 Leviticus 26:14-45; Deuteronomy 28:15-68

Daniel is just one man, yet he carries the sins of his nation to God and pleads with the Almighty to forgive and rescue His people. Their collective failures to live up to the covenant they made with God have scattered the chosen people to the four corners of the earth and have brought ruin to Jerusalem. After reading the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel knows that the calamity will not be over until God's people come back to Him. With fasting and prayer, Daniel hopes to begin the process of restoration.

God's covenant with Israel includes provisions for both blessings and curses. When the people follow God and keep His teaching, they can expect to live peacefully in the land God promised. But when the covenant people rebel against God and ignore His teaching, their actions—or lack of actions—bring into effect the curses. Daniel appeals to God's own interest as the One who cares about His name and His reputation. The fate of Jerusalem and His people reflects on Him.

sake of *Your name,* my Lord. 18Lend an ear, my God, and hear *this prayer*. Open Your eyes and see our deserted *streets and witness the devastation across the* city that bears Your name. We are crying to You and asking for mercy, not because we are righteous *and deserve it. No,* we bring these petitions to you because *we know* of Your great mercy. 19Lord, hear *our prayer*! Lord, forgive *our sins*! Lord, pay attention *to our plight* and act without delay, *not for our sake,* my God, but for Yours because these people and this city bear Your name.

20*For much of the day* I was pleading and praying, confessing my sin and the sins of my people Israel, presenting my case to the Eternal One my God on behalf of *Jerusalem,* His holy mountain. 21About the time of the evening sacrifice, while I was still pleading and praying and almost completely exhausted, the man Gabriel, who had appeared to me in an earlier vision, *appeared again and* reached out to me.

Gabriel *(to me)***:** 22Daniel, I have come *for one purpose:* to offer you insight and understanding *into these matters.* 23When you began your pleading *earlier today,* a word was issued. I *was instructed to* come and tell you about it, for you are highly regarded *by God.* So pay close attention so you can understand the vision.

24The decree has been issued: your people and your holy city have 70 sevens of time* to bring rebellion to a close, to put an end to sin, to wipe away guilt, to bring in a righteousness that endures, to seal up the prophet's vision, and to anoint the most sacred place. 25Know and understand this: from the proclamation of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to *the arrival of* the Anointed Ruler, there will be 7 weeks *of time*. For 62 weeks *of time* the community will be restored, the city rebuilt with broad streets and deep defenses, even through times of trouble. 26After those 62 weeks *of time* the Anointed One will be cut down and have nothing; then the warriors* of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and *defile* the sanctuary. Its end will come *swiftly as* in a flood and to the end there will be war. The decree has been issued: Desolation.

27And that prince will make a binding treaty with many people for a one-week *period of time*. In the middle of that one period he will put a stop to all sacrifices and offerings *to the Lord.* And at the height* *of his atrocities* he will set up an abominable *idol* that desecrates *the most holy place,* until the desolation decreed is finally poured out on the defiler.*

► Although God has countless heavenly messengers, only two are named in the Bible: Gabriel and Michael. These heavenly messengers fill many functions in the Bible; for example, they are members of God's divine council, they lead the heavenly army, and they deliver the words of God. In Daniel, Gabriel is a messenger in the most literal sense, bringing a revelation to Daniel through the explanations of a dream and of Scripture. Gabriel's

* 9:24 Literally, weeks * 9:26 Literally, people * 9:27 Literally, wing * 9:27 Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14

announcements about the coming Liberator do not end with Daniel. In the New Testament book of Luke, he is the one who announces the impending births of John the Baptist and Jesus to Zechariah and Mary, respectively.

10 1-2In the third year of King Cyrus' reign over the Persian Empire, Daniel, who had been named Belteshazzar *by his Babylonian captors,* received a word *from God through another vision.* The message proved reliable, and it had to do with a great war. Daniel understood the word and gained insight *into the future* through this vision. *Here is his account.*

These events happen around 535 B.C., when Babylonia is part of Persia.

Daniel: When *I received this vision,* I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three weeks. 3I had eaten *very little,* no meat and no rich foods *at all.* I had not *enjoyed the taste of* wine, nor had I used any oils *to bathe or groom myself.* I continued this way throughout the three full weeks. 4*The vision came to me* on the 24th day of the 1st month. As I was on the bank of the great Tigris River, 5I lifted my eyes and saw *what seemed at first to be* a man dressed in linen clothing. Around his waist was a belt made of the purest gold. 6His body had the appearance of *yellow* topaz; his face was bright like *flashes of* lightning; his eyes flamed like torches; his arms and legs sparkled like polished bronze; his voice sounded like thunder. 7I, Daniel, alone saw this *man and heard his voice.* Though there were others around me who did not see this sight, they were still overcome with fear and ran to hide. *I did not.* 8I was left all alone to witness this *glorious* sight. My strength *soon* left me. My face was drained of its natural color, and I was confused. I had no energy at all. 9Then I heard his voice and caught the sound of his words. As I did, I fell into a deep sleep—my face *pressed* to the ground. 10Just then, a *mighty* hand touched me and lifted my trembling *body* onto my hands and knees.

Messenger: 11Daniel, you are highly regarded *by God.* I have been sent to help you *understand the destiny of your people.* Stand up and listen carefully to what I have to tell you.

As he spoke, I *slowly* rose to my feet, *though I was still* shaking.

Messenger: 12Do not be afraid, Daniel. From the very first day that you began to pursue understanding and humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard. I have been sent in response to what you've said. 13*I would have been here sooner;* however, for the past 21 days the *spirit* prince of Persia opposed me *and prevented my coming to you.* Then Michael, one of the chief princes *of heaven,* came to my aid because I alone was *busy dealing* with the kings of Persia. 14I have come to help you understand what will happen to your people in the last days,* for this vision is about a time yet to come.

15As he was saying all this to me, I dropped my head and looked at the ground, completely quiet, *unable to respond.* 16Then one who looked like the sons of men *approached and* touched my lips. After that I was able to open my mouth and speak *again.* I turned to the one standing before me.

Daniel: My lord, what I have seen has left me utterly depressed. I have no strength left. 17How can I, your *humble* servant, even begin to address someone like you, my lord? My strength is gone, and I can hardly catch my breath.

18Again the one who looked like a man *reached out and* touched me. With that I felt my strength begin to return.

Messenger: 19Do not be afraid, you who are highly regarded *by God.* May peace rest on you *and make you whole*; be strong; be brave.

At his words, I grew even stronger.

Daniel: Please continue, my lord, for your words have given me strength.

Messenger: 20Do you realize, *now,* the reason I have come to you? Soon I must return to *continue the* fight with the *spirit* prince of Persia. When I do go, the *spirit* prince of Greece will come to do battle. 21Nevertheless, I will tell you what

* 10:14 This is a reference to the end of the age, but not to the end of the world.

is inscribed in the scroll of truth. No one
stands with me against the guardians
except for Michael, your *heavenly* prince.

11 **Messenger:** Darius the Mede had been on the throne less than one year when I came forward to back him and strengthen him.

[2]Now I am here to reveal to you the truth: Three more kings will rule in Persia. After them, a fourth will arise who will be much richer than all the others. He will use his wealth to build his power *and extend his influence*; then he will incite the nations to fight against the kingdom of Greece. [3]Meanwhile *in Greece,* a warrior king will come to power.

The Greek warrior king is Alexander the Great in the late fourth century B.C.

With great authority he will rule *his lands* and do as he desires. [4]But no sooner than he rises, his kingdom will be broken up and divided to the four winds of heaven. None of his own offspring will receive any portion, nor will these kingdoms exercise the *great* authority he once did, for his empire will be ripped from its foundation and given to others.

A series of powerful Persian kings arises after Cyrus. Over the next century, Persian power wanes until Alexander the Great brings down the Persian Empire.

[5]The king of the south will then grow in power *and prosper*. Yet *in time* one of his own officers will become more powerful than he and rule over an even greater empire. [6]Several years later, the king of the north and the king of the south will form an alliance. That alliance will be established by *the marriage of* the daughter of the king of the south to the king of the north; however, *this union will not last*. The princess will not hold onto power, and the king, too, will lose his throne. She will be given up along with her royal court, her father, and those who backed her. [7]*In response, one of her relatives,* a branch from her roots, will rise to take his place and become king *in the south*. He will *take up the sword and* lead an army into the fortress of the northern king. He will fight against them and *in the end* be victorious. [8]He will *sack their temples and* carry back to Egypt their gods, *cast* in metal images, and take their precious vessels *crafted* of fine gold and silver; for several years the king of the south will resist going to war against the king of the north. [9]But then, *in later times,* the king of the north will invade the provinces of the king of the south, but soon will *be forced to* withdraw to his own *northern* lands. [10]His sons will commit to war and assemble a powerful army, a force that will flood over the land, pass through *the territories,* and take the battle as far as the *southern* king's fortress. [11]*At this provocation,* the enraged king of the south will *rally a large force* to repel the northern invaders. And though the king of the north had assembled a powerful army, it will go down in defeat. [12]When the invading army is repelled, the heart of the king of the south will be caught up in pride, and so he will execute tens of thousands *of his enemies*; still he will not prove to be strong. [13]For the king of the north will return after a few years, having raised a fighting force far larger and better equipped than before. [14]When this happens many people will rebel against the king of the south. Violent people from your own people, *Daniel,* will join *the fray* in order to fulfill the vision, *but none will succeed*. All will fall. [15]Then the king of the north will come and build a siege ramp against a fortified city and *eventually* take it; for the south, even with their very best warriors, will have no strength left to fight. [16]The king of the north will go where he pleases, *and his army will march on unmatched and undeterred*. None can resist him. One day he will stand in the beautiful lands *of promise* with the power to destroy it *or let it be*. [17]Using the might of his kingdom, the king of the north will decide to force an alliance. He will give the king of the south his daughter for a wife *with the hope* that she might help conquer the kingdom *from within*; but his plans will not succeed. [18]Afterward, the king of the north will turn his attention to the coastlands, *attacking the cities there,* claiming many. *Eventually* a commander will put a stop to the violent attacks and turn the aggression back on the invader *and his army.* [19]The king of the north will flee to his own land *and* seek the protection of his own strongholds, but he will trip and fall, never to be seen *or heard of* again.

► After his death Alexander's kingdom is partitioned among his four generals, two of whom figure prominently in Daniel's prophecy. Alexander's generals continue to fight over Israel and its citizens. Seleucus Nicator rules in the north (Syria). Ptolemy Soter rules in the south (Egypt).

Messenger: 20Another *northern king* will rise to take his place. He will send out an official to exact taxes from the *most glorious* jewel of the kingdom, *namely Jerusalem,* but his tyranny will not last long. He will be cut down, though not in *the heat of* battle or in an angry *loss of control.*

21Yet another will rise to take his place: a truly despicable person. Though royal honors were not his by right, he will come in quietly and take over with cunning and clever promises. 22Armies will be overwhelmed and crushed before him, and the prince of the covenant will be cut down as well. 23Though his supporters are few in number, he will grow strong by deceiving those who have made alliances with him. 24In a time of ease *and great wealth* he will quietly invade the wealthiest parts of the region and do what none of his *royal* predecessors had ever done before; *instead of hoarding the treasure,* he will distribute the plunder, possessions, and property among those *loyal to him.* And though he will make plans to attack fortresses, these plans will not last for long.

25*But the king of the north is not finished.* Once again he inspires courage and gathers a large and powerful fighting force to attack the south; but the king of the south *takes notice and* gathers his own large, powerful army to wage war. But he will not be able to resist *the northern invader* because *treacherous* plans will be devised against him. 26*His closest advisors,* those who eat from the royal table, will *betray him and* bring about his downfall even as his army is swept away. Many will die in battle. 27Both kings will sit at the same table and lie to each other, their only interest in *deceiving and* harming the other. But none of this will matter, for the end is yet to come at the appointed time. 28The king of the north will *eventually* return to his own land with riches won from conquered peoples. With his heart set against the holy covenant, he will do whatever *his evil will desires* and then return to his own land.

29At the chosen time, he will once again *attempt to* invade the south, but this time will be different from any time before. 30For warships will arrive from the west* and confront him. Fearful *of their power,* he will withdraw. *On his way north,* he will unleash his violent fury against the holy covenant *and those loyal to it. At the same time* he will look with favor on those who turn their backs on it. 31The king will command his forces to *take over the city and* pollute the temple fortress. After they outlaw the daily sacrifices *to the one True God,* they will set up the disgusting idol that will desecrate the most holy place.* 32With smooth talk, he will entice people who act wickedly and break the covenant. But those who truly know their God will remain strong and work against him. 33The truly wise among God's people will help the many understand *the need to resist*; yet for quite some time they will be killed by sword and fire, or they will be imprisoned and their property taken. 34Those who fall victim *to this persecution* will receive only a little help, and many will join their cause out of smooth, *deceptive* speech. 35Some of the wise will fall *victim and be martyred* in order to be refined, purified, and made clean until the end, for the appointed time is still to come.

► Ironically, God's people have been at their best, not when they are moving with culture, but when they are moving against culture. The most extreme examples are in times of persecution when culture is actively hostile to faith. Persecution does not destroy true faith; it refines it.

Messenger: 36The king *of the north* will do as he desires. He will elevate himself and *make the audacious* claim that he is greater than all the gods. He will say horrendous things about the *One who truly is* God of gods. He will be successful *in*

* 11:30 Hebrew, *Kittim* * 11:31 Literally, abomination of desolation; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14

his exploits—but not forever—for the time of wrath must be fulfilled and what is decreed must be accomplished. 37He will have no respect for the gods worshiped by his ancestors or the one loved by women or any other god *for that matter*! For he will make himself greater than all *gods*. 38Instead of these, he will honor only the god of fortresses—a god his ancestors never knew—with gold and silver, with costly stones and other precious gifts. 39When he attacks the strongest fortresses, he will call upon this foreign god for help. He will bestow great honor on those *who are loyal to him, and for any* who acknowledge him, he will grant power and authority over many people and divide up the land as their reward.

40Then at the time of the end, the king of the south will make war against the king of the north. The king of the north will storm through the troops with chariots, horsemen, and many ships, overwhelming *the people* 41and advancing *to the south*. The northern king will enter the beautiful lands *of promise* and take control of many *nations along the way*. Yet other peoples will be rescued from his *tyrannical* hand: Edom, Moab, and the best of Ammon. 42He will extend his reach over *many* other nations, and even the land of Egypt will not elude *his wrath.* 43He will seize control over the treasures of Egypt, all of its precious items *skillfully crafted* of gold and silver. The Libyans and the Ethiopians will follow in his steps *and do his bidding*. 44But *various* reports from the east and the north *will eat away at the tyrant*. Distressed and furious, he will send his forces to destroy and annihilate many *nations*. 45*One day* he will pitch his palatial, *royal* tents between the *Great* Sea and the holy mountain of beauty, *namely Mount Zion.* Then *and there* his end will come, and no one will stand with him.

12 **Messenger** *(to Daniel)*: At that time, Michael, the great *heavenly* prince, the *grand defender and* guardian of your people, will arise. Then *the world* will enter a time of distress *unlike any in history, an hour of anguish* greater than any nation has ever known. But during this time your people, those whose names have been written in the scroll, will be liberated. 2And many who sleep *the sleep of death* in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life *with the Lord* and others to *utter* shame and eternal disgrace *far from Him.* 3Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky *at midday,* and those who make the many righteous *will shine* as the stars forever and ever. 4As for you, Daniel, keep *these visions and their meaning* a secret. *Write down what you have seen and heard,* then seal the scroll until the time of the end. Many will wander here and there, and knowledge will expand.

5Then I, Daniel, *stood on the bank of the Tigris River and* looked as two others appeared, one on my side of the river and the other on the far side. 6One of them spoke to the man dressed in linen clothing, who was upstream.

Heavenly Being: How long will it be until these disturbing events come to an end?

7*I watched and listened carefully.* The man dressed in linen clothing who was upstream raised both of his hands *into the sky* toward heaven. He swore *an oath* by Him who lives eternally that these disturbing events would last for a time, times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of *God's* holy people comes to an end, then all of this will be over. 8I heard *what he said* but could not understand *its meaning*.

Daniel: My lord, how will all of this come out in the end?

Man in Linen: 9*It is time for you to* go on your way, Daniel, for the words must be kept secret and sealed until the time of the end. 10Many will keep themselves pure and clean and refined *despite the pressures of these times,* but those who are wicked will continue their wicked ways and none of them will *ever* understand. But those who are wise will. 11From the time when the daily sacrifice is prohibited and the disgusting idol that desecrates the most holy place* is put in its place, there will be 1,290 days.* 12Those who remain *true to God* and reach the end of the 1,335 days are sure to experience God's blessing. 13As for you, *Daniel,* go *and be faithful* to the end *of your life*. You will *surely* rest, but when the end of days arrives, you will rise again to receive the inheritance allotted for you.

* 12:11 Literally, abomination that causes desolation * 12:11 Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14

HOSEA

God's faithfulness expressed though Hosea's family

The message of Hosea, a prophet of consolation

01 02 03 04 05 06

God often asks people to do hard things. During the second half of the eighth century B.C., the prophet Hosea lives in Northern Israel and is called by God to do something amazingly hard: God tells him to marry Gomer, a woman with a promiscuous past whom He knows has a promiscuous future. Even after they are husband and wife, Gomer runs away and stays with other men. Feeling the hurt of Gomer's betrayal, Hosea begins to understand what God is doing. The pain he experiences when his wife is unfaithful is the same pain God experiences when His people are unfaithful, that is, when the Israelites seek relationships with other gods and forge alliances with foreign nations. These activities violate their covenant with God just as Gomer and eventually Hosea's unnamed second wife (3:2) violate their marriage covenants with Hosea. Marriage and adultery perfectly symbolize the broken relationship between God and His people. The Lord wed Israel at Mount Sinai; He wooed and pursued His bride only to have her pursue other lovers. Because of her infidelity, God's judgment is sure to fall on His people, and even the land itself will suffer the consequences of Israel's actions.

The metaphor of Israel's current and future relations with God continues in the names given to Gomer's children: *Jezreel* ("God sows"), *Lo-ruhamah* ("No mercy"), and *Lo-ammi* ("Not my people"). These children are a constant reminder of Hosea's broken marriage and his wife's infidelity. These unusual names are a sign to the Northern Kingdom that their current worship of other gods and abandonment of the Lord's laws will result in His abandonment of the next generation. This will actually happen in 722 B.C., when God uses the Assyrians to destroy His people and sends the ten northern tribes into the oblivion of foreign exile. But separation is not the end of the story, for God continues to love and pursue His people. A day is coming, the prophet says, when His people will forget her former lovers and God will love her completely (14:1-4).

1 The words *in this book are the words* of the Eternal One, which were told to Hosea (Beeri's son) when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah; and when Jeroboam (Joash's son) was king of Israel.

2This is the word the Eternal spoke through Hosea first.

Eternal One *(to Hosea)***:** Go and marry a woman who is a prostitute and have children who come from this unfaithfulness. *This will represent how* the land *of Israel* has abandoned Me and become a prostitute *to other masters*!

3So Hosea married *a woman named* Gomer (Diblaim's daughter). She became pregnant and gave birth to his son.

Eternal One: 4*I want you to* name this boy Jezreel because I'm just about to punish Jehu's dynasty for all the blood Jehu shed at *the city of* Jezreel.* I will bring an end to the monarchy in Israel. 5*Here's how I'm going to do it:* I'll *destroy their army and* break their bow *when they fight the Assyrians* in the valley of Jezreel.

This judgment is for the crime of slaughtering Ahab's family at the city of Jezreel by Jehu when he made himself king, and the punishment includes Jehu's great-grandson, King Jeroboam.

6Gomer became pregnant again, and *this time* she had a girl.

Eternal One: *I want you to* name her Shown No Mercy,* because I'm not going to show any more mercy to the people of Israel. I won't forgive them anymore. 7But I will have mercy on the people of Judah. Even though they could never win in battle with their own weapons—bows and swords, horses and cavalry—I'm going to save them personally.

8After Gomer finished nursing Shown No Mercy, she became pregnant again and had *another* boy.

Eternal One: 9*I want you to* name him Not My People,* because these people aren't Mine *anymore,* and I am not their God.

10But *things won't always be this way. Someday* there'll be so many people in Israel that they'll be like the grains of sand at the seashore—too many to count! It shall turn out that in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," they will be called "Children of the living God."* 11The people of Judah and the people of Israel will *return from exile and* gather together *as one nation again*, and they'll agree on *only* one leader *for all of them*. It will be a great day when they go up from the land and "Jezreel" *is a reality.*

Jezreel means "God sows [seed]." He will bring the people back to their land, and they'll never be uprooted again.

2 **Eternal One** *(to the future reunited people)***:** Give your brothers *a new name*: My People;
and give your sisters *a new name too*: Shown Mercy.
2*I'm going to publicly charge* your mother, *Israel, with being unfaithful to Me.*
But you must bring the accusation against her—you bring it—
Because she's not My wife *anymore* and I'm not her husband.

Israel was unfaithful to God by worshiping the fertility gods of her neighbors and forging diplomatic and military alliances with these foreign nations.

Look at her! She must cease from her whoring ways,
even her adulteries from her breasts; *she must remove her lovers.*
3If she doesn't stop, I'll take away all her clothes *and jewels*
and leave her as naked as the day she was born.
I'll make her like the *bare rocks and soil of the* desert
where *nothing grows because* there's no rain:
I'll kill her with thirst.

4*When I divorce her,* I won't take care of her children
because they are children of *wickedness, tainted by that very* prostitution.
5Their mother was a prostitute;
she brought shame on herself when she had these children.

* 1:4 1 Kings 19:15-17; 2 Kings 9–10 * 1:6 Hebrew, *Lo-ruhamah* * 1:9 Hebrew, *Lo-ammi* * 1:10 Romans 9:26

Whenever God's children abandon proper worship of Him in favor of any earthly thing—be it worship of another god, dependence on themselves, or trust in foreign leaders—they break their covenant with Him. Breaking that promise is like committing adultery, which is literally the destruction of a marriage covenant. Here, God is furious with Israel because they have chosen to serve the gods of other nations in addition to Him; they are committing adultery against Him.

Under the rule of King Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, worship of a Canaanite deity named Baal is common. Many people believe he is the god of weather and therefore the one who makes the earth fertile and produces crops. Like God, he is worshiped through the donation of gifts and sacrificing of animals, but Baal is also honored by the activities of prostitutes at shrines dedicated to him. The men and women who are employed at those shrines are paid for their fertility rituals by customers (worshipers) not only with money but also with the produce of the land their sexual activities supposedly fertilized: bread and water, wool and flax, oil and wine.

She *chased her customers,*
saying, "I'm going to go
looking for my lovers.
They're the ones who give me my
bread and water,
my wool and flax, my oil and wine."
6But I'll block her way with a thorn
hedge;
I'll put a wall up around her,
blocking her *usual* paths,
7*and she will wander after* her
lovers *like a dumb sheep.*
She'll chase after them, but she
won't catch them.
She'll look for them, but she
won't find them.
Then she'll say, "I'm going to go
back to my original husband
because I was better off then
than I am now!"

8She didn't know I was the One who
gave her the grain and wine
and oil—
*not those fertility gods she was
worshiping.*
I made her rich with silver and gold,
but she devoted it to another
divine master!*

9So when harvest time comes, I'll
take back My grain,
and when the grapes ripen, I'll
take back My wine.
I'll take away the wool and flax I
gave her *to make clothes*
so she wouldn't be naked.
10*The land will be stripped bare,*
and this unfaithful wife *of Mine*
will be *walking around*
Embarrassingly naked in the sight
of her lovers,
and none of them will be able to
rescue her from Me.

11So I'm going to end all of her
celebrations
*now that she uses them to honor
other masters—*
Her *pilgrimage* festivals, her new
moon celebrations, her
Sabbath feasts,
and all her other gatherings.
12She says *she's entitled to* her vines
and fig trees
because they're her wages *from
prostitution*; *they're gifts* from
her lovers.
But I'm going to destroy them all.
I'll turn them into a tangle
of brush,
and wild animals will eat up *the
fruit.*
13I swear that I'll punish her for
honoring other masters* *on
My special days,*
even her burning incense to
those false gods.
She got dressed up in her rings and
jewelry;
she went after her lovers, and
she forgot about Me.

14*But once she has nothing, I'll be able
to get through to her.*
I'll entice her and lead her out
into the wilderness *where we
can be alone,*
and I'll speak right to her heart
and try to win her back.

* 2:8 Hebrew, *Baal* * 2:13 Hebrew, *baals*

15And then I'll give her back her
vineyards;
I'll turn the valley of Achor, *that*
*"Valley of Trouble,"**
into a gateway of hope.

This is where Achan was judged for keeping forbidden spoils of war when Israel first entered into the land after the exodus.

In the wilderness of exile she'll *learn*
to respond to Me
the way she did when she was
young, when I brought her
out of Egypt.

16And I swear when that day comes, she'll call Me "my husband" and never address Me again as "my master" *as she did those other gods.* 17She'll never invoke the name of any other master again.

Everyone will forget that gods by that name ever existed. 18When that day comes, *this is what I'll do for My people:* I'll make a covenant for them with the wild animals and flying birds and crawling insects, *and they'll agree never to devour her crops again.* I'll smash all the bows and swords *and weapons* that could be used to invade their land, and they'll live in security.

(to His reclaimed bride) 19I'm going to marry you, *and this time* it'll be forever in righteousness and justice. Our covenant will reflect a loyal love and great mercy; 20our marriage will be honest and truthful, and you'll understand *who I really am*—the Eternal One.

21And I swear that when that day
comes
I'll answer the sky and *prayers*
for rain,
and the sky will give the land *the*
water it's asking for.
22And the land will give the grain and
wine and oil *the fertile soil*
they need to develop,
and the crops will shout back *to*
Me, "God sows!"*
23*I won't just restore the agricultural*
abundance;
I'll sow *into My beloved land and*
plant the people in the land
and make them My own.
To the one who has not been
shown mercy,*
I'll rename her Mercy.
I'll tell Not My People,* "You are
now My People!"
and he'll respond, "*You're* my
God!"*

3 The Eternal spoke with me again.

Eternal One: Go and love a woman who is loved by someone else and is adulterous. *Care for her and protect her,* just as I love the people of Israel even though they're *unfaithfully* turning to other gods and *selfishly* eating *sacred* raisin cakes *in their honor*.

2So I paid the bride-price for this woman, *less than I would pay to own a slave:* six ounces of silver, about ten bushels of barley.

Hosea *(to the woman)***:** 3You're going to live with me for a long time. *I didn't buy you just for my own pleasure, and I'm not going to cast you aside.* But I'm not going to let you commit adultery *again*—in fact, you're not going to have sexual relations with anyone, not even me.

4In the same way, the people of Israel will go for a long time without having a king or prince *of their own,* without having any altars or sacred pillars, and without having any *way of divining answers through a* vestment* or images. 5And afterward, *once their devotion is renewed,* they'll return and genuinely worship the Eternal their God, and *they'll end their rebellion against* the royal house of David. In those days they'll come trembling to the Eternal One and *rediscover* His goodness.

4 Listen to what the Eternal says, you people of Israel!

Eternal One: I am bringing charges
against everyone who lives in
your land
because there's no truth and
no faithfulness and no
knowledge of God in the land.
2There is only cursing and lying
and killing and stealing and
adultery—
so that one act of bloodshed
follows right after another.
3*It's because you're breaking My most*
basic directives
that the land will mourn *with*
grief and even dry up like a
desert plant.
Those dwelling in it waste away,

* 2:15 Joshua 7:24 * 2:22 Hebrew, *Jezreel* * 2:23 Hebrew, *Lo-ruhamah* * 2:23 Hebrew, *Lo-ammi* * 2:23 Romans 9:25
* 3:4 Literally, ephod

As the wild animals, the flying
birds, and the swimming fish
are all dying.

4Be careful in bringing these charges
and contending with one
another,
for this is My charge against you,
you priests—I have a *divine*
contention against you!
5You stumble around during the day,
and the prophets stumble
with you at night.
And so I will destroy your mother,
the land where you live.
6You've forgotten the law of your God:
you've rejected My judgments.
I'll reject you because of your lack
of knowledge—reject you as
My priests;
I'll even forget your children!

7The more powerful the priests
grew, the more they sinned
against Me.
So I'll turn their honor* into
shame.
8Because these priests *are allowed to*
eat the sin *offerings,*
they actually want the people to
sin *so they'll have more meat*
to eat!
9And so it's "like priest, like people":
a low standard for living.
I'll punish them for this and
repay them for what they've
done:
10They'll eat, but they won't be
satisfied; they'll be active like
whores, but have no children
because they've rebelled in
guarding Me and My ways.

11Through prostitution, wine, and
new wine,
My people have lost their senses;
12They expect to hear oracles from a
wooden idol,
to get guidance from a diviner's
wand!
For a spirit of prostitution is leading
them astray—
that's why they're so unfaithful
to their God and are
becoming prostitutes.
13They offer sacrifices on the
mountain tops
and burn incense on the hills,
Gathering under *sacred trees like*
oaks, poplars, and terebinths,
relaxing in their comforting
shade.
This is why your own daughters
become prostitutes
and your daughters-in-law
commit adultery!
14I won't punish your daughters for
their prostitution
or your daughters-in-law for
their adultery,
Because you men are visiting
common prostitutes
yourselves
and offering sacrifices with
cultic prostitutes.
My people have no understanding,
and they're being ruined!

15But even though Israel is being so
unfaithful,
don't you become guilty, *too,*
Judah!
Don't go to Gilgal, and don't go
to *that "house of wickedness,"*
Beth-aven.
Don't swear by My name *while*
you're worshiping other gods!
16The people of Israel are stubborn,
just like heifers,
so how can I shepherd them like
lambs in a pasture?
17Ephraim is allied with idols;
don't have anything to do with
him!*
18When they've finished drinking,
they turn to prostitution to
sate their thirst.
Their rulers love shame *rather*
*than living decently.**
19They'll be swept away by the wind,
and they'll be ashamed of the
way they sacrificed *to idols.*

5 **Eternal One:** Hear this, you priests!
Pay attention, you leaders of
Israel!
Hear all of you in the royal court,
My judgment is against you!
You've been a snare at Mizpah, a
net spread out on *Mount*
Tabor;
you've led the people astray:
2Those who have revolted *against*
Me have dug a deep pit of
slaughter,
so I'm going to punish all of you.

* 4:7 Other manuscripts read, "they exchanged My honor." * 4:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 4:18 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

Hosea's prophecy is fulfilled in 722 B.C., when Shalmaneser V leads his Assyrian army to conquer Samaria, the capital city of Israel. But leveling the city and slaughtering countless citizens isn't what ends Israel's legacy. In the years following the war, Sargon II systematically deports the remaining Israelites to cities in the Assyrian Empire and repopulates Samaria with foreigners to suppress future rebellions. This policy decimates the cultures of the ten tribes who inhabited the Northern Kingdom and leads to the fabled "Lost Tribes of Israel."

It may be assumed that the members of the ten tribes assimilate into their new cultures and abandon their history and religion; they simply blend into their surroundings to survive. However, in the third century A.D., Christian poet Commodian compiles the writings of several early rabbis and weaves the story of the ten tribes' post-deportation lives. These ten tribes reside in a sort of paradise beyond a river, where everyone lives long lives, experiences no pain, and follows God's laws. One day, the story goes, these tribes will return to Jerusalem, recapture her, and dwell in her.

God is describing the fate of those rebellious leaders who have dug a deep hole: because of their depravity, they will be led to slavery in shackles.

3 I know Ephraim; Israel isn't hiding
from Me.
Even now Ephraim plays the
part of a whore;
Israel is *covering* herself in impurity.
4 They're so caught up in their way
of life
that they can't return to their God.
They have a spirit of prostitution
within them,
so they don't know *Me*; *I am* the
Eternal One.

5 The pride of Israel testifies against
her *to her very face.*
Israel (*which is called* Ephraim)
will stagger because of its guilt.
Judah, too, will stagger with them.
6 They'll go with their flocks and
their herds to seek Me,
offering a multitude of sacrifices,
but they won't find Me
because they are abandoned.
7 They've been unfaithful to *Me*, the
Eternal,
and produced *defiled,* illegitimate
children.
Now at a new moon, *a foreign
nation* will devour them and
their fields.

8 Blow the *ram's* horn in Gibeah,
sound the trumpet in Ramah, and
raise a war cry in Beth-aven.
Even as your cities fall, Benjamin,
more armies are behind you!
9 Ephraim will be devastated when
they are punished *with this
invasion from the south.*
(This is sure *to happen,* and
I'm announcing it to all the
tribes of Israel!)
10 *But I'll also punish* the leaders of
Judah—
I'll pour out My wrath on them
like water—
*Because they're trying to snatch this
territory of Benjamin's.*
They've become like the
dishonest people who move
boundary-stones.
11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed by
punishment,
because he insists on pursuing
empty ways *and trusting
others to save him.*

12 *In My judgments* I'm like *a disease
that devours* Ephraim as a
moth *eats wool,*
like an infected wound to the
people of Judah.
13 But when Ephraim saw how sick
he was
and Judah saw his open sore,
Ephraim went to Assyria and sent
to the great king *for relief.*
But a *foreign* ruler can't cure
you; he can't heal your sore.

The great king is the king of Assyria from whom both Israel and Judah eventually seek help.

14 I'll be like a lion to Ephraim,
like a young lion to the people
of Judah.

I'll tear them to pieces myself and
make off *with My kill.*
I'll carry it away, and no one will
be able to take it *from Me.*
15I'll go back to My lair and stay there
until they admit their guilt
and come looking for Me.
In their distress, they'll
desperately try to find Me.

6 Come on, let's renew our loyalty to
the Eternal One!
He tore us *like a lion,* but He'll
heal us;
He wounded us, but He'll bandage us.
2He'll bring us back to life after two days;
He'll raise us up on the third day, and
we'll live with Him.

While not clearly a reference to the Anointed One, this is a remarkable prefiguring of the time and consequence of His death and resurrection.

3So let's know Him; let's strive to know
the Eternal.
As surely as the sun rises, He'll come
out *from His lair.*
As surely as the rains come *each year*—
those spring rains that drench the
earth—He'll come *back* to us.

Eternal One: 4What am I supposed to
do with you, Ephraim?
What am I supposed to do with
you, Judah?
Your loyalty *to Me* is like fog in the
morning,
like dew that evaporates at
sunrise.
5This is why I cut them with *the
words of* the prophets
and destroyed them with the
words of My mouth.
My judgment went forth like the
light *of the rising sun.*
6For I want not *animal* sacrifices,
but mercy.*
I don't want burnt offerings; I
want people to know *Me as*
God!
7They broke their covenant *with Me,
treated it* as just a common
human affair;
they were unfaithful to Me there.
8*The city of* Gilead is full of evil,
murderous people.
Their footprints are bloody.

This may be a reference to Jephthah's return from the slaughter of the Ephraimites (Judges 11).

9As the priests travel together down
the road,
they're like a band of robbers
setting an ambush.
They *are like their ancestor Levi
who* committed murder at
Shechem,*
deceiving *the people* by their
treachery.
10I've seen a horrible thing in the
house of Israel:
Ephraim engages in prostitution
there *by worshiping at other
shrines.*
Israel pollutes itself *through violence
and idol worship.*
11But a harvest is set for you, too,
Judah
when I restore my people's
fortunes *and return them
from captivity.*

7 **Eternal One:** I will heal Israel *of her
exposed sins*:
Ephraim's wickedness will be
laid open;
Also Samaria's evil *will be revealed:*
dishonesty is tolerated, thieves
break in and bandits rob in
the open.
2They don't realize I'm aware of all of
the evil they're doing.
Even now their sins are all
around them—I can see
them clearly.

3The king celebrates their evil deeds,
and princes *enjoy* their deceptions.
4All of them are adulterers *with
unquenchable lust.*
They are like an oven overheated by
a baker,
An oven so hot it doesn't need to be
stoked *for several hours*
from the time the dough is kneaded
until it finishes rising.

Eternal One: 5When the king was
celebrating* and the princes
were sick with drunkenness,
his conscience was dulled and he
joined forces with rebels.
6Their hearts are like a *heated* oven
as they plot their schemes.

* 6:6 Matthew 9:13; 12:7 * 6:9 Genesis 34:25 * 7:5 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

Two types of ovens are used in ancient Israel: *tabuns* and *tannurs*. Both are beehive-shaped structures molded of clay, broken potsherds, and chopped straw, and are commonly found in a house's courtyard. At the top is a capped opening, which regulates the inside heat and allows the baker access to the oven's interior. Tabuns are fueled with cakes of dried manure and straw (Ezekiel 4:12-15), while tannurs are fueled by wood fires. Once a tannur's wood fire burns down to the embers, the oven is ready for baking.

Each day, women mix flour and water, knead the dough, and add a small amount of salt and fermented dough (from the previous day's work) to the mixture. After balls of dough have risen, they are flattened and shaped into discs. These discs are then easily tossed inside the oven's opening, where they stick to the walls and cook in just minutes.

All night their anger smolders,
but at dawn it blazes into a flaming fire.
7All of them are as hot as an oven,
and they consume their own judges.
All of their kings have fallen; none of them calls on Me.
8Ephraim is mixed up with *all* the other nations.
Ephraim is *like* a cake that hasn't been turned over.
9Foreigners are devouring his strength, *taking territory and tribute,*
but he doesn't realize *how weak he's grown.*
Gray hair is sprouting on his head,
but he doesn't see *what others observe.*
10Israel's *stubborn* pride will testify against him.
The people haven't come back to Me, their True God;
they haven't asked Me for help *despite all their troubles.*

11Ephraim is like a dove *caught in foreign intrigues,* silly and without sense:
they call to Egypt; they go to Assyria.
12But as they fly *to others for help,* I'll throw My net over them.
I'll bring them down like birds out of the sky and punish them,
as their congregation knows full well.

13May they experience sorrow for wandering away from Me!
May they be destroyed for the way they've rebelled against Me!
I would like to buy them back *from death,*
but they would just keep lying *to Me and* against Me.
14They're not sincere when they cry out to Me *for help.*
They howl on their couches;
Hoping *a god will send* grain to gather and wine *to enjoy.*
They turn away from Me.
15I trained them, I made their arms strong, *I could have protected them,*
but they devised evil schemes against Me.
16They turn *for help,* but not to the Most High;
they've become *as weak and ineffective* as a loosely-strung bow.
Because of their defiant words, their leaders will be killed in battle,
and they'll be the laughingstock *of everyone* in Egypt.

8 **Eternal One:** Blow the *ram's* horn *to sound the alarm*!
The eagle *of Assyria* is hovering above My house,*
Waiting for My instruction to snatch its prey,
because they've broken My covenant and rebelled against My law.
2*Still* Israel calls out to Me, "Our God, we know you!"
But even with your words of worship, you abandon our agreement.

* 8:1 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

3Israel has rejected what is good;
that is why an enemy will
pursue him.

4They've *overstepped their rights by changing leadership,* but not
by My authority;
they've anointed kings and
appointed princes without
consulting Me.
They've made idols out of their
silver and gold,
so Israel will be destroyed.
5I reject your calf, Samaria! My anger
is kindled against them.
How long will they be unable to
do what's right?
6This *idol* is from Israel.
A craftsman made it; it's not God!
Samaria's calf will be smashed to
pieces.

► Israel's harlotry is practiced not only by diplomatic accords with other nations but also by worship of their gods who serve as witnesses to these alliances. Here an idol is fabricated and worshiped by God's own people. As their ancestors did in the wilderness while Moses was on the mountain with God, they make an image of a calf. They turn from the True God to worship their own creation, a crude imitation of God's creation. The anger of the Lord is again aroused as it was in the wilderness, and He will crush both the idol and the idol worshipers.

Eternal One: 7*Then these proverbs will come true:*
"Because they sow the wind,
they'll reap the whirlwind."
"A shoot without a grain head
doesn't make any flour."
"If the shoot does produce,
foreigners will devour it!"
8Israel has been devoured *by that eagle* and strewn among the
nations.
Now it's like a *discarded* pot,
valuable to no one.

9All alone like a wild donkey, Ephraim
went up to Assyria
and had to hire *her own* lovers!

10But because they paid *tribute money to* other nations *instead of depending on Me,*
I'm going to gather them up *and send them into exile,*
And they will struggle for a time
beneath the burden imposed by
the *great* king of princes.*

11Even though Ephraim built many
altars to cover sin,
they've all become places where
he commits sin!
12It wouldn't matter how many *copies* of My law I wrote for him;
he'd treat them all as something
strange *and foreign.*
13*No matter how many* sacrifices they
offer,
no matter how many sacred
meals they eat,
I am not pleased with them.
I'll remember their guilt and
punish their sins:
they'll return to *slavery in* Egypt!
14Israel has forgotten his Maker and
built palaces;
Judah has built many walled
cities.
But I'll send fire on those cities,
and *My righteous wrath* will burn
up those citadels.

9 Don't rejoice, Israel! *Don't shriek* in ecstatic joy like the other nations!
You've prostituted yourself and been
unfaithful to your God.
You eagerly expect that you'll get your
prostitute's pay at the threshing
floors *with a rich harvest.*
2Neither the threshing floor nor the *oil or* winepresses will feed you;
you won't have any new wine *this year.*
3You won't remain in the Eternal's land,
and you can count on this:
Ephraim will go back to *slavery in* Egypt,
but this unclean food he'll eat in
Assyria.

4*Separated from Jerusalem,* they won't be
pouring out any libations of wine
to the Eternal,
and the sacrifices they make will not
please Him.
Whatever they offer will be like
mourner's bread:
whoever eats it will be impure.

* 8:10 Other manuscripts read, "kings and rulers"

In Israel's final years before conquest, the political atmosphere is in turmoil. Kings Zechariah, Shallum, and Pekahiah have been assassinated in political coups, and ambitious men are making alliances with foreign enemies hoping to gain international support for their own factions and solidify their own powers. These attempts at ascension and stability with the help of international alliances voids the one thing that can bring peace to Israel—the people's covenant with God.

Instead of relying on God, all of Israel's leaders allow themselves to be consumed in the regional politics. In the early eighth century B.C., Egypt's power is waning and Assyria is gaining momentum. Israel is the battleground between the empires, so Israel's kings think they can leverage the nation's geographical position and gain protection from one empire or the other by paying tributes. Instead, the cities are trampled in successive wars, and Israel's borders continue to shrink until Samaria is finally overrun by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Hebrew law prohibits any contact with the dead. In this case the bread is polluted by its proximity to death.

Besides, they'll need all the bread they've
got just to stay alive;
they won't have anything *worthy* to
bring to the Eternal's temple.
5What will you do on the appointed day
when you're supposed to celebrate a
feast *in honor* of the Eternal One?
6Even if they escape destruction, Egypt
will *be ready to* gather them up,
and Memphis will *be set to* bury them
in the city's massive cemeteries.
All their valuables will be choked out by
weeds,
and thornbushes will live in their tents.

7The days of punishment have come!
The time of retribution is here! Israel
will know this!
But because you are so hostile and
sinful, *you say about me,*
"The prophet is a fool! The man of
the Spirit is *raving* mad!"
8The prophet stands watch over Ephraim
along with God,*
but birds' traps are set all along his
paths;
Even in the temple of his God *they show
their* hostility.
9They've become deeply depraved, as in
the days of Gibeah.
God won't overlook their wickedness;
He'll punish *them for* their sins.

Eternal One: 10When I discovered
Israel, *he was a rare find,*
like grapes in the wilderness,
like early figs on a young fig
tree.
I met your ancestors;
when they came to Baal-peor,
They dedicated themselves *through
their worship* to *an object of*
shame,
and they became as detestable
as the thing they loved.

11Ephraim's glory will fly away like a
bird:
no offspring, no gestation, no
conception!
12And even if they do have children,
I'll take every single one of them
away.
It will be sorrowful for them
when I abandon them!
13*There was a time* when I saw
Ephraim like Tyre,
a pleasant palm planted in a
lovely meadow,
But now Ephraim must bring out her
children to be slaughtered.*

14Give them, Eternal One—what should *I
ask* You to give them?
Give them a miscarrying womb and
dried-up breasts!

Eternal One: 15In Gilgal My hatred grew
for them
because of all their evil that was
there.
I will force them out of My temple
because of the depths of
their wickedness.
I won't love them anymore; all
of their leaders have rebelled
against Me!

16Ephraim has been cut down; their
root has dried up,
and they won't bear any fruit.

* 9:8 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 9:13 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

And even if they do bear children,
I'll kill those precious ones they carried.

17My God will reject them because they haven't listened to Him.
They'll be drifters *and fugitives* among the nations.

10 Israel, once a vibrant vine that bore adequate fruit, *is now barren.*
The more fruit he bore, the more altars he made;
the more his *fertile* soil produced, the more he made the sacred pillars.
2But they aren't loyal *to God* in their hearts, and now they'll pay the penalty:
the Eternal will break apart their altars and smash their sacred pillars.
3Then they'll say, "We don't have our own king *anymore*
because we didn't fear the Eternal One.
But even if we *still* had a king, what could he do for us?"

A nation without a functioning king is no nation at all.

4They speak a lot of *sensible* words,
but their oaths are insincere, and their covenant promises *are empty*.
This is why *the king's* judgment sprouts up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field.
5The people of Samaria are afraid of what will happen to the calf-idol of Beth-aven;
the people will mourn for it, and its pagan priests will join in lament.
They'll wail when its glory departs.
6The *wretched* idol will be taken to Assyria and given to the great king.
Ephraim will be disgraced;
Israel will be ashamed because of this *king's* counsel.
7Samaria and her king will be cut off,
carried away like a twig on the *swirling* waters.
8The wicked high places where Israel's people sinned will be destroyed;
thorns and thistles will cover their *once-proud* altars.
People will beg the mountains,
"Surround us!"
They'll plead with the hills,
"Cover us!"*

Eternal One: 9From the days of Gibeah you, Israel, have sinned!*
And they're still the same today.
Nothing has changed.
Will war overtake these people of wickedness in Gibeah?
10At the time I choose, I'll punish them:
nations will gather against them because they have compounded their own guilt.
11Ephraim was a trained heifer who loved to tread on the threshing floor.
Now I have lashed a yoke to her fair neck.
Judah will plow, and Jacob will break up the *hard, compacted* soil.

12Plant *a crop of* righteousness for yourselves,
harvest *the fruit of* unfailing love,
And break up your hard soil,
because it's time to seek the Eternal until He comes and waters your fields with justice.

13You've plowed wickedness and reaped injustice;
you've eaten the fruit of deception.
Because you've trusted in your own might,
in the size *and skill* of your army,
14So the nations will line up against you *in battle*
and all of your fortifications will be destroyed,
Just as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel when he fought against it
and dashed its mothers to pieces with their children!
15The same thing will happen to you, O Bethel, because you're so wicked.
When that day breaks, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.

11 **Eternal One:** When Israel was a child, I loved him;
and out of Egypt I called My son.*

* 10:8 Luke 23:30 * 10:9 Judges 19 * 11:1 Matthew 2:15

2But the more I called to Israel,
the more they walked away
from Me.*
They kept on sacrificing to other
divine masters*
and burning incense to idols!

3But I was the one who taught
Ephraim to walk, holding
him up by his arms,
but his people didn't know I was
the One who took care of
them.
4I led them along with *leather* cords;
with ropes of love *I showed them
the way.*
As I dealt with them, I lifted the yoke
from their neck;
I bent down to give them their
food.
5The people *of Israel* will return to
bondage
like they knew in the land of
Egypt,
And *this time* Assyria will be their
king
because they refuse to return
to Me.
6The sword will be turned loose in
their cities.
It will destroy their defenses and
put an end to them because
of their schemes.
7My people are determined to turn
away from Me.

Even when they call out to the Most High,
He won't rescue them.

Eternal One: 8But how can I give you
up, Ephraim?
How can I turn you over *to your
enemies,* Israel?
How can I give you away as I did
Admah or treat you like
Zeboiim?

The four cities of the plain—Admah, Zeboiim, Sodom, and Gomorrah—were all destroyed (Genesis 14).

My heart is changed within Me,
and all at once My compassion
is stirred up.
9I will not carry out My burning
anger;
I will not destroy Ephraim
completely.
For I am God, not a human being;
I am the Holy One in your
midst;
I won't unleash My anger *for an
attack*.

10They'll turn back to Me.
He'll roar like a lion, and when
He roars,
His children will scurry in from the
west.
11They'll scatter like birds from Egypt
or like doves from the land of
Assyria,
And I'll restore them to their homes.

The Eternal declares *that He'll do this.*

Eternal One: 12Ephraim has surrounded
Me with lies.
The people of Israel *surround Me*
with *their weapons of* deceit.
But Judah continues to roam with
God,
even with the faithful Holy One.*

12 **Eternal One:** Ephraim feeds on
the wind.
He chases the *hot* east wind
all day long.
He's becoming more and more
deceitful and violent.
They've *abandoned their
covenant to* make an alliance
with Assyria,
trading oil *for favor* from Egypt.

As Israel pursues what she cannot obtain, she becomes entangled in affairs of other nations.

2The Eternal has charges to bring against
Judah;
He'll punish *the nation of* Jacob for
the way he's acting
and pay him back for the things he's
done.
3Even from the womb, he fought with his
brother by grabbing his heel;*
when he grew to be an adult, he
struggled against God.
4-5He wrestled with a *heavenly* messenger
and won;*
he wept and begged for his help.
It was the Eternal, the Commander of
heavenly armies, who met him at
Bethel;
the Eternal Himself spoke with him
there; the Eternal One is His
memorial name.

* 11:2 Hebrew manuscripts read, "But the more they called to Israel, the more they walked away from them." * 11:2 Hebrew, *baals* * 11:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 12:3 Genesis 25:26 * 12:4-5 Genesis 32:28

6So you must return to your God, maintain
loyalty and justice,
and wait patiently for your God.
7*Like Canaan, Israel is* a merchant who
uses dishonest scales—
he loves to cheat people!
8Ephraim gloats, "I've gotten rich! I've
made a fortune for myself!
And in all my dealings no one can
charge me with iniquity and
dishonesty."

Eternal One: 9I'm the Eternal One; I've
been your True God ever
since you left Egypt.
I'm going to make you live in
tents again,
As you do in remembrance during
the Feast *of Tabernacles.*

► Every year, the Israelites live in tents for one week as part of the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival reminds the people of God's constant protection of their ancestors as they wandered for a generation in the Sinai desert. However, the Israelites won't enjoy their coming time in tents. Living in tents will mean they've lost all the wealth and security they built up in their solid houses and cities; they'll be nomads wandering the earth, but this time without God's constant protection. In a reversal of the Exodus story, these wanderings will be a prelude to bondage in a foreign nation, where they will be slaves without the ear of God, as their ancestors were in Egypt.

Eternal One: 10I've spoken to the
prophets; I've given them
many visions,
and I've told you parables
through them.
11Because Gilead is so wicked, it is
worthless.*
They sacrifice bulls at *the cultic
center of* Gilgal,
But their altars will be heaps of
stone next to a plowed field.

12Jacob fled to the fields of Aram;*
Israel worked *for Laban* in exchange
for a wife;
to pay the bride-price, he shepherded
Laban's flocks.
13But the Eternal One led Israel out of
Egypt by a prophet;
Moses, God's own prophet, kept the
people safe.
14But now Ephraim has made his Lord
furious, *and this is His judgment:*
God will punish him for the blood
he's shed
and pay him back for his defiance.

13 When Ephraim spoke, people
trembled
because he was powerful in
Israel.
But he was guilty of *worshiping* another
divine master*
and was sentenced to death.

2Even now they keep on sinning; they
cast metal idols for themselves,
shaping silver to fashion *wretched*
images.
These *idols* are all skillfully crafted by
humans.
People say, "Offer your human
sacrifices to them, and kiss these
calf-idols."
3*God will destroy them for this,* and they'll
be like fog in the morning,
like dew evaporating at sunrise,
like the chaff blown from the
threshing floor,
Like the smoke that drifts out of a window.

Eternal One: 4I'm the Eternal One.
I've been your God ever since
you left Egypt.
You are supposed to be exclusively
loyal to Me.
No other god can be your
liberator.
5It was I who established the
relationship with you in the
wilderness,
I who looked after you in that
parched *and weary* land.
6When I fed them, they were satisfied,
but when satisfied, they
filled with pride and then
forgot Me.
7So I'll be like a lion to them,
like a panther stalking the
roadside.
8I'll meet them like a bear who's lost
her cubs;
I'll rip open their chests.

* 12:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 12:12 Genesis 28:5 * 13:1 Hebrew, *baal*

I'll devour them as if I'm a lion,
and I'll tear them apart as if I'm
a wild animal.

9This is why you're going to be
destroyed, Israel:
you're against Me, against the
One who's helping you!
10Where is your king now?
Let's see if he comes to save you
and all your cities.
Where are your leaders, the ones of
whom you demanded,
"Give me a king and princes!"?
11I gave you a king, even though you
made Me angry *by asking
for one,*
and in My rage, I *decided to* take
him away!

12Ephraim's guilt has been
wrapped up;
his sin has been hidden.
13The labor pains of his mother are
coming for him, but he is
unwise;
he does not move from the birth
canal.
14Should I deliver them from the
power of the grave?
Should I rescue them from
death's *cold grip*?
Hey, Death! Where is your big
win?
Hey, Grave! What happened to
your sting?*
I'll look the other way and not show
them any pity.

15Though Israel, among his brothers,
is like a plant that flourishes
in the wetlands,
an east wind will come—a *dry*
desert wind sent by Me—
And the waters will dry up. His
spring will run dry.
All the treasures in his
storehouse will be plundered.
16Because of her guilt and her
rebellion against her God,
Samaria will be punished: her
people will be cut down by
the sword;
Her children will be dashed to
pieces; her pregnant women
will be torn open.

14 Return, Israel, to the Eternal,
your True God.
You've stumbled because of
your wickedness.
2Think about what to say, and come back
to the Eternal One.
Say to Him, "Forgive all our sins, and
take us *back again.*
Bring us into Your good grace so we can
offer You *praise and sacrifice,*
the fruit of our lips.
3*We admit that* Assyria can't save us, nor
can riding horses *and chariots
into battle.*
We'll never again say to idols made
with our own hands, 'You're our
gods!'
We know You're merciful because You
take care of orphans."

Eternal One: 4I'll heal *their apostate
hearts* so they won't turn
away *from Me again*;
I'll love them freely because I
won't be angry with them
anymore.
5I'll be like dew that waters Israel.
She'll blossom like the lily.
She'll put down roots like the
stable cedars of Lebanon;
6She'll send out shoots until her
beauty is like the olive tree
and her fragrance like the cedars
of Lebanon.
7The people will *return from exile and*
sit in My shade once again;
they'll flourish like grain; they'll
send out shoots like the vine.
And their fame will be like the wine
of Lebanon.

8Ephraim, what do I have in
common with *deaf and blind*
idols?
I'm the One who responds *to
your pleas* and cares for you.
I'm like a flourishing juniper tree; I
provide life *year-round.*

9The wise will understand these things;
the perceptive will know them.
For everything the Eternal One does is
right,
and the righteous follow His ways.
But those who turn against Him will
stumble along His path.

* 13:14 1 Corinthians 15:55

JOEL

01 02 03 04 05 06

The day of the Eternal is near

The message of Joel, the son of Pethuel

The Book of Joel continues the redemptive story of the Book of the Twelve (also known as the Minor Prophets) that starts with the Book of Hosea. Little is known about the author of this intense and graphic prophecy which uses a locust infestation to predict an invasion by a powerful army. Joel, like many other prophets, has a gift known as second sight. This means that God shows him a deeper, transcendent reality through what he sees in the real world. These are more than visions; they are harbingers of real events, visible to all, and God uses them as an occasion to voice His message. Joel's focus on Judah and Jerusalem may suggest he is prophesying sometime after the conquest of the Northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C., but the oracles are general enough to refer to any of several invasions of the holy land: the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C., the Greeks in the late fourth century B.C., or the Romans in the first century B.C. Or perhaps they anticipate a future apocalyptic invasion. Regardless of its particular historical context, the book uses the locust invasion to warn God's people of divine judgment and call them to repent and change their ways. More than any other prophet, Joel builds this message on his understanding of the day of the Eternal One. When that day comes, the prophet says, God will judge the nations and His people; however, for all who repent and turn back to God, that day will usher in a time of joy, prosperity, and restoration like the world has never seen.

Locusts in the ancient world are no small matter; a swarm can devour everything in its path, and no pesticides are available to stop it. The insects kill vegetation in the short-term and cause famine in the long-term. Since the loss of entire crops means the loss of seed for the next planting season, the effects of a locust swarm sometimes last for several years. Not only do the people starve, but there is no grain, wine, or oil to give to the Lord (1:9-10, 13; 2:14)—a fact that concerns the prophet most of all. God does promise to make up for the calamity, to send rain on the land and pour out His Spirit on all people (2:19-29). This divine rain nourishes and replenishes the land as the divine Spirit re-creates and restores the people. It is fitting that such a book—concerned as it is with agriculture and ecological restoration—concludes with the expectation that one day the mountains will drip sweet wine, the hills will flow milk, and Judah's streams will cascade cool, clear water.

1 This is the word of the Eternal One
that came to Joel, Pethuel's son:

2 Hear this, elders *and leaders.*
All who live in the land should pay
close attention.
Has anything like this ever happened?
No, not in your lifetimes or your
fathers'.
3 *So be sure to* tell this story to your sons
and daughters.
Your sons should tell their sons and
so on, for generations.

4 *We have been invaded!*
What the cutting locusts left,
the swarming locusts consumed;
What the swarming locusts left,
the creeping locusts consumed;
What the creeping locusts left,
the stripping locusts finished off.*

These four locusts are probably not different species of insect. Joel is describing four different locust invasions and how each ravages the land.

5 *All you* drunks, get up and cry!
Weep and wail, all of you wine drinkers.
Your sweet wine
has been snatched from your mouths.

Eternal One: 6 For a people invaded My
land.
Their army is strong; their
numbers cannot be counted.
They *attack with* teeth as *sharp as*
a lion's;
they bear their fangs like a lioness.
7 My vines are ruined.
My fig trees are reduced to
stumps now.
These *enemy insects* have stripped
off the bark and tossed My
trees aside *like refuse.*
The branches lie *bare, broken*
and white.

8 Wail like a bride dressed in sackcloth
instead of her gown, as a virgin
mourning *the death of* the groom
she'd long been betrothed to.
9 Those who serve the Eternal One,
His priests, are in mourning too—
Because no one is able to bring grain or
wine to offer
in the Eternal's temple.

The priests are mourning because they have no offerings to make, but they are more concerned for themselves because without these offerings the priests lose their main source of food.

10 The fields lie desolate.
The earth herself mourns *the loss,*
For her *golden* grain is ruined.
The fruits of her vines have withered.
Her gift of oil has dried up.

11 Wilt in shame, you farmers. Wail *with*
screams, you vinedressers.
Grieve for the wheat and the barley;
Grieve, for the crops in the field are ruined.
12 The grapevines have withered *and died.*
The fig trees have dried up.
The pomegranate, the date-palm, the
apple tree—
indeed all the trees of the field—have
dried up.
Joy has withered *on the branches* of the
people *and turned to shame.*

13 You priests, *throw off your fine robes.*
Dress in sackcloth and grieve.
Wail, you servants at the altar.
Come *into the temple* and spend all night
in your sackcloth,
you ministers of my God,
Because no one brings grain and wine
to offer at your God's house *these days.*
14 So consecrate a *holy* fast; call everyone
together.
Gather all the elders *and leaders* and
the rest who live in the land.
Call everyone to the temple of your God,
the Eternal.
Then cry out to Him *with all your heart.*

15 But look! It is coming!
The day of the Eternal One is near.
Destruction, *not salvation,*
will be *the sentence* from the Highest
God.
16 Hasn't *all* our food been destroyed right
before our eyes?
Haven't joyful celebrations ceased in
God's house?

17 The seeds *the farmers planted* have
shriveled beneath the ground;*
all the storehouses are empty; *their*
supplies are gone.
The barns are breaking down
because there is no more grain *to fill*
them.

* 1:4 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 1:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

18Now even the beasts groan!
Herds of cattle wander, confused *and agitated,*
For they have no more pasture *to feed in.*
Flocks of sheep suffer *this ordeal* too.

19I cry out to you, O Eternal One,
along with everyone else.
For the fire *of Your wrath* has consumed the open pastures,
And flames have scorched all the trees in the field.
20Even the wild beasts call to You:
they are dying of thirst—the streams have dried up;
They are dying of hunger—the fire *of Your wrath* has consumed open pastures.

2 **Eternal One:** 1Blow the trumpet in Zion;
signal the alarm from My holy mountain!
It is almost here. Let all who live in the land tremble
because the day of the Eternal One is coming.

2*Judgment will come on* a black and fearful day;
a thick cloud of darkness *will loom over everything.*
A great and mighty army advances like dawn spreading across the mountains.
Never has the world seen anything like it before,
nor will future generations ever see anything like it again.

3*The army is like* a fire, consuming *everything* in its path—
a *scorching* flame burning *everything* behind them.
The land before them is *sweet* like the garden of Eden.
The land following—only a lonely desert; nothing is spared *in judgment.*
4They look like horses *arrayed for battle*;
they charge ahead like warhorses.
5They sound like clattering chariots racing over mountaintops,
like a crackling fire engulfing stubble,
Like a mighty army maneuvering for battle.
6Seeing the result *of God's judgment looming,* the nations writhe in anguish;
each face grows as pale *as a ghost.*
7They run like champions *into the fight.*
Like *skilled* soldiers, they scale *city* walls;
Every man marches in formation, never leaving his rank.
8*Organized*—no soldier crowds another.
Independent—each man marches straight ahead.
Together—they are unstoppable as they break through the defenses
and do not break off the attack.
9They charge the city, scurry along its wall.
They swarm through windows into houses, like common thieves.
10Before them the earth trembles and the heavens shake.
The sun and the moon become *a void of* darkness.
The stars lose their radiance too.
11The Eternal One shouts commands from the front line of His army;
His forces are vast—uncountable mighty soldiers obey His command.
The day of the Eternal One is great, fearsome indeed.
Who can survive?

Eternal One: 12Even now, turn back your heart *and rededicate yourselves* to Me;
Show Me your repentance by fasting, weeping, and mourning.
13Rip *the wickedness out of* your hearts; don't just tear your clothing.

Now return to the Eternal, your True God.
You already know He is gracious and compassionate.
He does not anger easily and maintains faithful love.
He is willing to relent and not harm you.
14Who knows? Perhaps He will turn and relieve you *of this threat,*
and leave behind some blessing as He goes—
Maybe enough grain and wine to offer to the Eternal, your True God?
15Blow the trumpet in Zion; set apart a time for fasting;
tell everyone to be still *and stop working.*
16Assemble the people. Consecrate the congregation.
Gather the elders *and other leaders,*

The *young* children, and even the
nursing babies.
Let the bride and groom leave their
chambers *on their wedding night.*
17Let the priests, the Eternal's servants,
stand between the porch and the
altar
and weep *as they intercede.* Let them
say,

Priests: Have pity on Your people,
O Eternal One!
And do not let Your legacy—
Your covenant people—
Be taunted and mocked by the
nations,
who ask, "Where is their God?"

18*But wait*—the Eternal One has become
possessive of His land;
He will restore us in compassion, His
people!
19In response to our prayers, the Eternal
will answer:

Eternal One: Listen! I am sending you
a great harvest of grain, wine,
and oil.
You will be completely satisfied
and no longer
Will I make you a people held in
contempt by the nations.

20I will remove *My* armies *who attack*
from the north far from your
borders,
driving them into a parched and
lonely desert.
Then I will separate them: the front
line to the Dead Sea,
the rear guard into the
Mediterranean Sea
with the vile stench *of their*
rotting corpses rising up.

Surely the Eternal One has done great
things!

21Do not fear, O land. *You have been revived.*
Celebrate and rejoice, for the Eternal
One has done great things!
22Do not fear, you wild beasts: *You will eat*
again,
for the desert pastures are green
again!
And so will we: the trees bear their fruit;
the fig trees and the vines produce
their bounty *once again.*

23People of Zion, *shout with* joy
and happiness in the Eternal, your
God;
The drought is over; He has sent the
early *autumn* rain as *a sign of His*
faithfulness.
He has poured down *heavy* rain,
autumn and spring, as before.
24The threshing floors will be covered in
grain;
the vats will spill over with new wine
and fresh oil.

Eternal One: 25I will compensate you
for the years
that the locusts have eaten—the
swarming locusts,
The creeping locusts, the stripping
locusts, and the cutting
locusts—*
My great army that I unleashed
against you.

26*In that day,* you will eat plenty
of food and always have
enough,
so you will praise My name,
The Eternal One, your God who is
merciful to you.
Never again will My people be
shamed *among the nations.*
27*Return to Me* and you will know
that I live among *My people*
Israel
and that I, the Eternal One, am
your God and there is no
other.
Never again will My people be
shamed *among the nations.*

28Then in those days I will pour My
Spirit to all humanity;
your children will *boldly and*
prophetically speak *the word*
of God.
Your elders will dream dreams;
your young warriors will see
visions.
29*No one will be left out.* In those days
I will offer My spirit
to all servants, both male and
female.

30In the heaven *above* and on the
earth *below,*
I will give signs *of My*
intervention: blood, fire, and
clouds of smoke.

* 2:25 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

31The sun will become a void of
darkness, and the moon will
become blood
just before the great and dreadful
day of the Eternal One arrives.

► Was the day of the Eternal One wonderful to long for or horrific to dread? For Joel, it is both. Each of the five times this day is mentioned, he expresses a different expectation. In Joel 1:15 the prophet signals distressing locust invasions, in Joel 2:1 the day is filled with human invaders against Jerusalem, and in Joel 2:11 it is a stunning event. But in Joel 2:31 the outlook begins to change. Not only is the earth transformed with the heavenly rains and Spirit of God, but also the celestial bodies cease to carry out their functions of giving light and setting seasons for the earth. Both in verse 31 and in Joel 3:14, the day of the Eternal is positive for Israel but ominous for all other nations. Now the tables have been turned, and Zion is not a mountain devoured by locusts and human armies. It is a wonderful garden where the Eternal One meets constantly with His people, surrounded by abundant and perennial agriculture.

32Then everyone who calls on the name of
the Eternal One will be liberated.*
Mount Zion and Jerusalem will
shelter those who survive *exile,*
Just as the Eternal says, "Among those
who survived, He will call them."

3 **Eternal One:** *Know that* in those
days and at that time
I will bring back Judah and
Jerusalem from their captivity.
2I will assemble all Israel's
enemies in the valley of
Jehoshaphat—*My judgment.*
I will judge them for how they
treated My people, My legacy,
Israel—
Whom they *deported and* exiled to
the nations.
They divided My land *among
themselves*;
3They cast lots for My people, *selling
them into slavery—*
trading boys for prostitutes,
selling young girls for a drink
of wine.
4Tyre, Sidon, and all the districts of
Philistia, what do you have
against Me?
Are you trying to get back at Me?
Do you pay me back?
I will turn your *wicked* actions
back upon your heads, fast
and sure.
5You have taken wonderful treasures
from My house, My silver and
gold,
and you carried them to your
own temples *and palaces.*
6You sold the people of Judah and
Jerusalem to the Greeks
to send them far away from
their home *without hope of
return.*
7*But now,* watch! I am going to
awaken them *to action,*
and in those distant lands
where you sold them
I will turn your *wicked* actions back
upon your heads:
8I will sell your sons and daughters
into slavery.
Now the people of Judah will be
your children's masters.
Indeed, they will sell your children
to the Sabeans,
who *will take them* far, *far* away.

The Eternal One has spoken.

9Proclaim this among the nations: "Get
ready for war.
Awaken your great warriors.
Let all the soldiers come near *the valley,*
poised for battle.
10Hammer your sickles into swords.
Forge your pruning shears into
spears.
For this final battle, even the weakling
must say, 'I am a warrior!'

11"Hurry up! Join *the battle,* you nations all
around;
gather in the valley *of Jehoshaphat.*"
Eternal One, march Your troops *to war.*

Eternal One: 12Let the nations awaken
and come to the valley of
Jehoshaphat.

* 2:28-32 Acts 2:17-21; Romans 10:13

For that is where I will come *Myself*
and set forth judgment against
the nations who surrounded
and attacked My Israel.

13 Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe
for judgment.
Come on and tread the grapes, for
the winepress is full.
Indeed, the vats are overflowing *with oil,*
for their evil is great.

14 The thunder of battle goes up in the
valley of decision,
and the day of the Eternal One is
near that valley.
15 *It is time.* The sun and moon have
become *a void of* darkness;
the stars, too, lose their radiance.
16 The Eternal roars from Zion;
His voice thunders from Jerusalem.
The earth and the heavens tremble
before Him.
But the Eternal is a hiding place for
His people,
a fortress for the Israelites.

Eternal One: 17 Then you will know that
I am the Eternal, your God,
and I live in Zion, My sacred
mountain.
Jerusalem will be *My* holy *city*;
never again will foreign *invaders*
infiltrate it.

18 On that great day, *the Eternal will*
provide:
Sweet wine will drip down from the
mountains.
Fresh milk will pour down from the hills.
Clear water will run through Judah's
ravines.
A fountain will bubble up from the
Eternal's temple
and water the *arid* stream bed of
Shittim.
19 Egypt will become a wasteland and
Edom a lonely desert,
because they violently attacked the
people of Judah
And murdered the innocent in Israel.
20 But as for Judah, it will always be *full of*
people.

Eternal One: Jerusalem, too, will
endure for generations to
come.
21 I will avenge those *who were hurt,*
enslaved, exiled, and killed;
I will not let the guilty go free.

For the Eternal One lives in Zion.

AMOS

The judgment of God and the call for justice

The message of Amos, the shepherd and orchard worker

Amos insists that he is not a professional prophet. Prophecy is not the family business. From working the land and tending sheep in peaceful Tekoa, a pastoral village of Judah, he is called to go north and echo God's voice during the prosperous reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.).

Like other prophets, Amos rails against Israel's neighboring peoples, such as the Philistines, the Ammonites, and the Edomites. He denounces them for their violent ways and unjust use of power. But Amos saves his strongest condemnation for God's own people, his fellow citizens of Judah and Israel, because they rejected the teaching and will of God. Amos warns Israel that their covenant with God guarantees nothing as long as they continue to violate God's laws, especially regarding the poor. He criticizes the shallow prosperity of his day, knowing that often wealth is not the signature of God's blessing; instead it may be a thin veneer that covers the people's greed, cheating, and injustice. So he announces that those addicted to violence will themselves die by the sword, and that the people of Israel will be carried off into exile. He calls for justice and right living before God rather than empty religious ritual, but such faultfinding is always unwelcome in the uneasy alliance of politics and religion. Therefore, Amos is driven from the king's shrine in Bethel by Amaziah, the priest in charge, and told never to return again.

Amos's prophecies often emerge from a phenomenon known as second sight. The prophet sees something rather ordinary—such as a locust or a plumb line or a basket of ripe fruit—and receives an extraordinary message from God in that moment. These events are the bases of many of his oracles. In the visions, he is inspired both to announce God's message and to plead with God to spare His people from judgment. Amos's message predicts coming judgment, but his book ends with beautiful promises of restoration. God does not tear down simply to tear down: He tears down to build up again. He destroys to restore. Amos may be the first prophet to have his words collected and then written down for future generations, but soon other prophets or disciples of prophets will also record their visions and prophecies so that God's messages will reach more of God's people.

1 These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds in Tekoa, *a city in the highlands of Judah. God gave* him these visions regarding Israel in the time of Uzziah (who ruled Judah) and Jeroboam (the son of Joash, who ruled Israel) two years before the *great* earthquake.

2 The Eternal One roars from Zion;
His voice thunders from Jerusalem.
The pastures shrivel and die beneath the shepherds' *feet,*
and the crest of Mount Carmel dries to dust *as all await His judgment.*

Eternal One: 3 For three crimes of Damascus,
no for four, I have laid down My sentence and will not revoke it
Because they have threshed *the people of* Gilead
with threshing-sledges made of iron.
4 I will send down fire on the house of Hazael, *the ruler in Damascus,*
and burn down the fortresses of Ben-hadad, *his son and successor*.
5 I will smash the gates of Damascus,
wipe out those who live in the valley of Aven.
I will cut off the hand that holds the scepter in Beth-eden
and force the people of Aram into exile in Kir.

So says the Eternal *about Aram, Israel's constant enemy to the northeast.*

Eternal One: 6 For three crimes of Gaza,
no for four, I have laid down My sentence and will not revoke it
Because they sent entire communities into exile,
including women and children,
Because they sold My people *as slaves* to Edom.
7 So I will send down fire on the wall that protects Gaza
and burn down all of its fortifications.
8 I will destroy those who live in Ashdod
and *cut off* the hand that holds the scepter in Ashkelon.
I will raise My hand against Ekron and the rest of the Philistines;
even those in the formerly great city of Gath will perish.

Four of the five major cities of Philistia are mentioned here; only Gath is excluded. It was previously destroyed by Judah under King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:6).

So says the Eternal Lord *about Philistia, Israel's enemy in the southwest.*
9 Here is what the Eternal says *about Tyre, that maritime power to the northwest*:

Eternal One: For three crimes of Tyre,
no for four, I have laid down My sentence and will not revoke it
Because they also handed over whole communities to Edom
and ignored the covenant of brotherhood, *the treaty between Phoenicia and Israel.*
10 So I will send down fire on the wall that protects Tyre
and burn down all of its fortifications.

11 Here is what the Eternal says *about Edom, our neighbor to the southeast*:

Eternal One: For three crimes of Edom,
no for four, I have laid down My sentence and will not revoke it
Because he pursued his brother, *Israel,* with the sword without any pity,
Because he continually stoked his anger
and nourished his rage.
12 So I will send down fire on Teman, *its largest city in the south,*
and burn down the fortresses of Bozrah *in the north.*

13 Here is what the Eternal says *about Ammon, just northeast of the Jordan*:

Eternal One: For three crimes of the Ammonites,
no for four, I have laid down My sentence and will not revoke it
Because they ripped open *the bellies of* pregnant women in Gilead
as they made war to expand their territory.
14 So I will send down fire on the wall that protects Rabbah, *its only major city,*
and burn down all of its fortifications.
With shouts and war cries on the day of battle,
with a whirlwind in the midst of the storm,

15 *I will force* the king into exile,
along with all the officials *who*
counsel him.

So says the Eternal One.

2 Here is what the Eternal says *about*
Moab, Ammon's brother nation east of
the Jordan:

Eternal One: For three crimes of Moab,
no for four, I have laid down
My sentence and will not
revoke it
Because they burned to ash the
bones of the king of Edom,
believing this would prevent his
resurrection.
2 So I will send down fire on
Moab and burn down the
fortresses of Kerioth,
where the people worship
Chemosh.
Moab will be destroyed in an uproar,
with warriors screaming and
war horns blaring,
3 And I will destroy their ruler,
along with all the officials *who*
counsel him.

4 Here is what the Eternal says *about Judah*:

Eternal One: For three crimes of Judah,
no for four, I have laid down
My sentence and will not
revoke it
Because they have rejected the
teachings of the Eternal One
and have not kept His
commandments,
But they have walked away to
follow the same lying *idols*
their ancestors pursued.
5 So I will send down fire on Judah
and burn down all the fortresses
of Jerusalem.

6 Here, *Israel,* is what the Eternal says
about your past and present behavior:

Eternal One: For three crimes of Israel,
no for four, I have laid down
My sentence and will not
revoke it
Because they have sold the right-
living for silver
and the poor *and their property*
for a pair of sandals.
7 They have trampled the heads of
the weak into the dirt
and pushed the oppressed even
further down.
A father and his son sleep with the
same girl,
trampling My holy name in the
process.
8 *And the* religious lie beside every
altar
on garments taken as collateral
from their debtors;
And in the house of their pagan
god, they drink
wine bought with the fines they
have imposed *on others.*

9 Still I destroyed *all of Canaan's*
Amorites before them,
those Canaanites who were as
tall as the towering cedars,
as strong as the *mighty* oaks.
As entrenched as they were, I *still*
destroyed their fruit above
and their roots underneath *My*
promised land.
10 And I brought you up out of the
land of Egypt
and led you safely through 40
years of wilderness wandering
to take possession of the land of
the Amorites.
11 I took some of your children and
raised them up as prophets,
and *I called* some of your youth
to be Nazirites, *set aside to*
My service.
Isn't this true, people of Israel?

God's very own people are forcing those who have dedicated their service to Him to abandon their calling. Here He renders His judgment on them.

So says the Eternal.

Eternal One: 12 But you made the
Nazirites *break their vows*
and drink wine.
You told the prophets, "Don't
you dare prophesy!"

13 I will press you down beneath *your*
enemies, just as a wagon full
of fresh grain creaks
and groans beneath its own
weight.
14 The swift will lose their speed; *there*
will be no escape;
the strong will lose his strength;
the warrior will not survive
the battle;

15The archer will not be able to stand
his ground *and aim his*
arrows.
Even the fastest runner will not
escape, nor will the one who
rides on horseback.
16The bravest *and strongest* soldiers
will *throw down their weapons*
and run naked *for cover* on that
day.

So says the Eternal One.

► We are appalled to hear of horrible atrocities and crimes against humanity. Today we work to put an end to ethnic cleansing and sex trafficking, but these crimes are nothing new. Consider the world Amos occupies: it's a world where the Philistines, the most technologically advanced people in their region, sell people into slavery; where the Edomites attack their neighbors in hand-to-hand combat and violently end their lives; where Ammonites rip open pregnant women in order to annex a few more acres; and where the Israelites, God's own covenant people, sell the needy, while both father and son have sexual relationships with the same girl. If we are appalled to hear these stories, imagine how much more God, the Father of all, is angry with those who act in these ways. Since God's prophet Amos knows His mind, he will not sit idly by and let the poor and right-living suffer.

3 Hear the message that the Eternal has spoken about you, people of Israel—*the words He has spoken* against the whole family:

Eternal One: I brought you up from
Egypt
2Of all the peoples on the earth,
I *knew and* chose you *for a*
relationship with Me.
So I will punish you for the wrong
you have done.

3Do two people travel together
if they had to set up a time to meet?
4Does a lion roar in the forest
if it has not found its prey?
Does a young lion growl in its den
if it has not caught something?
5Does a bird fall into a trap
if no net has been set for it?
Does a trap snap shut
if nothing has set it off?

6Does the trumpet sound the alarm in
the city
without frightening the people?
Does disaster come to a city
unless the Eternal One has permitted
it?
7*The answer to all is the same:* No.
The Eternal Lord does nothing
Without revealing His plan to His
servants, the prophets.
They are His spokespeople.
8The lion has roared;
who is not afraid?
The Eternal Lord has been heard;
His prophets can't help but prophesy.

9Speak to the fortresses of Ashdod
and to the fortresses in the land of
Egypt.
Tell *their leaders,* "Gather on the hillsides
in Samaria
and see what great wrongs are done
in Israel;
Witness the acts of oppression done
there.

Eternal One: 10Those who fill their
fortresses *with finery* through
violence and robbery
have no idea how to do what is
right.

Israel has forgotten God's laws, so of course the people can't follow them. They have fallen into slavery and oppression.

11So the Eternal Lord says *to Israel,*

Eternal One: An enemy will surround
and besiege your land.
It will overwhelm your defenses,
and your fortresses will be
plundered.

12Just as the shepherd rescues
two legs or the tip of an ear from the
hungry lion, that is the kind of rescue
the *wealthy* people of God dwelling in
Samaria will see: only a small piece of

fabric from their luxurious linens and
furnishings will remain.*
13Listen *to what I am saying,* and tes-
tify against Jacob's house.

The Eternal Lord, the Commander of
heavenly armies, says,

Eternal One: 14On the day I punish
Israel for its wrongdoing,
I will also fall upon the altars of
Bethel, *that center of cultic*
worship,
Where the horns of the altar will be
hacked off
and topple to the ground,
making their illegal sacrifice
impossible.
15I will demolish the winter house
of the rich and the summer
house as well;
their palaces *decorated* with
ivory will be torn down,
And their fine mansions will be laid
low.

So says the Eternal One.

4 Hear this word, you cows *on the*
fertile pastures of Bashan,
who *grow fat and happy* on the
hillsides of Samaria,
Who oppress the poor and destroy the
needy
while you order your husbands to do
your own work.
2The Eternal Lord has made a vow by His
own holiness:

Eternal One: The day will come when
your enemy will drag you
away
with hooks *like sides of beef*—will
subdue you with fishhooks,
each and every one of you.
3You'll be forced to leave through
breached walls,
each one *of you* taken straight
out and cast into Harmon, *a*
place of exile.
4*I dare you:* Come to *My shrine at*
Bethel and do wrong;
come, *worship Me* at Gilgal, and
watch your sins multiply.
Go ahead, bring your *ritual* sacrifices
there every morning
and ten percent of your earnings
every three days.
5Burn a thanksgiving offering of
leavened bread,
boast about your freewill
offerings, and let everyone
know
because these things are what
you love to do, people of Israel.

So says the Eternal Lord.

Eternal One: 6I kept your teeth clean
and your stomachs empty
when *famine struck* all your
cities and no food could be
found in your towns,
But still you did not come back
to Me.

7I held back the rain from your fields
when there were still three
months left until harvest.
I would send rain on one city
but not on another.
I would send rain on one field
but not on another, so the dry
field withered.
8So people from two or three towns
stumbled to one
that had water to drink, but
they were still thirsty.
And still you did not return to Me.

9I struck your *crops* with disease and
mildew.
Whatever survived in your
gardens and vineyards,
Whatever remained of your fig
and olive trees, the locusts
devoured;
and still you did not return to Me.

10I sent plagues on you like *the*
plagues I unleashed upon
Egypt.
I slaughtered your young men
in battle,
Stole away your horses, and sent
the stench
of *those bodies rotting in* your
camps reeking into your
nostrils;
And still you did not return to Me.

11I destroyed some of you as I
destroyed *the ancient cities of*
Sodom and Gomorrah,
and those who survived were
like a smoking branch
plucked from the fire;
And still you did not return to Me.

* 3:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

12So this is what I am going to do to
you, Israel.
Because of what I am planning,
prepare to meet your God,
people of Israel!

13Witness the One who shapes the
mountains and fashions the wind,
who reveals His thoughts to human
beings,
Who changes dawn to darkness
and treads upon the high places of
the earth.
The Eternal God, Commander of
heavenly armies, is His name.

5 Hear this message I sing about you;
it is my dirge for you, people of
Israel:
2The virgin Israel has fallen,
fallen never to rise again;
Forsaken in her land, *forgotten where she
lies.*
No one is there to help her rise again.
3So says the Eternal Lord:

Eternal One: The city that sent out a
thousand soldiers
will see only a hundred of them
survive;
And the town that sent out a
hundred
will see only ten remain for the
house of Israel.

4So says the Eternal to Israel:

Eternal One: Turn back to Me and you
will live. *There is still time.*
5But don't hang your hopes on
Bethel,
Or travel to Gilgal or Beersheba *or
any other sanctuary expecting
help,*
because Gilgal will surely be
sent into exile,
And *the shrine at* Bethel will come
to nothing.

6Turn back to the Eternal One, and you
will live.
If you don't, He will flame up like fire
against the house of Joseph,
Burn it to the ground, and no one in
Bethel will be able to put it out.

7*Listen,* you who distort justice and make
it taste bitter
and trample righteousness to the
ground.

8The One who set the Pleiades and Orion
in the heavens,
who turns night's shadow into
morning and darkens the day
with night,
Who calls forth the waters of the sea
to pour down *rain and flood* the
earth—
the Eternal One is His name,
9Who destroys the mighty in a flash,
and crashes against the fortress *with
the force of a tidal wave.*

10Those *of you who hold power now* hate
the one who judges *in the courts*
at the gate
and detest anybody who speaks the
truth.
11So because you have climbed *to success*
on the backs of the poor*
and your wealth comes from taxes
you impose on their harvests,
You may well build mansions of
expensively-cut stones,
but you'll never occupy them.
You may plant beautiful vineyards,
but you'll never enjoy their *delicious*
wine.
12For I know the depth of evil that you've
done,
and *I see* the gravity of your sins:
You persecute those who do the right
thing, you take bribes,
and you push the poor to one side
in the courts at the *city* gates
instead of helping them.
13So the wise may decide to keep quiet
just then,
because *truly,* it is an evil time.

14Search for good and not for evil
so that you may live;
That way the Eternal God, the
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
will be at your side,
as you yourselves have even said.
15Hate what is evil, and love all that is
good;
apply His laws justly *in the courts* at
the *city* gates,
And it may be that the Eternal God, the
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
will have mercy on those
descendants of Joseph who
survived.

* 5:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

► Amos looks into the future to a day when God's judgment will fall on His people. But judgment and destruction are not intended to be the end. The last word belongs to God, and it is a word of mercy on His covenant people. Sin, of course, must be dealt with; it must be punished decisively. But in God's grace, some will survive the onslaught. These survivors the prophets call "the remnant." They are the ones God destines to be restored and to carry on His name. Centuries later, the remnant will refound Israel and extend the covenant blessings to every family on the face of the earth.

16So says the Eternal God, Commander of
heavenly armies, the Lord *of all*:

Eternal One: *Get ready to hear* wailing
from every street,
people crying out in *pain and*
sorrow along every highway.
The farmers will be pulled away
from their fields to mourn,
and those who are trained to
grieve will wail with them.
17In every vineyard, there will be
mourning
because I will pass through the
middle of you.

Says the Eternal One.

► Most people think they are OK with God; it's the other fellow who should be worried. Some apparently think that they will fare well in the day of the Eternal One, a day when God will judge sin and defeat His enemies. Ironically, God's own people have become His enemies. So Amos warns that the day of the Eternal One will bring a big surprise to those who think they are in good standing with God. It will be a day of darkness, not light—a day of gloom from which there will be no escape.

18How horrible for you who look forward
to the day of the Eternal One!
Why do you want it to come?
For you, its arrival will mean darkness,
not light.
19It will be as if you were to escape from
a lion
only to run headlong into a bear,
As if you ran into a house *to hide,* leaned
against the wall *to rest,*
and a *poisonous* snake latched onto
your hand.
20Will not the day of the Eternal One be
darkness instead of light,
pitch black, without even a hint of
brightness?

Eternal One: 21I hate—I totally reject—
your religious ceremonies
and have nothing to do with
your solemn gatherings.
22You can offer Me *whole* burnt
offerings and grain offerings,
but I will not accept them.
You can sacrifice your finest, fattest
young animals as a peace
offering,
but I will not even look up.
23And stop making that music for
Me—it's just noise.
I will not listen to the melodies
you play on the harp.
24*Here's what I want:* Let justice
thunder down like a waterfall;
let righteousness flow like a
mighty river that never runs
dry.

25Did you offer Me sacrifices or give Me offerings during the 40 years *I guided you* in the wilderness, people of Israel? 26But now you place your trust in *false gods; you pray to the idols* Sikkuth (your king) and Kiyyun (the star god), those *detestable* images that you've made for yourselves. 27*Because of your worship offered to man-made images,* you must go away—beyond Damascus.*

So says the Eternal God, the Commander of *heavenly* armies.

► Didn't God institute the festivals? Didn't He instruct His people to sacrifice? Didn't He inspire the singers and songwriters to praise His name? Yes. Even the most beautiful ceremony

* 5:25-27 Acts 7:42-43

can become empty ritual, and a sacred time should not be mixed with activities that displease God. He wants more than pious exercises; He wants His people to follow His instructions, to do what is right, and to honor Him because they recognize that He is the one all-powerful God.

6 Grief is coming to those who live
comfortably in Zion
and those who feel secure on the
mountain of Samaria;
The noteworthy of this nation
and those respected by the people of
Israel *have much to dread.*
2Go over to Calneh and look *at what
happened there,*
then cross over to the great *city of*
Hamath *in Aram,*
Then go down to Gath, *the city* of the
Philistines.
Are you any more powerful than these
fallen kingdoms were?
Are your lands any larger than
theirs?
3You try to hold off the evil day,
but your actions bring the reign of
violence ever nearer.

4*Grief is coming to* those who lounge on
beds inlaid with ivory,
who stretch out on their *luxurious*
sofas,
And who feast on lambs from their
flocks
and stall-fattened calves anytime, *not
just during festivals.*
5*Grief is coming to those* who sing foolish
songs to the sounds of the harp,
who think they can play like David;
6Who guzzle *fine* wine *by the gallon* from
elegant bowls;
who apply expensive oils to their
bodies, *when cheaper ones will do,*
But they are not grieved by the awful
state of Joseph's people.
7That is why they will be the first ones
carried off into exile,
and their lives of leisure and feasting
will disappear.

8The Eternal Lord has sworn by His own
holiness,
and the Eternal God, the
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
Promises this:

Eternal One: I detest the pride of *Israel,
descendants of My servant*
Jacob,
and I hate their fortresses,
And I will hand over the city and all
its wealth *to their enemies.*

9If there are *only* 10 people left in one house, they will all die. 10If a man arrives to take his relative's remains out of the house *for burial* and he calls back into the darkened house, "Is anyone else with you?" the only survivor will respond, "No." The relative will cut the survivor off: "Quiet! Not another word! We mustn't mention the name of the Eternal One."

11Look: the Eternal gives the order,
and the great house is smashed
to pieces, and the little house
crumbles.
12Do horses gallop over big boulders?
Does a person plow such rocks with
a team of oxen?
But you have somehow managed to
make justice poisonous
and turned the *sweet* fruits of
righteousness into bitterness—
13You, who celebrate taking back *worthless*
Lo-debar
and ask, "Haven't we captured
Karnaim with our own strong
armies?"

Eternal One: 14You will see—I am
raising up a *strong* nation
against you, people of Israel,
and they will hound you from
Hamath pass *in the north*
To the *Great Rift* Valley at Arabah *in
the south.*

So says the Eternal God, the Commander of *heavenly* armies.

► Prophets find God's message in every word and turn of phrase. Lo-debar and Karnaim were two cities recaptured by Jeroboam II, king of Israel, after a foreign ruler had annexed them as part of his kingdom (2 Kings 10:32-36). When Jeroboam won back the region, the people celebrated (2 Kings 14:23-29); but Jeroboam was out of step with God, so the joy was short-lived. That's where the names of the two cities become interesting. In

Hebrew *Lo-debar* means "no thing"; *Karnaim* means "horns," and horns are a symbol of strength. In a bit of sarcasm, the prophet quips that those who celebrate the retaking of Lo-debar are celebrating "nothing," while those who claim the victory at Karnaim have only their horn, their own strength, to thank. God will have none of it.

7 This is what the Eternal Lord showed me: He brought a swarm of locusts when the crops had begun to sprout in *late* spring (after the king's *portion of the* hay had been cut). 2When *I saw* the locusts devour everything green in the land *that belonged to the farmers,* I spoke.

Amos: O Eternal Lord, please forgive *us*!
How will Jacob's *descendants* survive this?
The nation is so small.

3The Eternal relented *and showed mercy.*

Eternal One: What you have seen will not be.

4Then the Eternal Lord showed me this: He called for a rain of fire, and it devoured the deep abyss and began to devour the land itself.

Amos: 5O Eternal Lord, please no! Not this!
How will Jacob's *descendants* survive this?
The nation is so small.

6And the Eternal again relented *and showed mercy.*

Eternal One: This will not happen either.

7Then He showed me this: The Lord was standing by a wall built with a plumb line, and in His hand was a plumb line.

Eternal One: 8What do you see, Amos?

Amos: A plumb line.

Eternal One: Watch *what I'm about to do*! I am going to put a plumb line
up against My people Israel *to see what is straight and true,*
And I will not look the other way any longer.
9The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the religious shrines of Israel reduced to ruin,
And with sword *in hand,* I will bring down the house of Jeroboam *the king.*

10Then Amaziah, the priest at the royal shrine in Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam, king of Israel.

Amaziah's Message: Amos is plotting conspiracy against you in the very heart of the land of Israel. *You must act.* The land cannot bear any more of his speeches. 11For this is what Amos is saying:

Amos: Jeroboam is going to die by the sword,
and *the people of* Israel will be captured and led away into exile *far from home.*

Amaziah's Message: 12I told Amos, "Listen, seer—run for the land of Judah; earn your living and spread your prophesies there, 13but don't ever *show your face and try to* prophesy at Bethel again because it is the king's sanctuary and a temple for this kingdom."

14But Amos persisted.

Amos: I am not a *professional* prophet, or even the son of one. *You shouldn't be afraid of me;* I am just a man who followed my herds and gathered the fruit from the sycamores 15until the Eternal spoke to me, as I was minding my flock.

Eternal One: Go and speak My words to the people of Israel!

16So now listen to what the Eternal has to say, you who say,
"Don't prophesy against Israel,
Or predict the downfall of Isaac's descendants."
17The Eternal One says this:

Eternal One: Your wife will be reduced to selling herself in the streets,
your sons and daughters will die by the sword,
your land will be measured out to others,

You yourself will end your days in
an impure land,
and Israel will be sent into exile
far from home.

► Prophecy has often been described as "speaking truth to power." Amos predicts the demise of the king, not in some corner somewhere but at the king's royal shrine at Bethel. The priest in charge, Amaziah, reports the traitorous words to the king and bans the prophet from ever returning to the religious center of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. But Amos has the last word. He will not be silent despite the threats against him. The word of God cannot be suppressed by powerful priests or royal decree. Judgment will surely come to the land because the Lord has decided it!

8 This is what the Eternal Lord
showed me: a basket of ripe fruit.
Eternal One: [2]What do you see, Amos?

Amos: *I see* a basket of ripe fruit.

Eternal One: The time is *ripe for* the
end of My people, Israel.
I will not overlook their
wrongdoing any longer.
[3]On that day, the *joyous* songs sung
in the temple will turn to
wailing and crying,
and dead bodies will be piled up
everywhere, scattered here,
scattered there.
Silence!

Says the Eternal Lord.

[4]Listen to this, you who trample on the
needy
and bring the poor to ruin,
[5]Who ask, "When will the new moon
festival be done
so we can sell our grain?
And when will the Sabbath end
so we can sell our wheat?
Then we can tamper with our scales
and make the bushel measure smaller
And the counterweight heavier to cheat
our customers.
[6]We can buy the needy for silver
and the poor *and their property* for
the price of a pair of sandals.
We can even sell the chaff we sweep up
as grain."
[7]The Eternal has sworn by the pride of
Jacob, *the very land He gave to
them:*

Eternal One: I will not forget anything
that Israel has done.
[8]Won't the land *beneath their feet*
tremble for this,
and everyone who lives in it
mourn?
The ground will rise and fall like the
river Nile, *which floods and
recedes;*
it will ripple and roll like *the
current of* Egypt's Nile.

[9]The Eternal Lord says,

Eternal One: On that day, I will make
the sun set at noon
and send darkness across the
earth when it should be
broad daylight.
[10]I will turn your celebrations into
mourning
and all your singing into wailing.
I will make it so that all wear
mourning sackcloth
and every head is shaved *out of
sadness.*
It will be like the grief you feel at
the death of an only child,
and it will be a bitter day by the
end.

[11]The Eternal Lord says,

Eternal One: The days are coming
when I will send a famine on the
land—
Not a hunger for food or thirst for
water,
but *starvation* for the words of
the Eternal.
[12]People will stagger from *the Dead*
Sea to *the Mediterranean* Sea,
and from the north to the east;
They will run everywhere, desperate
to hear the voice of the
Eternal One,
but they will not hear it.

[13]When that time comes, beautiful
young women and strong
young men
will fall from thirst.

14And those who swear by the pagan
idols of Samaria—
who say "As your god lives, Dan!"
Or "As your power lives,
Beersheba!"—
will all fall, never to rise again.

9 I looked and saw the Lord standing by the altar.

Eternal One: Strike the tops of the pillars
so that the foundations shake,
and cut them off so *the building*
crashes down upon the
heads of all the people!
I will kill with the sword any who
survive.
Not one of them will get away.
Not one of them will escape.

2If they dig down to the land of the
dead,
My hand will *find them and* pull
them back up.
If they *try to* climb to heaven,
I will bring them back down
from there.
3If they try to hide on the summit
and in the dense forests of
Mount Carmel,
I will track them down and
capture them.
If they try to disappear from sight
in the depths of the sea,
I will send a sea monster to bite
and devour them.
4If they are taken captive by their
enemies,
I will command that they be
killed by the sword *in their
exile,*
And I will fix My gaze upon them,
not for their good, but for their
harm.

5The Eternal Lord, Commander of
heavenly armies—
He touches the earth and it cracks
and crumbles,
and everyone upon it cries with grief.
He touches the land and it rises and falls,
falls and rises like the Nile in Egypt.
6He builds His upper chambers in the
heavens
and founds His storeroom* on the
earth.
He calls up the waters of the sea
and pours them out across the land—
Eternal One is His name.

Eternal One: 7To Me, aren't you like the
people of Ethiopia,
*overwhelmed by the powers
around you,*
You people of Israel?
Didn't I bring the people of
Israel from the land of
Egypt,
And the Philistines from Caphtor,
and the Arameans from Kir?
8Look! The eyes of the Eternal Lord
are *fixed* upon your sinful
kingdom,
and I will wipe it off the face of
the earth.
But I will not destroy Jacob's
descendants completely.

So says the Eternal.

Eternal One: 9I will give the order,
and I will shake the nation of
Israel among all the nations
The way grain is shaken in a sieve.
All the *good* kernels will fall to
the ground,
But the rocks will stay trapped in
the sieve, *ready for disposal.*
10*I will see* all of My people who do
wrong,
who say, "Nothing bad will ever
happen to us."
I will see them all fall to the sword.

11*After that happens,* on the day *I
choose,* I will rebuild
the *dilapidating* house of David
from its ruins,
Mend the holes in it, rebuild its
wreckage,
and restore it just the way it
used to be.
12Then they may possess what
remains of Edom,
including every person among
the outsiders who have been
called by My name.*

13So says the Eternal One *who will make
this happen.*

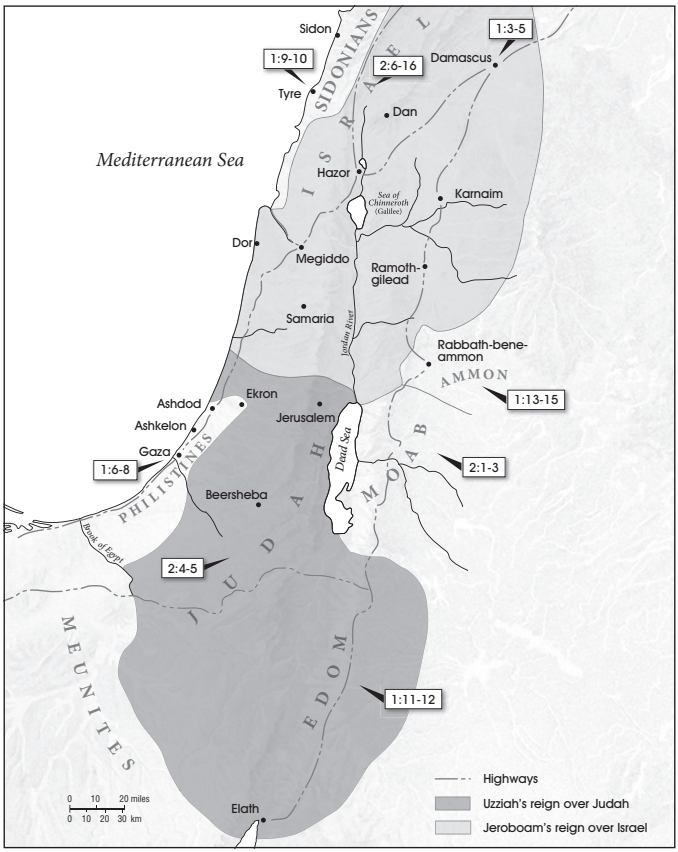
Eternal One: The day is coming
*when one following will overtake
one ahead—*
When the person plowing the field
will overtake
the person *still* reaping *the grain
from the last season;*

* 9:6 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 9:11-12 Acts 15:16-17

When the person stomping grapes
will overtake
the person planting the
vineyard.
And *in that fertile day,* new wine will
drip from the mountains,
and the hills will flow with it.
14 I will restore the captives of My
people, Israel.
They will rebuild their ruined
cities and return to them.
They will plant *new* vineyards and
drink wine from them,
and they will plant *new* gardens
and eat the food they grow.
15 I will plant them in their own soil,
and they will never be uprooted
again,
For this is the land I have given
them.

So said the Eternal One your God.

► Most of Amos's prophecy announces doom against Israel, Judah, and her neighbors. But in these last verses, the tone of his prophecy changes. He foresees a day when divine judgment will give way to restoration. According to the prophet, David's dynasty will be reinstated and the divided people of God will once again be united. A glorious age will then arrive when their enemies are defeated, their devastated cities are bustling and thriving again, and their farmers and vintners can't keep up with the abundance of food and wine. When that day comes, the people will experience the fruit of God's salvation.



Amos Prophesies against Cities and Nations

OBADIAH

God's judgment on Edom for its cruelty

The message of Obadiah, a servant of God

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest in the Old Testament, and not much is known about its author. Obadiah, which means "one who serves the Lord," may be either a title or a proper name. Traditionally the author is identified as the servant to King Ahab in the ninth century B.C. (1 Kings 18:3), but the content and style of the book suggest this Obadiah is another prophet who lived after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The date of the work cannot help solve the mystery as there are not enough details within the prophecy to date it precisely. Regardless of his identity, the prophet who speaks this message has a fierce love for the people of Jacob—especially Judah and Jerusalem—and is the human vehicle for God's voice to the nations.

Obadiah's message concerns the Edomites, the descendants of Isaac through his son Esau, and accuses them of disloyalty to God and treachery against the Israelites, Isaac's other descendants through his son Jacob. It explains how the Babylonian crisis has reopened the deep wound of an ancient family feud. Instead of rushing to Judah's aid when Jerusalem was attacked and destroyed, Esau's descendants took advantage of the moment and profited by Judah's suffering. Although the descendants of Jacob and Esau formed separate nations hundreds of years before this prophecy is delivered, God remembers the tradition of enmity between these "brothers" and chooses to punish the broken loyalty. Ultimately, Obadiah says, God will humble the proud people of Edom, restore the fortunes of Israel, and cause Israel to once again possess the land of promise. The day of the Eternal is near and coming close. On that day, God will settle every score, right every wrong, and bring justice to an unjust world. Edom itself is destined to be ruled by Jacob's sons and daughters as the kingdoms of this world give way to the kingdom of the Eternal God.

Imagine the scene: The Edomites have come with other nations to rob and betray Israel; it looks as though God has allowed Israel's cousins, the descendants of Isaac through Esau, to steal from His temple and holy city. The Israelites are convinced they have kept Abraham's covenant with God while the Edomites have forsaken the Lord and His people Israel. Their prayer is for God to provide refuge for those who seek and trust in Him, and to judge their enemies.

[1]This is the vision that came to Obadiah:

Listen carefully to what the Eternal Lord says about *the nation of* Edom.
Learn from their fate.
We have been put on notice through the Eternal's representative
who was sent *to everyone* among the nations saying,
"Get up. Get ready to charge against Edom in battle."

Eternal One *(to Edom)***:** [2]See how insignificant I will make you compared to other nations;
you will be completely despised *by the rest of the world.*
[3]Your deep pride has blinded you *to the truth,*
tucked securely in the clefts of the rocks, *safely* out of reach.
You say to yourself,
"Whose attack can *reach up here and* bring me down to the ground?"

Edom named its capital city "Rock," and many of the people there were cave dwellers, virtually unreachable.

[4]Even if you fly high as the eagle,
believing yourselves strong and free,
and put your nest among the stars,
I will have no trouble bringing you down.

This is declared by the Eternal One.

[5]*Consider* how *thoroughly* you will be wiped out.
If thieves come to *steal from* you
And robbers arrive under cover of night,
won't they take only what they want?
If the grape harvesters arrive,
doesn't their *hasty* picking usually leave some fruit *in the field for the poor*?
[6]But Esau, *your nation* will be ransacked;
there will be nothing left.
Every last treasure you had *carefully* hidden will be taken.
[7]Your *supposed* allies—every last one—will turn against you;
they will run you out of your own town.
And those who promised you peace will lie to your face and conquer you.
Even those who shared your bread will ambush you.
You won't understand what is happening *until it is too late.*

Eternal One: [8]When this day comes,
won't I destroy the wisest citizens of Edom,
Make all insight *vanish* from Mount Esau,
and leave all helpless?
[9]As for your warriors, *great Edomite city of* Teman,
they will be routed, *shattered.*
Their slaughtered *bodies* will cut off everyone's path to Mount Esau
[10]because of your violent history against your brother Jacob.
Shame will envelop you,
and your nation will be destroyed forever.
[11]You just stood there, *doing nothing,*
while strangers ransacked their city,
While invaders rushed through the gates and divided up Jerusalem for themselves.
You might as well have been one of them.
[12]You should never have gloated over your brother's *tragedy that* day
or *been secretly* happy *about all* their misfortune.
You should never have celebrated the people of Judah's decimation.
You should never have acted so arrogantly
on the day they suffered so much.

13You should never have walked
through the *city* gates of My people
on the day of this disaster.
You should never have gloated at
their difficulties
on the day of this disaster.
You should never have taken
advantage of them and their wealth
on the day of this disaster.
14You should never have lain in wait
along the crossroads
to cut off those trying to escape;
You should never have handed over
the *handful of* survivors *to Babylonian captivity*
on the day of their great distress.

15The day of the Eternal's *judgment* for all the nations is near.
Whatever *evil* you have done will be done to you;
Your deeds will come crashing back on your head.

Eternal One: 16Just as you drank *to the defeat of My people* on My holy mountain,
now *you and* all the nations *around you* will *always* drink excessively.
They will *be forced to* drink and guzzle *a mouthful of suffering,*
and it will be as if they never existed.

17But on Mount Zion *will be a place of safety*.
Some will escape to that holy hill,
And the people of Jacob will *conquer and* possess
those who conquered and dispossessed them.
18The people of Jacob will become a fire
and the family of Joseph a flame.
They will ignite and consume the people of Esau *as they execute divine punishment*
until only *dry* stubble remains.
No one from the people of Esau will survive *the conflagration.*

So declares the Eternal One.

Eternal One: 19The people from the southern desert* will take over Mount Esau,
and those from the foothills* *will flood* into the Philistines' *coastal* plain.
They will possess the *fertile* lands of Ephraim and Samaria,
and Benjamin's people will inhabit Gilead.
20The army of exiled sons *and daughters* of Israel will *stream back home*
and live along the coast and possess the Canaanites as far as Zarephath.
And the exiles of Jerusalem who live in Sepharad
will settle down in the cities *and villages* of the South.*
21These deliverers will go up to Mount Zion, *My holy hill,*
and justly rule Mount Esau *from there*.
And the kingdom *they establish* will belong to the Eternal One *alone*.

* Verse 19 Hebrew, *Negev* * Verse 19 Hebrew, *Shephelah* * Verse 20 Hebrew, *Negev*

JONAH

God extends His mercy to other nations

The story of Jonah, an unmerciful prophet

When reading the Book of Jonah, it is difficult to sympathize with this northern prophet. He is nationalistic and xenophobic, and he just cannot be bothered to rub shoulders with unlovable people, especially the violent and oppressive Assyrians. Because most people have felt as Jonah does at some point in their lives, this prophetic novella draws in its readers and makes them want Jonah—perhaps even secretly—to drown in the sea for his stubbornness and disrespect. To be fair, Jonah does have a legitimate gripe against the very people God is commanding him to go and preach to. For a long time, the Assyrians have aggressively built their empire on the backs of smaller nations such as Israel, which has been reduced to a vassal state. The Assyrians appear to enjoy bullying conquered nations, deporting their chief citizens, breaking up families, laying waste to the land, and doing everything they can to erase their victims' identities. In 722 B.C., the Northern Kingdom of Israel will be decisively conquered by Assyria, so Jonah's animosity toward the northern aggressor is understandable.

Regardless of Jonah's personal judgment of Nineveh, it is consoling that the Eternal One has the last word: "Should I not have pity on that great city of Nineveh where there are more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (4:11). This question drives the storyline. God will do whatever it takes to get Jonah to Nineveh with His message. He'll send a storm; He'll even send a great fish to swallow His defiant prophet because God knows the people of Nineveh will turn to Him when judgment is proclaimed over their city. But the story is not really about the men, women, and children (or even animals!) of Nineveh. The story is about the unloving and ungracious prophet who prefers fire from heaven to mercy for his personal enemies.

It is difficult to read Jonah and not think about how we view ourselves and other people. Do we want to keep God's grace and mercy to ourselves—thinking perhaps we somehow deserve it—while secretly hoping others receive God's unmitigated fury?

1 *One day* the word of the Eternal One
came to *the prophet* Jonah (Amittai's
son).

Eternal One: 2Get up, and go to that powerful *and notorious* city of Nineveh. Call out *My message* against it because the wickedness of its people has come to My attention.

3*In hearing those instructions,* Jonah got up and ran toward Tarshish from the Eternal's presence. He went down to *the port at* Joppa and found a ship bound for Tarshish. He *climbed aboard,* paid the fare, and made himself *comfortable* in the hold of the ship.

► The Lord calls Jonah to Nineveh, but instead he runs full speed to Tarshish, a great and wealthy city on the coast of Spain. It is about as far to the west as most Israelites have ever ventured, while Nineveh is about as far to the east as most Israelites have ever gone. Nineveh is a great city and the fiercest enemy of Jonah's people, so Jonah is afraid and wants to be completely away from this calling and from anyone who may be inclined to go on this ill-fated adventure.

4*Not to be deterred,* the Eternal One threw an intense wind at the sea. The violence of the storm put Jonah's ship in jeopardy of breaking apart. 5The sailors panicked! They started *running back and forth,* throwing cargo overboard to lighten the boat; every man, *out of desperation,* cried to his own deity. *Eventually, a sailor found* Jonah down in the hold of the ship, where he had lain down and fallen into a deep slumber. 6*When* the captain *heard, he* went *down and woke* Jonah *up.*

Captain: How can you sleep *so deeply*? Get up, and call out to your deity! Maybe your deity will see what is happening and save us *from this catastrophe.*

Sailors *(to one another)***:** 7*You know what we should do?* We should cast lots to find out who is ultimately responsible for our distress!

So they cast their lots, and Jonah's name was chosen.

Sailors: 8*Who are you?* We must know who is responsible for this disaster that would swallow us *in the sea.* What do you do? Where are you from? What country is your home? Whom are you descended from?

Jonah: 9I am Hebrew, and the God whom I worship is the Eternal One, the God of heaven. He made the sea and the land, *so He controls them.*

10After interrogating him, the sailors were terrified because Jonah had told them he was running away from the Eternal's presence.

Sailors *(to Jonah)***:** What have you done? *Because of you, we're all going to be killed.*
11(shouting over the building storm) What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?

Jonah *(shouting back)***:** 12*God is using the sea to punish me, so* pick me up and throw me into the sea! Then the sea will grow calm *again, and you'll be safe!* This is *all* my fault! This great storm *of my God's anger* has built against you because of me!

The sailors fear what will happen to them if they kill one of God's people.

13The sailors ignored Jonah's advice and tried to row back to land. They made no headway because the violence of the storm kept growing.

Sailors *(to God)***:** 14Eternal One! Please, *we beg You*—do not kill us as if we had murdered this man. And don't punish us as if we'd killed an innocent person. *We understand that* You, Eternal One, do as You please.

15At that, they grabbed Jonah *by his arms and legs* and threw him overboard. And when they did, the *raging* sea grew calm. 16The sailors were even more terrified of the Eternal One. They offered sacrifices to Him and made promises to Him.

17The Eternal *didn't let Jonah die.* He chose a large fish to swallow Jonah; for three days and three nights *the prophet* Jonah sat *safely* inside the belly of this fish.

2 To his God, the Eternal, Jonah
prayed from inside this *great* fish.

Jonah reveals in his prayer a change of heart: he thanks God for saving him from the angry sea.

Jonah: [2]With desperate cries
I beckoned the Eternal *to hear,* and
He answered me.
From the belly, the place of death, I
cried out *to You,*
and You have responded to my
voice.
[3]You threw me into the *watery* depths
and cast me into the middle of the
chaotic seas.
The waters closed in around me;
Your waves broke over me;
Your surf *swelled as I sank into the depths.*
[4]But then I said *to You,*
"I have been driven out from before
Your very eyes.
Still, *I know* I will gaze again on
Your holy temple."
[5]The waters swallowed me;
the deep *abyss* was covering
over me.
Seaweeds were wrapped around my
head, *trapping me*
[6]as I sank down to where the
mountains are rooted *to the earth.*
I went down to the place *where death's gate* would lock me in forever.

Yet You lifted me up from the pit.
Eternal One, *You are* my God!
[7]Only as my life was fading way
did I remember the Eternal;
To Your *sacred dwelling,* Your holy
temple,
my cries did rise to You.
[8]Those who worship worthless idols
turn their backs on God and
renounce their loyal love.
[9]But I will *sing to You and* sacrifice to
You
with a voice filled with
thanksgiving;
Whatever I promised, I will certainly
pay it
because deliverance is from the
Eternal *alone.*

[10]Then the Eternal One directed the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the shore.

3 The word of the Eternal came to *the prophet* Jonah a second time.

Eternal One: [2]Get up, and go to that powerful *and notorious* city of Nineveh, and pass on to them the message I'm giving you.

[3]*Having learned his lesson,* Jonah yielded to the Eternal's command and headed *on the road* to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was an important city, *so large that* it took three days to travel throughout it. [4]Jonah had barely begun to walk the first day's journey into the city *when he stopped.*

Jonah *(shouting out to the people of Nineveh)***:** After 40 days, Nineveh will be annihilated.

[5]*With that announcement,* the people of Nineveh started to trust in *Jonah's* God! Every person—whether young or old, rich or poor, *male or female*—fasted and wore a sack *as a sign of remorse for his past wickedness.* [6]*The people of Nineveh told each other about this, until* the news made it all the way to the king of Nineveh, *who ruled the entire Assyrian Empire.* The king changed from his royal robes to sackcloth, and instead of sitting up high on his throne, he sat *down low* in the dust. [7]He sent an official message *to his subjects.*

King's Message: By order of the king of Nineveh and his nobles, "No human being, animal, cattle, or flock may taste anything. None of them may go out to eat or drink any water. [8]Instead let both humans and animals cover themselves with sacks. Let all *who belong to this empire* call to God sincerely and turn from their wicked ways and violent acts. [9]Perhaps *Jonah's* God will *show mercy and* relent *from His judgment.* Perhaps *out of compassion* He will not unleash His fierce anger against us, and we may be spared."

[10]God saw all they did and how they turned from their evil ways. So He relented and decided not to unleash the disasters He said He would *through His servant Jonah.*

4 The mercy God extended toward Nineveh upset Jonah terribly. *The more he thought about* it, the angrier he became. [2]So he prayed to the Eternal.

Jonah has time to think of how greatly the Assyrians are oppressing Israel, and he can't reconcile their deliverance.

Jonah: Eternal One, isn't this what I said *would happen* when I was still in my own country? This is exactly the reason I ran away to Tarshish in the first place. *I know how You are!* I know *that You are not like other gods,* that You are full of grace and compassion, that it takes a lot to make You angry, and that Your loyal love is so great that You *are always ready to* relent from inflicting misery. 3Eternal One, *since You didn't kill them,* please take my life away from me. For my death *now* is so much better than my life *tomorrow*.

Eternal One: 4*Jonah,* do you have any good reason to be angry?

5Jonah headed east out of the city *instead of west toward his home* to look for a place *high above the city* to sit down. He found a suitable spot and built a shelter from the hot sun. He sat there waiting to see what might happen to the city. 6Then the Eternal God chose a *gourd* plant to grow up and to shade Jonah from the discomfort *of the intense heat. The large, thick leaves of* this vine made Jonah very, very happy. 7But at dawn the next day, God chose a worm to chew through the *gourd's* vine; *that night,* it shriveled. 8Then when the sun rose, God chose a scorching east wind *to blow*. As the sun beat down *from a cloudless sky* on Jonah's head, he became faint. Again, he asked to die.

Jonah: My death *now* is so much better than my life *tomorrow*.

Eternal One: 9Do you have any good reason to be angry about this *gourd's* vine?

Jonah: Yes, *I do.* I'm angry enough to die.

Eternal One: 10*Jonah, don't you understand?* You care about this *gourd's* vine, and yet you didn't do anything to make it grow; *you didn't plant it, water it, or protect it*. It appeared one night then died another. 11Should I not have pity on that great city of Nineveh where there are more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?

MICAH

Sin, judgment, and hope for redemption

The message of Micah, a prophet from the country

Micah is a prophet living in the rural areas of Judah at the same time Isaiah is prophesying in the city of Jerusalem. His name expresses a profound question: "Who is like the Eternal?" Like many other prophets whose sermons are collected in the Old Testament, Micah understands God's mind in ways others do not. He knows well the story of His people and how their past actions have offended God and violated the covenant. When the people of Israel and Judah neglect their devotion to the one True God, their fortunes plummet; when they move away from the acts of justice and mercy God demands, they suffer. Micah, like his predecessor Amos, has been given the message that God is about to do a new thing in Israel, but this new thing will involve judgment and transformation.

As with many other figures in the Bible, very little is known about Micah the prophet. The first few verses of the book indicate that he is prophesying during the last decades of the eighth century B.C. and perhaps into the seventh century (759-687 B.C.). He is from a small village about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem that has built up around a trading route, so he may be a merchant—giving him ample opportunity to travel throughout the region. He considers himself a true prophet bearing true words from God, unlike the many false prophets who tell people what they want to hear. His message is one of judgment for the rich and powerful who neglect the covenant and one of liberation for the poor and downtrodden who embrace it. For Micah, faithfulness to God is not just a matter of mastering the forms of religion and performing the requisite rituals; no, true faith embodies love and expresses itself in humility and acts of justice and kindness.

Those who serve God faithfully are rewarded according to the prophet; it is important to note that even in pronouncing gloom and doom, Micah turns eventually toward hope. God is a God of might and mercy; whatever may happen, God will not abandon His people if they remain faithful. But if they do not, God is willing to forgive those who return to Him.

Among the memorable oracles in Micah's prophecy are those describing a shepherd who comes from Bethlehem, gathers together the remnant of God's people, rules with justice, and establishes peace. Other prophecies look forward to a time when Jerusalem is acknowledged as the center of the world, when war and fear are things of the past, and when people have all they need for productive, meaningful lives. Early Christians will read and reread these prophecies in light of their experiences of Jesus and become convinced that these hopes coalesce in Him.

1 These are the words of the Eternal One and the visions about *the two capital cities of Israel and Judah,* Samaria and Jerusalem, that were given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah over Judah.

► The Northern Kingdom of Israel, sometimes called Samaria after its capital city, was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom of Judah, where Micah lives and speaks, has been spared that fate, but at a high price: the people have lost the power to govern themselves, pay huge tributes to the Assyrians, and allow the corruption of their religious practices because of the Assyrians' influence. All Israelites suffer under these conditions, but Micah's attention is drawn especially to the poor and dispossessed; somehow, as often happens in wartime, rich people manage to get richer while the poor are exploited, and Micah is outraged at the way the rulers of Judah have taken advantage of those who had little—and now have less.

2 Listen, all of you people!*
Pay attention, earth and all upon it!
The Eternal Lord gives evidence against you;
the Lord *speaks* from His holy temple.
3 Look at this: the Eternal is leaving His home *in heaven,*
and He is coming down to walk*
over the high places of the earth.
4 The mountains will melt beneath His feet;
the valleys will burst open,
Like wax next to a *raging* fire,
as water pours from the heights.

Eternal One: 5 All of this is happening because of the crimes of Jacob,
the wrongdoings of the people of Israel.
And what is the crime of Jacob?
Isn't it Samaria?
And what is the high place of Judah? Isn't it Jerusalem?
6 And so I will turn Samaria into a pile of ruins in an open field.
To make her properly into a place to plant a vineyard,
I will roll her stones into the valley
and bare her foundations *for all to see.*
7 I will shatter her images and burn her *immoral* riches with fire,
and all her idols I will break down.
They came from the earning of prostitutes, *servants of other gods,*
and they will be used *again* to pay the wages of another prostitute.

8 Because of this, I will howl and wail;
this is why I will go barefoot and naked,
Why I will scream like the jackals
and *screech* like the ostriches as if in mourning.

Eternal One: 9 For her wounds cannot be cured because *Samaria's transgression* has reached Judah.
It now has reached the gate of My people, even in Jerusalem.

This listing of 11 conquered Israelite cities begins with David's quote about Gath when he was lamenting the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:20).

10 Do not tell this in Gath. Do not weep even a little.*
In Beth-le-aphrah, wallow in the dust *as you mourn.*
11 Travel on, you who live in Shaphir, *no longer beautiful but* naked and ashamed.
You who live in Zaanan, do not come out *when the enemy approaches.*
Beth-ezel is weeping, "He is tearing you away from His foundations,"
and she won't be there to support her neighbors.
12 Those who live in Maroth wait anxiously for good *news;*
the Eternal sends disaster down to the gates of Jerusalem.

* 1:2 Hebrew manuscripts read, "them." * 1:3 Greek and Latin manuscripts omit, "to walk." * 1:10 Greek manuscripts read, "not in Acco."

13Harness your horses to the
chariots, you who live in *the*
stronghold called Lachish;
in you are the seeds of the sin of
My daughter Zion;
in you are the crimes of Israel.
14That is why you will pay a dowry to
Moresheth-gath
when Israel departs for exile.
The houses of Achzib will deceive
and disappoint the kings of
Israel.
15I will send a conqueror *again* to all
of you living in Mareshah,
and the glory of Israel, *her*
treasures and leaders, will
come to Adullam *for refuge*
as David once did.

The list of cities given here matches the path Sennacherib took when he marched against Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

16Cut off your hair and shave your heads.
Prepare yourselves for slavery
on account of the children whom
you pampered *and privileged.*
Make yourself as bald as an eagle,
for they have been removed from
you into exile.

2 *Beware, for* disaster is coming to
those who plan wickedness,
who *lie* on their beds plotting evil.
When morning shines *on them,* they
carry out their plans
simply because they have the power
to do so.
2They see fields they want and take them.
They see houses, and they grab
them up.
They persecute each landowner, taking
all that belongs to him—
including his freedom and his
children's inheritance.

Eternal One: 3Look at what I am doing:
I am preparing a calamity for
you people,
A yoke from which you will not be
able to free your necks.
You will not be able to walk with
your noses in the air
Because the times will be
disastrous *indeed.*

4On that day, you will be a subject of
parodies;
each of you *land stealers* will sing a
dirge and say,
"*Oh no!* We're completely ruined!
God has divided up my family's
inheritance.
And how has He taken it out of my hands?
He has given my land to the
conquerors."
5Because of this, you will have no
descendant
who can measure out your share in
the Eternal's community.

6*They say,*
"Don't rattle on like this,"
But those *same* people preach *falsehood*
themselves:
"Calamity is not coming *in our*
direction."
7Should it be said to the people of Jacob,
"Has the Spirit of Eternal lost His
patience *with us*?
Is this how He works?"

Eternal One: When I speak, don't good
things happen
to the ones who uprightly follow
My fair path?
8But recently My people became
their own enemy.
You strip the mantles off the
clothes
Of those just passing through, those
who thought themselves safe,
those who are opposed to war.
9You drive the women of My people
from the homes they love.
You steal My glory from their
young children.
10Get up and go! This is no place *for*
you to rest,
because when something is
contaminated *with evil,*
It destroys people *painfully and*
completely.
11If someone going on about nothing
of worth wanders by and says,
"I've come to preach to you of
whiskey and wine,"
Then these *selfish* people would
hire him
as their official speaker *just*
because they like his message.

12I will certainly gather you all
together, *people of* Jacob;
I will surely bring *you* together
with the survivors of Israel's
decimation.
I will gather them like sheep in a
fold,
and like a flock *trapped* in the
center of their pasture,

They will make a great noise, there
will be so many of them.
13Their leader breaks out first,
then all break through the gate
and escape.
Their king will show the way, and
the Eternal One will lead
them.

3 Listen to what I say, you leaders of
Jacob *who judge,*
you rulers of the people of Israel
who sit in the city gates.
Shouldn't you know what justice is?
2*Yet* you hate what is good and love evil;
you skin the people *alive* and tear the
meat from their bones.
3These *selfish judges* eat the flesh of my
people,
strip off their skin, break their bones
into splinters,
And chop them up like stew meat for the
kettle,
like meat for the pot.
4In that time *something dire will happen,*
and they will call on the Eternal,
but He will not answer them.
He will hide His face from them then
because they have acted so wickedly.

5This is my message for the *false* prophets
who have led my people so far from
the truth,
Who preach peace when someone pays
them with food
and declare war against those who
don't:
6"It will be a *dark* night, *too dark* for you
who lack vision,
and it will be darkness for you who
cannot divine."
The sun will go down on these *so-called*
prophets,
and the day will be black all around
them.
7The seers will be in disgrace,
and those who predict the future
ashamed.
They will keep their mouths shut
because there will be no word from
God.

8But that is not the case with me—I am
filled with power,
with the Spirit of the Eternal One,
with God's justice and might,
To accuse Jacob of his crimes
and *the daughter of* Israel of her
wrongdoing.

9Now listen closely you leaders of Jacob,
you rulers of the house of Israel
who hate what is *right and* just and
make the straight *path into a*
crooked *road*,
10Who build Zion with *innocent* blood
and Jerusalem with wrongdoing.
11Her leaders exchange justice for a bribe;
her priests teach, but for a price;
her prophets divine for money,
Yet they *have the gall to say as they* lean
on the Eternal,
"He is on our side! Nothing bad will
happen to us!"
12All of this is why Zion will be plowed *flat*
as a field,
Jerusalem will become a tumble of
rubble,
And the temple mountain will become
an *ordinary* high place in the
forest.

There really is no worse fate for Jerusalem than this: the fertile land, the grand architecture, and the temple to God will become a desert haunt for varmints and scavengers.

4 But in the last *hopeful* days that are
coming,
the temple mountain of the
Eternal One will tower over all
other mountains.
It will be raised above the hills, and
people will flow up it *like rivers.*
2The nations of the world will say, "Come,
let's go up, everyone,
to the mountain of the Eternal One,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
So He can teach us His way and we can
follow in His footsteps."
For God's law will march out of
Zion—the Eternal's word from
Jerusalem.
3He will judge between many people and
arbitrate disputes between strong
faraway nations;
they will hammer their swords into
plow blades, their spears into
pruning hooks.
One nation will not attack another,
and they will give up war training *and*
maneuvers.
4But they will each sit under their own
vines and fig trees,
and no one will make them afraid
again
Because the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies, has ordered it so.

5All people move ahead in the name of
their own gods, *whatever they are,*
but we move ahead in the name of
the Eternal,
Our True God, forever and ever.

► In the New Testament Jesus speaks of a kingdom where love, respect, and peace are the norms. It is clear that Micah, too, looks toward a future when there will be no war and neighbors will share their shade trees with no fear. A time without war and hostility between nations and neighbors can only be realized under the rule of the Prince of Peace.

Eternal One: 6In that day *of hope,* I will
gather the lame,
bring together all those who
have been driven away and
those whom I have injured.
7From those who were lame I will
create a remnant,
and from those who were cast
off I will create a strong
nation;
And the Eternal will reign over
them in Mount Zion
now and forevermore.
8And to you, the tower of the flock,
the hill of the daughter of
Zion,
your former authority will
return to you, the royal
authority of the daughter of
Jerusalem.

9Now, why do you cry aloud?
Don't you have a king in your midst?
Has your counselor vanished,
allowing pain to paralyze you as it
does a woman in labor?
10Writhe in pain and groan, daughter of
Zion,
like a woman about to give birth,
For now you must leave your city to
wander in the fields
on your way *back to slavery, this time*
in Babylon.
And from there the Eternal One will pay
your ransom and pluck you
from the hands of your enemies.

11Many nations have gathered to fight you,
saying,
"Let her be laid waste *before us*;
let's feast our eyes on *Mount* Zion!"
12But they don't know what the Eternal
One is thinking,
are not privy to His plans:
He has gathered them like sheaves on
the floor of a threshing house.

Eternal One: 13Come on in, and start
threshing *this grain,* daughter
of Zion;
I will make your horn like iron,
your hooves like bronze,
So that you will stomp many people
beneath them.

And they will dedicate what they have
stolen to the Eternal,
their wealth to the Lord of the
entire earth.

5 **Eternal One:** Now, muster your
troops O daughter.* You have
been besieged,
and they will strike the judge of
Israel on the cheek with a rod.

This difficult passage recalls the judges who ruled God's people in Canaan as it looks forward to the Redeemer from the insignificant town of Bethlehem.

2But you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
of the clans of Judah, are no
poor relation—
From your people will come a Ruler
who will be the shepherd of My
people, Israel,*
Whose origins date back to the
distant past,
to the ancient days.

3So God will abandon Israel
only until the now-laboring mother
gives birth,
And then those of His people who survive
will be gathered back together with
the rest of Israel.
4And he will stand and feed his flock in
the power of the Eternal One,
with the majesty of the name of the
Eternal, his True God.
And they will live in safety, for his
greatness will extend to the
farthest parts of the earth.

* 5:1 Greek manuscripts read, "Now, you are walled in." * 5:2 Matthew 2:6

5He will be our peace.
When the Assyrians invade us, set
foot inside our strong palaces,*
We will raise up *more than enough* to
conquer them—
seven shepherds and eight rulers
of men.

The "seven shepherds and eight rulers" represent the whole leadership of the people.

6They will rule over the country of
Assyria with the sword,
and the country of Nimrod at its
front gates.
He will save us from the Assyrians when
they invade our lands
and tread in our borders.
7-8Then what remains of Jacob will be like
a dew from the Eternal,
like showers on the grass, which are
beyond the control of humans.
He will be spread throughout many
peoples and many nations.
Like a lion among beasts of the
forest, a young lion among flocks
of sheep,
He tramples and tears as he goes; no one
will survive.
9You will have victory over *all* your
enemies,
and all who oppose you will be routed.

Eternal One: 10When that day comes,
I will rip your horses from
beneath you
and destroy your chariots *and*
weapons of war;
11I will rip the cities from your lands
and cast down all your
fortresses.
12I will tear *all* magic spells from your
hands
and overthrow your *magicians*
and fortunetellers.
13And I will tear down the images and
sacred pillars among you.
Never again will you worship
these gods that your own
hands have made.
14I will uproot the sacred poles* in
your communities
and tear down your towns.
15And with anger and great wrath,
I will execute My vengeance
against *all* the nations that
have disobeyed Me!

► This is the fourth time in Micah's prophecy that the city leaders and general population of Judah are called to "listen up" (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 3:9; 6:1). Each time the prophet has something very important to say to those in Judah.

6 Listen to what the Eternal is saying.
People of Israel, stand up and plead
your case to the mountains;
Let the hills hear what you have to say.
2Listen, *jury of* mountains, to the
complaint of the Eternal One;
listen, you enduring foundations of
the earth,
For He brings a charge against His
people and argues against Israel.

Eternal One: 3My people, what have I
done against you?
How have I made you tired *of*
Me? Answer Me!
4I brought you up out of the land of
Egypt, paid your ransom,
freed you from that place of
slavery, and sent Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam to lead
you.*
5O My people, remember how
King Balak of Moab plotted
against you,
how Balaam (Beor's son)
answered him, *refusing to*
*curse you?**
Everything happened between
Shittim and Gilgal
as you took possession of the
lands I promised you,
So that you might remember *all* the
saving acts of the Eternal.

Israel: 6What should I bring into the
presence of the Eternal One
to pay homage to the God Most
High?
Should I come into His presence
with burnt offerings,
with year-old calves *to sacrifice*?
7Would the Eternal be pleased by
thousands of *sacrificial*
rams,
by ten thousand *swollen* rivers of
sweet olive oil?

* 5:5 Greek manuscripts read, "on our land." * 5:14 Hebrew, *Asherim* * 6:4 Exodus 13–15 * 6:5 Numbers 22:5-6

Many Christians wonder what God wants from faithful followers. Does He want them to sacrifice everything for Him? Does He want them to keep strict codes of behavior—refuse to do this or always do that? People in the past and people today have all sorts of opinions about how the faithful should act; and in several other places in the Bible, all of the so-called laws, rules, regulations, and suggestions are boiled down to their simplest form: in order to make God happy, do what is right, love kindness, and live with compassion toward others; walk in right relation to the God of Abraham, and do so humbly. By doing these things, Micah says, God's followers will please Him and live happy lives. In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus similarly says people are to worship only one God; to love that God with heart, mind, body, and soul; and to love their neighbors as themselves.

Should I offer my oldest *son* for my
wrongdoing,
the child of my body to cover
the sins of my life?

8*No.* He has told you, mortals, what is
good *in His sight.*
What else does the Eternal ask of you
But to live justly and to love kindness
and to walk with your True God in
all humility?
9The voice of the Eternal cries out to the
city *of Jerusalem,*
and the wise fear Your name.

Eternal One: Listen, all of you gathered
there, (tribe and people):*
10Can I overlook the treasures of
wickedness
Stored away in the house of the
wicked,
the dishonest *scales and*
measures that I hate?
11Can I overlook *the one who uses*
crooked scales
and bags of dishonest weights *to*
cheat the innocent?
12Her rich are filled with violence, her
citizens speak lies,
and the words of their mouths
can never be trusted.
13That is why I will strike you down
with disease,*
destroy you because of your
wrongdoing.
14You will eat, but you will never be
satisfied;*
you will *always* feel the gnawing
pangs of hunger.
You will store away but never keep
safe;
what you have put aside I will
destroy with the sword.
15You will sow *grain* but never reap it;
you will plant olives but never
anoint yourself with *their*
sweet oil;
You will harvest vineyards *for juice*
but never drink the wine.
16For you have followed the ways of
Omri
and all the works of the
kingdom of Ahab,
And you have followed their paths
of wickedness.
That is why I can *justifiably*
decimate you.
Your citizens will be the subject of
satire and mockery,
and you will bear the scorn My
people deserve.*

From the descendants of Omri (his son Ahab, daughter-in-law Jezebel, and granddaughter Athaliah) come many of the sins of Israel.

7 **Israel:** I am filled with sadness, like
one who, after the grapes
have been gathered,
after all the summer fruit
has been picked, can find
nothing to eat,
Not a cluster of grapes, not even
one of those early figs I love.
2The faithful have disappeared from
the land, and no one honest
remains;
they are all alert for blood,
hunting their neighbors with
a net.
3The hands of those *who should*
know better are good at doing
evil:
the ruler and the judge ask for
bribes;

* 6:9 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 6:13 Other ancient manuscripts read, "I have begun to strike you down."
* 6:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 6:16 Greek manuscripts read, "the scorn of the nations."

The people in power merely
mention their deepest
desires,
and the ruler and judge make
sure they happen.
4The best of them is *as painful to*
deal with as a briar,
the most honest of them like a
hedge heavy with thorns.
So the day your watchmen have
awaited—
the day of your punishment—
has come.
Now you will be confused *and*
confounded.
5Do not trust your neighbor or rely
on a friend.
Do not tell your secrets even to
the spouse who shares your
bed,
6For the son insults the father, the
daughter rebels against the
mother,
and the daughter-in-law *rises up*
against the mother-in-law.
Your enemies can be found within
your own household.

7But as for me, I will look to the
Eternal One, and my hope is
in the True God
who will save me. My God will
hear me.
8Do not gloat at my fate, my enemy;
although I am down now, I will
rise up.
Although I am in darkness now, the
Eternal One will be my light.
9I must bear His anger because I
have sinned against Him
until He argues on my behalf
and rights all my wrongs.
He will bring me out into the light,
and then I will see His *saving*
justice.
10When my enemy sees *that God has*
rescued me,
then shame will wash over her
Because she sneered to me, "Where
is the Eternal your God?"
It will be my turn to watch
when she is trampled,
Walked on like mud in the street.

11*Israel,* that will be the day for building
your city walls;
that will be the day to expand your
national boundaries.
12In that day, people will come to you
from everywhere: from Assyria to
cities in Egypt,
From Egypt to the *Euphrates* River,
from sea to sea and from mountain
to mountain.
13The earth will become a desert because
those who live on it
will produce no fruit from their labors.

14*God,* with Your shepherd's staff lead Your
people *to pasture*;
lead the flock that belongs to You
And grazes alone in the forest
surrounded by garden lands.
Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead
as *they used to do,* long ago.
15I will show you* wonders
as you saw in the days when you
came out of Egypt;
16The nations will see and be ashamed,
despite all their might.
With their hands over their mouths
and ears they will hear nothing.
17They will lick dust like the snakes *of the*
earth crawling across the dirt.
They will creep out of their holes,
shivering *in terror because of You.*
They turn to the Eternal, our True God,
filled with dread,
and they stand in awe of You.

18Is there any other God like You, who
forgives evil
and passes over the transgressions
done by Yours who remain?
He does not hold onto His anger forever
because He delights in showing love
and kindness.
19He will take pity on us again, will tread
our wrongdoing underfoot.
He will cast all our sins down to the
bottom of the sea.

20Show Your faithfulness to Jacob and
show Your faithful love to
Abraham
As You swore to our ancestors in
the days long ago.

* 7:15 Hebrew manuscripts read, "him."

NAHUM

The destruction of Nineveh

The message of Nahum, a prophet from Elkosh

When considering the character of God, Nahum's vision describes both His great patience and His fiery vengeance. Nahum, whose Semitic name means "comforted," depicts Israel's God as the Divine Warrior fighting oppressors on Israel's behalf during a time of international turmoil. These oracles, likely delivered between the Assyrian conquest of Thebes in 663 B.C. and the Babylonian-Median conquest of Nineveh in 612 B.C., offer hope to the Israelites who have been trampled by the warring empires around them. To them Nahum's graphic and disturbing details of the violent fall of Assyria are a comforting picture of impending freedom. For a long time God has used the Assyrians to punish His people and the surrounding nations for their wickedness, but soon they will watch as He remembers His covenant and avenges His own.

Against the backdrop of a world filled with unimaginable cruelty, Nahum's bloody portrayal emphasizes God's compassion. A God who is just and compassionate cannot simply stand by and ignore the horrors of evil, violence, deceit, and greed. He must deal with them decisively in order to set the world right and repair its raging injustice; but even as God is intolerant of violence and cruelty (1:2), He is slow to anger (1:3). Furthermore, the point of God's judgment is never merely to punish; it is always to bring about repentance and change which will lead to better lives and a better world. For Nahum the God of Israel is not vindictive; rather, He is jealous for the unswerving devotion and honest worship of all the nations. He desires for people to know Him through His great love and mercy rather than through His mighty wrath.

For several generations Nineveh inspired fear among the nations, but her greatness was short-lived. Internal strife and external threats from two of her vassals—the Babylonians and the Medes—resulted in the fall of Asshur in 614 B.C. and eventually Nineveh two years later. Nineveh must have seemed impregnable to her citizens and her enemies. Her walls were, in places, over 50 feet high—massive by ancient standards—and wide enough for chariots to be driven on top of them. Large towers flanked the city's colossal gates and offered any guest or potential foe an imposing image of a city that could not be taken. But together, the Babylonians, Medes, and their allies attacked the city and razed it to the ground; they massacred a large number of Nineveh's citizens and deported the survivors. In the end the people of Nineveh were treated by their enemies the same way Nineveh had treated her victims. Nahum's prophecy ends on a triumphant chord for those who love justice and hate oppression. God will not let it stand.

1 This records the vision which burdened *a man named* Nahum, who came from *the town of* Elkosh. The vision is *a message from God pronouncing what is coming to the city* of Nineveh, *the capital of the Assyrian Empire.*

2 The Eternal One won't tolerate anything that distracts from Him
and will avenge *and settle the score on behalf of His covenant people.*
The Eternal will serve up justice when His anger *finally overflows.*
He brings justice to those who oppose Him
And sustains His fury toward those who work against Him.
3 The Eternal's anger builds slowly, but His power is great.
He will not allow the guilty to go free.
His way is in fierce winds and storms;
the clouds are dust beneath His feet.
4 He chastises the oceans, and they all dry up;
He makes the *rushing* rivers run dry too.
The lush lands of Bashan and Carmel wither,
and the *beautiful* flowers of Lebanon shrivel.
5 In response to Him, mountains quake
and *mudslides flow down* melting hillsides.
The planet and all who live on it are overwhelmed in His presence.
6 Who can stand up when His fury *finally overflows*?
Who can hold up under the heat of His anger?
His fury flows out like fire,
strong enough to shatter even the rocks.
7 The Eternal One is good,
a safe shelter in times of trouble.
He cares for those who search for protection in Him.
8 But with an overwhelming flood,
He will make a complete end to his enemies.
He will chase His foes into oblivion.

► This divine appearance, often called a theophany, is a vivid portrayal not only of the Lord's characteristics but also of His activity on behalf of Israel. Descriptions of fantastic weather patterns demonstrate both the mysterious elusiveness and the mighty grandeur of God. Similar to the story related in Job 38, God visits the afflicted and impoverished through these images, and that impressive power He displays in His storms benefits the oppressed. Despite unspeakable horrors the Assyrians committed against the Israelites, His people still understand that their God is good.

9 Futile are the plots you devise against the Eternal One, *Nineveh,*
because He will put a stop to them.
Evil will not have a second chance to rise up.
10 They are tangled up in the thorns *of their own evil ways,*
inebriated by their own excesses.
They are consumed *by their own evil,* like dried grass *in a fire.**
11 It was one of your own, *Nineveh,* who hatched evil plots against the Eternal
and encouraged *others toward* wickedness.*

Eternal One *(to His people)***:** 12 Although their numbers are countless and they have strong *allies,*
they will be stopped and *their time as your oppressor* will pass away.
Although I have brought trouble down on you, *people of Judah,*
I will bring trouble to you no more.
13 Now I will break their yoke *of slavery and death* from your shoulders
and tear their chains *of religious and political oppression* away from you.

Judgment is pronounced against the King of Assyria, his worthless gods, and his worthless life.

14 The Eternal has sent this command about you, *king of Nineveh.*

Eternal One: You will have no descendants left to carry on your name.

* 1:10 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 1:11 Hebrew, *Belial*

I will destroy the things you
have carved and cast *with*
your own hands,
Idols you have made to fill the
temples of your gods.
I will *personally* prepare your
grave because you are totally
despicable!

15Look, here comes a runner across the
mountains bringing good news,
announcing peace!
Celebrate your festivals, *people of*
Judah, and keep the promises you
made.
Those wicked armies* *of Nineveh* will
never invade you again.
He is utterly cut off.

2 *Nineveh,* an attacker is moving in to
scatter you.
You had better guard your fortress,
Keep watch *up and down* your streets,
strap your *war* belt around your waist,
And gather all the strength you can.
2The Eternal One will restore all the glory
given to Jacob;
the new nation will resemble the
splendor of Israel *in its day,*
Although destroyers destroyed everything,
even decimating every branch *of*
Jacob's family tree.

3Here comes your attacker's best warriors
with *gleaming* red shields;
the soldiers are in scarlet armor.
Chariots *gleam and* flash like fire with
their approach.
They were *carefully* made ready *for*
battle.
They taunt you by waving *strong* spears
*before you.**
4See the chariots race *each other* up and
down your streets,
rushing back and forth through the
city.
They look like *flaming* torches.
They dart like lightning bolts.
5Your king remembers his specially-trained
forces,
but they *can't get it together,*
stumbling as they march.
They run to *protect* the city wall
and try to shield it *from the attackers.*
Their resistance fails.

Nineveh has hundreds of towers along her walls, some up to 200 feet in height, but before the judgment of God they will dissolve.

6The *city* gates at the rivers are thrown
wide open,
and the palace collapses *in the*
resulting flood.
7A decree is set and goes out: Nineveh
will be ransacked.
She is stripped and will be carried far
away *from home.*
You can hear the young girls pounding
their *breaking* hearts
and moaning like *terrified* doves.
8Nineveh was a *shimmering* pool of water,
full to the brim in the days *of her*
glory,
but look, her soldiers are draining
away.
"Stop! Stop!" *the Assyrian commanders*
shout,
but no one turns back. *The*
destruction continues.
9*The attacker commands,* "Take all the
silver;
take all the gold!
The supply is endless.
After all, their treasury is full of *stolen*
wealth."
10*Every corner of* the city is turned upside
down, ransacked, stripped bare.
She will lose all hope; *her* knees give
way;
she will shake with fear and turn
white *as a sheet.*

11Where now is *Nineveh's famous and*
deadly lion's den?
The place where they nourish their
young lions *into killing machines*?
The place where the lion and the lioness
go, along with their cubs, *to feed*
on victims?
The place where they had nothing
to fear?
12The lion *always* kills enough for his cubs
and strangles the prey for his mate,
Filling up the lair with *the blood and*
bones and flesh of its kill
and his dens with the fallen prey.

Eternal One: 13I stand against you,
Nineveh!
I will *command My heavenly*
army to burn up your chariots
till the smoke rises up
And to consume your young lions
with the sword.
I will leave nothing in the land
to sustain you.
The voice of your messengers will
never again be heard.

* 1:15 Hebrew, *Belial* * 2:3 Other manuscripts read, "the horsemen rush back and forth."

3 Hopelessness and despair,
that's the destiny of the city that
shed so much blood,
That perfected its use of lies,
that overflows with stolen treasures,
Leaving behind endless victims.
2The *sharp* cracking of the whip *in the air*;
clattering of wheels *on the streets*;
Galloping horse hooves;
clanging, *banging* chariots;
3Charging cavalry troops;
flashing swords and gleaming spears;
Armies of casualties, piles of dead
bodies—too many to count—
so many you can't walk without
stumbling over them!
4This is all because you tempted and
lured the nations like a harlot,
dangling the allure *of immorality*.
You were a sorceress *promising control of*
the spiritual world,
enslaving nations to lives of
immorality and families to
sorcery.

Nineveh is laid waste as God watches.

Eternal One: 5Look at Me and My
armies.
I stand against you, *Nineveh!*
I will *treat you like the harlot you*
are, lifting your dress over
your face—
peeling back your outward façade
And exposing *your true condition,*
your nakedness *underneath.*
You will be humiliated *and*
ashamed in front of the
world.
6I'll throw *all your own* filth on you.
I'll treat you with contempt and
make a *humiliating* public
display of you.
7Then the whole world will turn its
back on you and flee, saying,
"Poor, *pitiful* Nineveh—you are
totally ruined."
Is there anyone who will
sympathize with you?
Where will I find anyone to
comfort you?

► Nahum expresses God's sentiment against Nineveh, and it is not attractive! The prophet uses graphic images to show how angry God truly is. If showing the nakedness of the Assyrian people to the nations is not demoralizing enough, then the shame of God throwing excrement at His enemies is unmistakable. The indignity of being stripped naked and covered in filth is the fullest expression of God's rejection. While these images are disturbing, they are also typical of how powerful enemies, such as the armies of Nineveh, have treated their victims. Now the table is turned; the victor is now the victim. There is no one to comfort the Assyrian people: they are without a prophet; they are without a poet; they are without hope.

8Are you any stronger than *the city of*
Thebes* *in its glory days*?
Sitting at the edge of the Nile, its waters
created a moat *of protection on*
one side of her.
The *Red* Sea was a perfect defense
against her eastern enemies,
As good as the protection of a wall.
9*The bounty of the regions of* Cush and
Egypt supported her, and
the areas of Put and Libya were her*
strong allies.
10Yet she was taken captive and exiled.
Her babies were broken to pieces at
the crossroads of every street.
They tossed lots *into a bag and drew out*
names to establish control of her
honored men;
all her best and brightest were put
in chains.
11And just like them, you will go into hiding,
getting drunk *to escape your terror,*
searching for some place to hide
from your enemies.
12But those strongholds, *Nineveh,* are *easy*
pickings,
like figs on a tree when they first
become ripe.
Just shake the tree,
and figs fall into your open mouth.
13Look at your *fierce* troops surrounding
you *now.*
They cower like untrained women, *not*
battle-hardened warriors.
The gates that should have protected
your land
instead are standing wide open.

* 3:8 Hebrew, *No-amon* * 3:9 Hebrew manuscripts read, "your."

Fire burns through the bars; your
enemies stroll right in.

14 Draw up *plenty of* water *to put out the*
fires,
and prepare, for *your enemy will begin*
a siege.
Get busy working the clay and mud to
make extra bricks;
you'll need them to repair holes
punched in your walls.
15 The *attackers'* fire will consume you.
Their swords will cut you down,
And like grasshoppers *attacking a field*
of grain,
they will *totally* consume you.
Like grasshoppers, multiply yourselves;
like locusts, make your numbers
countless.
16 You brought so many merchants
till they are more numerous than the
stars in the skies.
Like grasshoppers, they strip *sustenance*
from the land,
only to fly away *before justice can be*
sought.

17 Your courtiers are like locusts;
your city officials like swarms of
locusts
Who *become chilled* against the wall on
a cold day.
When the sun comes up *and they are*
warmed,
They fly away, *abandoning you.*
Searching, no one can find them.
18 O king of Assyria, your shepherds *felt*
safe enough to sleep *in the fields.*
Your leaders slept *soundly in the city.*
When judgment comes, your people are
scattered *like lost sheep,*
far and wide among the mountains.
There is no leader left to rally them
together.
19 Nothing *and no one* can heal your
wound.
Your *city's* wounds are fatal; *you*
cannot survive.
Everyone who hears the news *of your*
destruction
claps his hands *in celebration,*
Because who among them has not felt
your *legendary and* endless cruelty?

HABAKKUK

01 02 03 04 05 06

A crisis of faith in light of Judah's impending destruction

The message of Habakkuk, a prophet

Habakkuk is a philosophical prophet, and his message is embedded in a dialogue he has with God over the impending destruction of Judah at the hands of a nation with a reputation for power, cruelty, and wickedness. Habakkuk questions God for sitting by and doing nothing as injustice and violence run rampant. Even though God's people cry out for help, the heavens seem strangely silent. Like Job, the prophet challenges God boldly and then awaits God's response. Ultimately God does respond, only to indicate that He will punish sin wherever it is found—even among His people—using whatever means He desires. The prophet eventually accepts that God's ways cannot be completely understood by His people, and he is encouraged to learn that God intends to destroy the wicked Chaldeans even as He pledges to restore Judah's fortunes. Habakkuk even acknowledges this in a prayer, a psalm-like hymn celebrating God's descent to the earth to fight for His people against rival nations.

Habakkuk's questions are supremely relevant to contemporary culture. Why do arrogant and predatory people prosper while benevolent and humble people are victimized by a violent, materialistic society? Why do greedy businessmen and politicians fleece the underprivileged, rarely coming to justice? Why do powerful nations oppress smaller nations for the sake of enslaving people and harvesting natural resources? Answers to questions like these do not come easily. In fact, answers may never come. Regardless, Habakkuk soon trusts that God's covenant people will not only survive, but they will thrive as they remain faithful to the Eternal One who comes to redeem and restore them (2:4; 3:17-19).

In some ways, the redemptive activity of the church addresses Habakkuk's questions. When the followers of Jesus clothe the naked and feed the hungry, they are joining God in His kingdom work to repair the world. When they take in widows and orphans and speak out against national and personal evils, they are meeting evil head-on under His gentle reign. When they sell their possessions or live among human traffickers in order to rescue sex slaves, they are partners with God in denouncing these vile acts and putting things right. Ultimately, God will put an end to evil and all its manifestations; until then, the church has plenty to do.

1 This is the vision with which the prophet Habakkuk was burdened.

2How long must I cry, O Eternal One,
and get no answer from You?
Even when I yell to You, "Violence *is all around*!"
You do nothing to save *those in distress*.
3Why do You force me to see these atrocities?
Why do You make me watch *such* wickedness?
Disaster and violence, conflict and controversy are raging all around me.
4Your law is powerless *to stop this*;
injustice prevails.
The depraved surround the innocent,
and justice is perverted.

Eternal One: 5Take a look at the nations and watch *what happens*!
You will be shocked and amazed.
For in your days, I am doing a work,
a work you will never believe
even if someone tells you *plainly*!*
6Look! I am *provoking and* raising up the bitter and thieving *Babylonian warriors* from Chaldea;
they are moving out across the earth
And seizing others' homes *and property in their path.*

Chaldea is an area along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southernmost Babylon.

7That nation is terrifying *people,* is feared *by everyone.*
It makes the rules and serves only its own interests.
8Babylonia's horses run faster than leopards,
are fiercer than wolves when the sun goes down.
Its horsemen rush ahead *with deadly force,* galloping great distances;
the troops swoop down like eagles ready to devour,
9And Babylonia *keeps on* coming, *hungry* for violence.
Hordes of *determined* faces are on the move *like a hot* east *wind,*
Scooping up captives like sand.
10Their leader mocks kings and ridicules those in authority.
He laughs at every fortress
And builds ramps of dirt *against their walls* to capture it.
11He blows through like the wind and then presses on *to the next attack.*
For their king, his god is his strength, but he will be held responsible.

12Have You not existed from ancient times, O Eternal One, my holy God?
Surely You do not *plan* for us to die.
You, O Eternal One, have made Babylonia Your tool for judgment.
You, O Rock, have established that king as *Your instrument of* correction.
13Your eyes are too pure to even look at evil.
You cannot turn *Your face* toward injustice.
So why do You *stand by and* watch those who act treacherously?
Why do You say *and do* nothing
When the wicked swallows up one who is more in the right than he is?
14You made humans like fish in the sea,
like creatures under no *rule or* authority.

The Chaldeans were known for their fishing, in addition to their brutality.

15But the Babylonian yanks up his enemies with a hook,
dragging them away with his net.
Gathering them up like fish in a net,
the king shrieks and shouts for joy at his catch.
16So he offers a sacrifice to his net *that has made him rich*;
the smoke of his sacrifices rises for his fishing net *that has brought him success*;
Because of it, his table is full and his belly is fat.
17Will he empty *and fill* his net *without end*?
Will he continue to murder the people of the world without pity?

2 I will take my place at the watchtower.
I will stand at my post *and watch.*
I will watch and see what He says to me.
I need to think about how I should respond to Him
When He gets back to me with His answer.

* 1:5 Acts 13:41

Eternal One *(to Habakkuk)*: 2Write
down this vision.
Write it clearly on tablets, so
that anyone who reads it
may run.
3For the vision points ahead to a
time I have appointed;
it testifies regarding the end,
and it will not lie.
Even if there is a delay, wait for it.
It is coming and will come
without delay.*

4*So I wrote,* "Look how pompous he is!
Something is not right in his soul; he
is not honest and just.
But the righteous one will live by his
faithfulness."*

5Indeed, wine betrays the proud man
who is always restless.
He has a big appetite; it is like the
deep, dark pit of the dead.
Like death, he is never satisfied.
He gathers all the nations to himself
and collects all the people for his
own *purposes*.

6Will not all these *nations* raise up their
litany of insults?
Will they not provoke him with their
taunts and mockery, saying,
"Woe to him who hoards what is not his!
How long can he profit from
extortion *and debt*?"
7Will not your creditors suddenly rise up
against you?
One day they will wake up *and will
have had enough.*
Indeed, you will be their spoil!
8*Why?* Because you have plundered many
nations,
now all who remain will *come and*
plunder you—
Because you have made bloody and
violent raids over the earth
and *ransacked* many peoples and
their villages.

9Woe to him who builds his house on
such evil profits,
who puts his nest up high, *safe for
the future,* safe from disaster!
10*You don't realize it, but* by cutting down
so many peoples,
you have brought shame on your
house;
You have sinned against your own soul.
11For the stone in the wall will cry out
against you;
the wooden rafter* will answer *from
the ceiling*.

12Woe to him who builds a city on
bloodshed
and who establishes a town by
injustice!
13Look! Is it not because of the Eternal, the
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
that all the people work for is
consumed in fire
And that all the nations produce comes
to nothing?
14For as the waters cover the sea,
the whole earth will be filled with the
knowledge
That the Eternal is glorious *and powerful.*

15Woe to you who gives his neighbors a
drink,
who keeps filling their cup with your
anger *and malice*
To intoxicate them so you can *uncover
their shame*
and look at their nakedness!
16Instead of honor, you are going to have
your fill of shame.
Now drink up and expose your own
uncircumcised nakedness, *your
lack of God's mark.*
The cup in the Eternal's right hand will
come around to you,
and disgrace will eclipse your *current*
glory.
17For the violence done against Lebanon
will *now* overtake you;
the terror you showed the animals *in
turn will terrorize you.*
Because you shed blood and wrought
violence in the earth,
you have destroyed cities and all their
inhabitants.

18What use is an idol shaped by its maker?
It is nothing but an image cast in
metal; it teaches deception.
For a *foolish* idol-maker puts faith in his
own creation,
a god that cannot speak.
19Woe to him who says to *a block of* wood,
"Wake up!"
or to a silent stone, "Arise!"
Are *inanimate* objects your teachers?
Look, it may be covered in gold and
silver,
But there is no breath *of life* inside.

* 2:3 Hebrews 10:37 * 2:4 Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 * 2:11 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

20But the Eternal One is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth keep silent in His presence.

3 This is the prayer that Habakkuk the prophet sang 2to the Eternal One.

► When Habakkuk looks around him, it seems the good suffer and the wicked prosper. The Babylonian Empire is threatening to destroy Judah, the Egyptian armies have abandoned their treaty with Jerusalem, and within Judah some of God's own people are abandoning Him for personal gain. But when he asks God why the good suffer, God explains that in the long run, they don't. God is in control of all of creation, and only He can see how current circumstances fit into His greater plan. With that knowledge, Habakkuk now praises God for answering the prophet's questions, for being in control, and for eventually vindicating His faithful followers.

I have heard the reports about You,
and I am in awe when I consider all You have done.
O Eternal One, revive Your work in our lifetime;
reveal it among us in our times.
As You unleash *Your* wrath, remember *Your* compassion.

3God is on the move from Teman *in the south*;
the Holy One *is on His way* from Mount Paran.

[pause]*

His splendor overtakes the skies;
His praise fills *every corner of* the earth.
4His radiance is like a bright light, rays stream down from His hand,
and there His power is hidden.
5Pestilence marches before Him;
plagues follow in His steps.
6He stands *still* and surveys the earth;
He looks their way, and the nations jump *in fear*.
Indeed, the eternal mountains crumble.
The ancient hills *are humbled and* bow down.
The paths He carved will last forever.
7I see the tents of Cushan under attack *by evil forces*.
The tent curtains of Midian shake *throughout* that land.

8Was Your rage directed at the rivers, O Eternal One?
Or Your anger at the rivers?
Or Your fury at the seas?
Is this why You drove your horses, Your chariots of deliverance?
9Your bow was prepared *for battle*.
Your arrows waited for Your command.

[pause]

You split the earth with rivers.
10The mountains saw You and trembled; heavy rains passed through.
The deep made its voice heard; it lifted its hands high.
11The sun and the moon remained in their homes *in the sky*.
At the flash of Your arrows, they go out;
At the gleam of Your spear, *they go away*.
12In fury You marched across the earth.
In anger You trampled the nations.
13You went out to rescue Your people, to rescue Your anointed one.
You shattered the head of the wicked empire;
You laid him bare from thigh to neck.

[pause]

14Their warriors rushed in to scatter us, thrilled to consume their poor victims in secret,
But You *turned their weapons against them*
and pierced the heads of their warriors with their own arrows.*
15You marched on the sea with Your horses,
stirring up raging waters *and overwhelming waves*.

This victory poem is not unlike Exodus 15, the celebration of the Eternal's victory over Egypt and the Red Sea.

* 3:3 Literally, selah; likely a musical direction from a Hebrew root meaning "to lift up." * 3:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

16 I listened and *began to feel sick with fear*;
my insides churned.
My lips quivered at the sound.
Decay crept into my bones;
I stood there shaking.
Now I wait quietly for the day of distress;
I sit and wait for the time when
disaster strikes those who
attacked my people.
17 Even if the fig tree does not blossom
and there are no grapes on the vines,
If the olive trees fail to give fruit
and the fields produce no food,
If the flocks die *far* from the fold
and there are no cattle in the
stalls;
18 Then I will *still* rejoice in the Eternal!
I will rejoice in the God who
saves me!
19 The Eternal Lord is my strength!
He has made my feet like the feet of
a deer;
He allows me to walk on high places.

For the worship leader—a *song*
accompanied by strings.

ZEPHANIAH

The day of the Eternal One is near

The message of Zephaniah, a prophet from Jerusalem

Zephaniah is a contemporary of Nahum, living and prophesying in Jerusalem during the seventh century B.C. His name means "the Eternal One has hidden" or "protected," and this is an appropriate moniker because the message he delivers to the people of Judah promises that those who seek God and carry out His teachings may be hidden or protected from the Lord's coming judgment of the nations.

The prophet indicates that he received God's message during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah came to the throne at the tender age of eight, and in less than a decade, the young king turned to God and instigated a series of reforms that may be either the impetus for or result of Zephaniah's preaching. Unlike his wicked grandfather and father, Kings Manasseh and Amon, Josiah rejected foreign gods and destroyed their shrines and temples as far as his royal arm could reach. He decided that Jerusalem should be the one place to worship the one True God. As Solomon's temple was being repaired after years of neglect, a priest named Hilkiah found a copy of the book of the law. When the king heard it read, he realized God's judgment was about to fall on Judah since her people had not followed His ways. Josiah mourned and petitioned God for mercy, and God responded by promising to let the king live out his days and die before disaster falls on Judah and her citizens (2 Chronicles 34).

The themes of judgment and restoration dominate Zephaniah's prophecy. Even God's people in Jerusalem and Judah will not escape the day of the Lord's judgment because they have bowed down to idols and embraced violence and injustice. Judah's neighbors on every side will also experience God's fury for how they treated His people. Indeed the whole earth will see punishment and desolation, but calamity is not to be the last word. The prophet calls God's faithful to turn to Him in repentance and seek His justice. If they do, God's salvation will follow. He will reverse their shame and restore their fortunes. He will defeat their enemies and remove their fears. When that day comes and God makes everything right, Jerusalem will not be able to contain the joy of her people.

1 The Eternal One had a message *for the whole world,* and He gave it to *a man named* Zephaniah when Josiah (Amon's son) was the king of Judah. Zephaniah's father was Cushi, the son of Gedaliah (Amariah's son and a descendant of *a commoner named* Hezekiah).

Eternal One: 2-3I am going to wipe the face of the earth clean of every *living* thing.
I will wipe away both people and animals;
Even the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea will be swept away.
Rubble and ruin *will be all that is left* with the wicked*
When I cut off humanity from the face of the earth.
4I will use My *powerful* hand to crush *the people of* Judah
and those who make Jerusalem their home.
I will remove from this place every *reminder and* remainder of *false divine* masters;*
the names of those pagan priests *will be forgotten* along with *My* priests.
5*I will use My power against those who worship creation—*
those who bow down on their roofs before the multitude *of stars* in heaven—
And against those who bow down and pledge allegiance
to both the Eternal One and *false gods such as* Milcom, *god of the Ammonites.*
6*I will use My power against* those who used to *worship* the Eternal One
but turned their backs and no longer follow Me.
They don't look to Me *anymore* for help and guidance.

7Keep quiet now! *You are standing* before the Eternal Lord
because the day of the Eternal One is near;
His judgment is coming. He has prepared the sacrifice,
and He has chosen His guests *with care.*
8On the day of the Eternal's sacrifice,
this will happen *just as He describes*:

Eternal One: I will punish the rulers *of Judah*
and those born to royalty
And those so enamored with foreign *ways*
that they don't act or dress *like My people anymore.*
9On that day, I will punish those who jump temple thresholds *fearing pagan demons,*
those who exchange true religion for silly superstition,
And those who use violence and betrayal *to steal from others*
in order to make *themselves and* their king rich.

10On that day, you will hear cries *from all over the city of Jerusalem—*
first a cry *for help* from the fish gate *on the north side of the city,*
Then a wailing cry from the *newly-built* Second Quarter.
Then crash! *Stones are falling, breaking;*
Sounds of destruction are coming from the *suburban* hills.
11Cry out, those of you living in the bottom of *Jerusalem's southern* hollow,
because I will stop all the *traveling* merchants.
Everyone *with pockets* full of money will be cut off.
12On that day, I will *personally* search and illumine *every dark corner of* Jerusalem.
I will wipe out everyone who has numbed his senses with the dregs *of his own wine*
And says, "The Eternal will do nothing *in our lives,*
neither helping us nor hurting us."
13*But they are wrong.* Everything they value will be taken away.
Their houses will be destroyed.
They will build new houses and never have a chance to move in.
They will plant vineyards and never enjoy *a sip of their own* wine.

14*I'm warning you,* this *day of judgment* is right around the corner.
The great *and terrible* day of the Eternal One is coming on you very quickly.

* 1:2-3 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 1:4 Hebrew, *baal*

Listen, *here it comes,* the day of the Eternal
One, and it will be very bitter!
Even your strongest and bravest will
break down and cry out.*

15On that day, *you will see what happens*
when God is furious.
You will be overwhelmed with all
the trouble and pain—total
destruction.
You will watch the sky fill with the thick
clouds and gloomy darkness.
16*You will hear* the trumpet blast and
battle cry
as He moves against the city that day.
You were so sure it was fortified *against*
attack with its *thick walls and*
high towers,
yet they will surely fall.

Eternal One: 17I will bring distress on
all humanity,
and they will stumble around
like the blind.

Why? Because they have sinned *time and*
again against the Eternal.
Their lifeblood will be poured out
like ash *of a burnt offering.*
Their bodies will be discarded like
excrement.

18Don't think any amount of money can
save them
from the terrible anger of the Eternal
when that day arrives.
He will consume the whole earth in His
fiery jealousy,
for He is going to expedite the
annihilation of every living thing
on the earth.

2 You shameless bunch of people,
gather together *now and pray.*
2*Do it while there is still time,* before all
these *terrible* things *happen.*
I'm warning you they are beginning
to happen;
The day is blown away like chaff. *God*
will not stand by.
Do it before the terrible Eternal's
anger comes down on your head.
Do it soon before the *appointed* time when
His anger rains down over you.
3Seek the Eternal. *Only He can save you,*
Judah.
Call out to Him, all who realize their
lowly places on the earth,
All who *are trying to* live by His teaching.
Pursue what is just and chase after
true humility.
Maybe, *just maybe,* the Eternal will hide
and protect you
from what will happen on that *terrible*
day when His anger is unleashed.

► During the early seventh century B.C., Judah is a tiny nation controlled by the Assyrian Empire and bullied by her neighbors. Under former Kings Manasseh and Amon, Judah lost all international power and fell into such hedonism that prophets such as Zephaniah are forced to hide themselves. No one in Judah is safe as Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Egypt (ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty), and Assyria continue seizing land God promised to the Israelites centuries earlier (Genesis 15:18-21). God has frequently used those foreign nations to discipline His children; but they, too, worship other gods and have overstepped the boundaries He set for them. The destruction of these foreign oppressors promises Judah not only revenge but the restoration of the inheritance promised to her people so long ago.

4As for *the Philistine cities off to the west—*
Gaza will be deserted,
Ashkelon will be left in *ashes and* ruins,
Ashdod will be scattered *to the winds* at
noon,
and Ekron will be pulled up by its roots.
5Too bad for their citizens who live along
the seacoast,
those people who migrated from
Crete;*
This message from the Eternal One is for
you *too.*

Eternal One: O Canaan, land of the
Philistines,
I will destroy you and wipe you
from the face of the earth.

6Their *valuable* coastlands will become
pastures *for our sheep,*
meadows* for our shepherds, and
pens for our flocks.

* 1:14 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 2:5 Hebrew, *Cherethites* * 2:6 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

7Their land will be given to
whomever remain from the people
of Judah.
During the day, they will eat *the fruit* of
the land.
In the evening, they will go into the
houses *left* in Ashkelon to sleep.
You see, the Eternal their God will
always care for the faithful
and will return their prosperity *to
them.*

► For hundreds of years the Philistines have lived along the coast and taken great joy in attacking settlements occupied by God's people in the eastern hills. The archenemies of Israel, they are an advanced seafaring culture that devastates cities, uproots crops, and drives the Lord's servants far from their homes. But God has seen their actions, and fortunes will soon be reversed.

Eternal One: 8As for Moab and Ammon
off to the east,
I have heard them taunting and
mocking My people.
I know they have expanded their
borders *into Judah's land.*
9As I, the Eternal, Commander of
heavenly armies and God of
Israel, live
I will make Moab like Sodom
and the Ammonites like *the
people of* Gomorrah.*
Nothing will be left there but
thorny plants and barren
ground.
They will become totally
desolate salt pits; not a thing
will ever thrive there again.
The remnant of My people will take
whatever they want from
them;
the survivors of My nation
will inherit what I once
designated to Moab and
Ammon.

10Shame will be payback for their *arrogance and* pride, because they taunted and belittled those who are faithful to the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. 11And the Eternal will strike terror in their hearts because He will starve out all their *so-called* gods *from the face* of the earth. And so all the different people who live along the coasts will bow low before Him; everyone *will worship Him* from where he lives.

Eternal One: 12As for you, Ethiopia *to the south,* you will die by My sword.

Even the great Assyria, once God's chosen instrument to punish His people, will not escape the Lord's judgment.

13God will stretch His hand over Assyria in
the north and wage war against
her.
Their prized city Nineveh will be left in
ruins.
Fertile land will give way to thirsty
desert. *Nothing will thrive there.*
14Cattle and sheep will sleep in her *streets*;
wild beasts *will roam through the
rubble.*
*Birds that fly and animals that burrow,
such as* the *scavenger* pelican
and hedgehog, will live atop each
column.
Birds will *roost and* sing in the *broken*
window sills.
Wrecked and ruined are the thresholds
to the pagan temples,
for God has exposed their beautiful
cedar woodwork *to the elements.*
15Nineveh is the boastful city
that bragged of her greatness and
security.
She said in her heart,
"I am *so amazing* that no other can
compare."
Now she is totally deserted
and animals live in her *streets*!
Everyone who passes her now will hiss
and taunt
and make vulgar gestures.

3 Disaster is coming to the *city of*
rebels,
to Jerusalem, the now defiled city
of oppression.
2That city refused to listen to anyone.
She would not take advice.
She didn't believe in the Eternal One
anymore.
She didn't want a close relationship
with her God.

* 2:9 Genesis 19:1-28

3 Her rulers *remind me of* roaring lions,
out for the kill instead of protecting her people.
Her judges are *a pack of* wolves *on the prowl* at night,
Consuming what they are after
until not one bone is left *to chew on*
the next morning.
4 Her prophets, *whom the people should look to for the truth,*
are irresponsible and *double-crossing,*
deceitful men.
Her priests make vile holy places and do violence to God's teaching.

God entrusts prophets and priests to care for His people. Instead of teaching the people God's truth, they ignore the law and prey on the ignorant and the defenseless.

5 *Despite all this,* the Eternal One is *right there* in her midst;
nothing He does is wrong.
Every morning He delivers His judgment;
He illuminates the right way to live.
Though, *like the sun,* He never fails *to appear,*
it's amazing that the lawbreakers
aren't ashamed *of their actions.*

Eternal One: 6 I have totally destroyed *the other* nations.
I crumbled their high towers *to the ground.*
I emptied their streets, leaving no one to travel them.
There is not one person, *not one animal,* no one in their decimated cities.
7 I said *to Myself,* "Surely My people will honor Me.
Surely they will listen to Me
So *they can* save *themselves and* their city
from all *I warned them about and* appointed for their benefit."
But *no,* they were even more eager to keep doing all the wrong things.

8 *To My remaining faithful,* I say wait *and watch* for Me
because on that day, *the nations will be called into court.*
I will rise up *against them* as *My* plunder and declare My decision:
I will call the nations and their rulers together
And pour out My hot anger and frustration on them.
All of it will be spent, for the whole earth will be burned up in My fiery jealousy.
9 And then I will transform the words spoken by the nations to pure words,
and the people will finally hear My truth.
Then all the people will be able to pray to *and serve* the Eternal One,
standing together as *part of* the same *people.*
10 My followers, who had been scattered *to faraway places* as distant as Ethiopia's rivers,
will come back *to worship Me* with *pure* offerings.

11 When that day comes, you won't feel *embarrassed and* ashamed anymore
over all the rebellious things you did in the past.
As I said I would, I will remove the proud and arrogant among you.
Arrogance *and pride* will never again be *tolerated* in My holy mountain.
12 But I will leave afflicted and poor people among you
who will trust the reputation of the Eternal One for *strength and* protection.
13 The *faithful of* Israel who remain will not continue to sin.
They won't tell lies or try to trick each other *ever again.*
They'll eat *well each day* and sleep *peacefully each night like protected sheep,*
because nothing will make them afraid.

14 *Hurray! It's time to* sing, *faithful* daughter of Zion!
It's time to shout *out loud,* Israel!
Be happy and celebrate with all your being, *faithful* children of Jerusalem!
15 The Eternal has cancelled His judgments against you.
He changed the course of your enemies.
The *True* King of Israel, the Eternal One, is standing right here among you;
you have no reason to be afraid ever again.

16 On that day people will say to *the faithful in* Jerusalem,
"Do not be afraid, Zion;
Hold your *head and* hands high,
and take courage."
17 The Eternal your God is standing right here among you,
and He is the champion who will rescue you.
He will joyfully celebrate over you;
He will rest in His love *for you*; He will joyfully sing because of you *like a new husband*.

This celebrated passage reflects the reconciliation between God and His wife, Jerusalem. The daughter Zion is reunited with her King and Husband, the Eternal!

Eternal One: 18 Don't be sad anymore about *all the time* you were away *in exile,*
Unable to keep the appointed feasts *or worship Me in the appointed place*.
I will gather those who've shamed you, *Zion*.
19 Keep watching! At the right time,
I will deal with those who assaulted you.
I will steady those who are lame *and about to fall*;
I will gather those who are outcasts *and oppressed*.
Instead of being filled with shame *as they always have been,*
I will fill them with praise and make them famous over all the world.
20 On that day, I will gather all of you together *for one big homecoming*.
I will make you famous, and all the world will sing your praises.
Right before your eyes, I will restore to you all that you have lost,
and your lives will be full again.

So says the Eternal One.

HAGGAI

Rebuild God's house and experience His blessing

The message of Haggai, a contemporary of Zechariah

Although ancient in its context and composition, the Book of Haggai is applicable for those who, like the sixth-century Jews, have been socially and ethnically displaced and are trying to find a sense of identity and meaning. After their exile (586-538 B.C.), some of the Jewish people have been told to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their society and God's temple, first by Persian King Cyrus in 538 B.C. and later by King Darius in 520 B.C. (the same year, God gives this message to Haggai). As the exiles arrive, they are greeted by those who stayed behind in Jerusalem during the ordeal. God raises up the prophet Haggai and his colleague Zechariah to encourage both the returning exiles and the Jerusalem citizens to come together and focus on rebuilding the Lord's temple so that He may renew the land to sustain the new communities and to provide grain and animal offerings for the temple sacrifices.

The prophet announces to the people that their current frustrations and adversities result from giving their time and energies to building their own homes instead of rebuilding God's house. He communicates to Jerusalem's leaders that the restoration of the temple is not solely related to issues in the city; God wants to display His presence and character first in Jerusalem and then to the rest of the world (2:21-22). Because of God's message, Haggai is instrumental in bringing solidarity to a displaced people who are anything but unified in how they will make a new life in their homeland. Besides serving as an encouragement to the people, he also inspires Zerubbabel and Joshua to take the lead in governing the people, rebuilding the temple, and regaining God's favor. His ministry is apparently very effective, for soon the work begins and the temple is completed in 515 B.C.

The words of Haggai speak to all people who have been marginalized and are fragmented by how they view themselves and their role in society. As the prophet brings peripheral groups together for the singular task of restoring God's earthly dwelling—the Jerusalem temple—he shows how people can find true significance and value only by being properly focused on Him.

1 On the first day of the sixth month, during the second year King Darius reigned *over the Persian Empire,* the prophet named Haggai gave a message from the Eternal One to *men named* Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son and the *Jewish* governor of Judah) and Joshua (Jehozadak's son and the high priest). 2This is what the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies *who is more powerful even than the king,* had to say.

Eternal One: These people *living in Jerusalem* say it's not yet the *right* time *for them* to rebuild the temple, the place where the Eternal One dwells.

3The prophet Haggai gave a message from the Eternal.

Eternal One: 4Do you think the time is right for you to live in secure and lavishly covered homes when My house still lies in a heap of rubble? 5Think very carefully about your choices. 6You have planted a large crop, but your harvest is small. You have food to eat, but it is never enough to satisfy. You have something to drink, but you are never filled. You have clothes to wear, but they are not enough to keep you warm. You earn a salary, but the money runs out quickly, as if there are holes in your pocket.

7Think very carefully about your choices. 8Go up to the mountains, and bring down trees to *make lumber and* build *My* house. Do this so I may take pleasure in it and be honored *by it.*

9You expected to be well rewarded *for all your hard work.* But as you see, you are getting back almost nothing. As you have brought in *profits,* I've blown them away. Why? I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will tell *you why*: My house has remained in ruins while each of you has been chasing after your own concerns. 10This is why heaven above you has held back the dew* and the earth has refused to produce crops. 11I caused a drought in both the fields and the hills. All the crops *you tried to produce have been affected,* including your grain, your new wine, and your oil. *All have been damaged:* humanity, cattle, and everything you tried to produce yourself.

12Then Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son), Joshua (Jehozadak's son and the high priest), and all those who had returned obeyed the voice of the Eternal, their True God. *They took seriously* the message brought by the prophet Haggai, believing he had been sent by the Eternal One, whom they *worshiped and* feared.

► Haggai says the fields are not producing food because the temple has not been rebuilt. This understanding correlates God's divine presence with the fertility of the land. The notion of divine control of natural events is common to the ancient world, but Haggai understands that acts of sacrifice or external displays of intrinsic beliefs cannot renew the land; transformative change brought on by the Lord's presence can. God wants His people to experience real spiritual changes that are reflected in the ways they interact with each other and the rest of the world.

13-15On the 24th day of that 6th month, which was King Darius' 2nd year, Haggai, the messenger of the Eternal One, *received this new* message from the Eternal and shared it with the people.

Eternal One: I am with you.

And the Eternal One rallied the spirit of Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son and Judah's governor), the spirit of Joshua (Jehozadak's son and the high priest), and the spirit of all those who had returned *to Jerusalem* so that they came together and began work on the house of their God, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

2 On the 21st day of the 7th month, the prophet Haggai gave *another* message from the Eternal.

Eternal One: 2Ask Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son and Judah's governor), Joshua (Jehozadak's son and the high priest), and all those who returned *from exile,* 3"Are any of you still living who saw how glorious My *first* house was before *it was destroyed more than 60 years ago*? How does this *current one* look to you now? In comparison *to the first,* does this one look like nothing? *Of course it does.*

* 1:10 Hebrew manuscripts read, "from dew."

4"But *don't be discouraged.* Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Joshua (Jehozadak's son and the high priest). Be strong, all you who *once again* live in the land. Keep working *on it.* For I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, am with you! 5Regarding the covenant* I made with you when your *ancestors* came out of Egypt,* My Spirit remains with you, living among you. Do not be afraid.

6"Yet once more* I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens,* the sea, and the land. 7I will rattle all the nations, and all that is valuable in *the eyes of* the world will be *willingly* brought to My house. I will see to it that it is filled *to the brim* with My glory.

8"*You see, all* the silver and *all* the gold *in this world already* belong to Me. 9*You will stand by and watch as* the magnificence of this new house will eclipse the magnificence of My first house. And in this *new* house, I will give *you* peace."

God proclaims peace will come upon the Jews, a peace not only for Israel but for all believers in the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7).

So says the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

10On the 24th day of the 9th month during the 2nd year of *King* Darius' reign, the prophet Haggai received a *third* message from the Eternal One. 11The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, told *Haggai to* ask the priests *to explain* what the law says *about this scenario*:

Haggai: 12If a person is carrying sacred meat, *the meat of the sacrifices,* in the fold of his garment and that garment comes into contact with some *ordinary* bread, stew, wine, oil, or any other food; then does it transfer its sacredness to the new food?

Priests: No.

Haggai: 13*What about this situation then?* If a person who is ritually impure from touching a dead body* touches one of these foods, does he transfer the impurity to it?

Priests: Yes, it is now impure.

Haggai: 14The Eternal One says this is what He sees when He looks over this people and this nation:

"Everything they have done and everything they have brought there as a *spiritual* offering is impure. 15Now think carefully *about your choices* from this point forward. Consider how things were before you even laid the first stone back upon the other to rebuild the house of the Eternal One. 16How did it turn out for you? *Were you able to do it without Me?* You came to scoop *grain* and expected 20 measures, but there were only 10. You came to draw wine from a vat and expected 50 measures, but there were only 20. 17I crushed you and everything you tried to do *under your own power* with scorching *heat,* mildew, and hail; and still you didn't turn to Me.*

18"From this day forward—from the 24th day of the 9th month, from the foundation of the Eternal One's house—think carefully *and ask yourself,* 19'Is there seed left *unplanted* in the *storage* barns?' *No. But you must be patient.* The *grape* vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate trees and the olive trees have not borne fruit yet. From this day on, I will bless you."

20That same day the prophet Haggai received a second message from the Eternal One.

Eternal One: 21Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, that I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.* 22I will upend royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I will crash chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will be killed *in confusion and chaos,* each by the sword of his countryman. 23On that day, I will choose you, my servant Zerubbabel (Shealtiel's son); this I declare. I will make you *My choice* as a signet ring *represents the wishes of its owner* because I have chosen you.

So said the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

* 2:5 Hebrew manuscripts read, "word." * 2:5 Exodus 24:5-8 * 2:6 Hebrew manuscripts add, "and it is small." * 2:6 Hebrews 12:26 * 2:13 Hebrew manuscripts read, "soul." * 2:17 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 2:21 Hebrews 12:26

ZECHARIAH

Visions and oracles of Jerusalem, her king, and her future

The message of Zechariah, a priest and prophet who returned from Babylon

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Zechariah is both a priest and a prophet. He hears his first message from God in the early years after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon around 520 B.C. As a priest, he has a deep concern for the temple in Jerusalem that has lain in ruins since the Babylonian armies razed it nearly 70 years earlier. Along with Haggai, his contemporary, the prophet Zechariah calls for the completion of the new temple, the place of God's presence on earth. Also as a priest, Zechariah is desperate for sin and impurity to be removed from the covenant people. He wonders how a holy God can dwell in the heart of a city like Jerusalem, infected with so much wickedness. As a prophet, Zechariah is God's mouthpiece to a generation that has journeyed far from Him. Because of his special connection to God, Zechariah can look into the future and see a new day, a day when God's anointed shepherd will arrive to rule and transform the world.

The name Zechariah means "the Lord remembers," which would be a fitting title for this book even if it were not the prophet's name as well. He has not forgotten His covenant promises, of course, but the 70 years of exile have seemed like an eternity of silence. With the return from Babylon, Jerusalem has God's attention once again, and He will go to work for His people righting wrongs, establishing justice, and fulfilling His promises.

Although the message of Zechariah bears certain similarities to earlier prophecies, he is an apocalyptic prophet, so the vehicles of his prophecy are reports of visions, questions, and interpretations offered by God's heavenly messengers. The term *apocalypse* literally means "an unveiling." In his night visions, Zechariah sees a reality that is hidden to most, a reality that will soon invade history from above. For him the ultimate hope for a complete restoration of God's people comes not from earth below but from God's actions above.

There are many other important themes in Zechariah's prophecy: the restoration of David's royal family in Zerubbabel and his power-sharing with the high priest Joshua; the universal adoration of the Eternal God in Jerusalem, the destroyed city that will one day be recognized as the center of the world; and, perhaps most memorably, all those passages that will be interpreted as foreshadowing the coming of the Anointed One. Echoes of Zechariah's prophecies resonate throughout the Gospels and also in the Book of Revelation, making him one of the most quoted prophets and priests by New Testament writers.

1 During the eighth month of the second year of *the reign of Persian King* Darius, the word of the Eternal One came to the prophet Zechariah (Berechiah's son and Iddo's grandson).

Message: [2]The Eternal became very angry with your ancestors. *That's why He turned His back on them.* [3]Now, tell your people what the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say: "Return to Me, so I may turn back to you." *This is the message* the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, burdens *you with today, Zechariah.*

[4]Do not be like your fathers *and mothers,* whom the prophets of their own time warned, "Here is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say: Turn away from your evil thoughts and your evil acts." Even then they did not listen to Me. *That was the message* the Eternal One burdened *His prophets with a generation ago.*

Eternal One *(to Zechariah)***:** [5]Where are your ancestors *now*? And what about the prophets *I sent to warn them*? They did not live forever, did they? [6]Didn't My words and My rules that I dictated through My servants the prophets outlive your *rebellious* ancestors? That's why they repented *eventually* and realized, "The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has done to us exactly what He decided He would do *if we behaved this way*. His punishments match our evil thoughts and acts."

► Zechariah has a series of eight visions one night in early 519 B.C. These visions are filled with symbols, numbers, unusual sights, and distinct sounds. In order to understand what he is seeing, God sends a heavenly messenger to serve as Zechariah's guide and interpreter. All the visions relate to some aspect of the restoration of Jerusalem and her people.

[7]On the 24th day of the 11th month (called Shebat *by the Babylonians*) of the 2nd year of *the reign of Persian King* Darius, the word of the Eternal came to *me,* the prophet Zechariah (Berechiah's son and Iddo's grandson). This is what happened: [8]During the night, I had *eight* visions. I opened my eyes, and there was a man riding a red horse *and bringing a message.* He was in the middle of a stand of *ever-blooming* myrtle trees down in the lowest part of the *Kidron* Valley. Behind him stood horses of red, tan, and white.

This is not just any messenger who comes to Zechariah in his vision; he is a heavenly messenger whom Zechariah addresses as "lord."

Zechariah: [9]What are they, my lord?

Heavenly Messenger: I will show you.

[10]The man standing among the myrtle trees explained.

Heavenly Messenger: The horses *and their riders* have been sent by the Eternal to patrol the *whole* earth.

[11]And they began to give reports to the Special Messenger of the Eternal One, who was standing among the myrtle trees.

Patrols: We have traveled back and forth across the surface of the whole earth and found it resting peacefully.

Special Messenger of the Eternal: [12]O Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, how long will You keep Your mercy from Jerusalem? How long will You keep Your mercy from the cities of Judah, which have endured Your anger for the last 70 years?

[13]The Eternal One answered him, speaking kind and comforting words to the heavenly messenger who had been talking to me. *He shared with me the message.*

Special Messenger of the Eternal *(to Zechariah)***:** [14]Tell everyone these words of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies: "I am very jealous for *the people of* Jerusalem and Zion. [15]Also, I am very angry with those nations that feel at ease. I was only slightly angry *with these other nations,* but when they attacked *more ruthlessly than I commanded them to,* they made the situation much worse *for themselves.* [16]Here's what I will do: I, the Eternal One, will turn back to Jerusalem with that mercy *they've missed for 70 years.* My temple will be rebuilt in

Jerusalem," says the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies; "*surveyors* will stretch out their measuring lines over Jerusalem, *and craftsmen will return to rebuild it.*"
17You must reiterate *to your people* what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says: "My cities will once again be so prosperous, they will overflow. Once again I will comfort the people of Zion, and *once again* I will choose Jerusalem *as My earthly home.*"

18That night I had a *second* vision *of God's wrath.* I looked up and saw four horns.

In a second vision of the power of God's judgment, God's people are oppressed by the nations, who are represented by four horns.

Zechariah *(to the heavenly messenger)***:** 19What are these?

Heavenly Messenger: These are the horns *of the nations* that have *been raised in battles to* scatter *and oppress* Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

20Then the Eternal showed me four craftsmen.

Zechariah: 21And what are these *people* coming to do?

Heavenly Messenger: These are the horns *of the nations* that have scattered *the people of* Judah, and because of them, no one may lift his head up *in dignity.* The craftsmen have come to *wreak havoc and* inflict terror on the nations who own the horns, to strike down those who raised their horns before attacking Judah and sending her people into exile.

2 That night I had a *third* vision. I looked up and saw a man with a measuring line in his hand.

Zechariah: 2Where are you going with that?

Surveyor: I am going to measure *the city of* Jerusalem to find out how wide and how long it is *so that a wall may be built around it.*

A third vision looks forward to a time of restoration and the coming of God's Anointed One when things will be set right.

3Then the heavenly messenger who had been answering my questions *since my first vision* left *my side,* and a second messenger came and met him.

Second Messenger: 4Go quickly, and tell that young surveyor *with the measuring line,* "Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the vast number of people and all their domesticated animals living in it." 5For the Eternal One says, "*Instead of a wall of stone,* I will be a wall of fire protecting her all around, and I will be the *shining* glory within her."

Eternal One *(to Zechariah)***:** 6*Tell all the Israelites* to hear *My message:* "Up! Flee from your oppressors in the north. I have scattered you *far across this earth,* as if you were the four winds of heaven, *and now I call you to return.*" 7*Then tell My people in Jerusalem to hear My message:* "Escape from *subservience to* daughter Babylon and go to Zion!"

8So said the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

After *His* glory *has arrived in the city,* He will send me to the nations that stripped you bare, *Jerusalem,* because any nation who harms you harms the apple of His eye.

Eternal One: 9Watch *what I'm going to do:* I am ready to wave My hand over them *to command punishment,* and their own slaves will *turn against them and* strip them bare.

When these things happen, you will know the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has sent me *as His prophet.*

Eternal One: 10Sing out loud and be happy, daughter Zion, because you will see Me coming and I will live among you. I, the Eternal One, promise this. 11When that day comes, many other nations will join with Me, and *their people* will become My people. *Still* I will live among you, *my covenant people.*

When these things happen, you will know the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has sent me to you. 12The Eternal will inherit Judah as His share in the holy land, and He will again choose Jerusalem as His city. 13Hush, all people! Be silent before the Eternal, for He has awakened and has come *in glory to Jerusalem* from His holy home *in heaven.*

3 Then the heavenly messenger showed me *a fourth vision*: Joshua, the high priest, was standing in front of the Eternal's Special Messenger *who was presiding over a heavenly council meeting.* Standing to Joshua's right was the one called the Accuser.* He was ready to argue that Joshua *was unworthy to serve as high priest.*

► In this vision Zechariah sees a heavenly court. Joshua the high priest is on trial, charged with impurity and accused of being unfit to serve as high priest. The Accuser appears in the role of a prosecuting attorney, bringing charges and attempting to undermine the credibility of the one person God wants to lead His people. But the Judge will have none of it.

Eternal One *(to the Accuser)*: [2]I am reprimanding you, Accuser. I, the Eternal One, have chosen Jerusalem *as My own, saved her from My fiery wrath* as if she were a wooden poker just pulled from *destruction in* a fire.

[3]Joshua stood *motionless* before the Eternal's messenger, still dressed in filth-covered clothes, *as if recently returned from captivity.*

Special Messenger of the Eternal *(to the other heavenly council members)*: [4]Remove the filth-covered clothes from this man.

(to Joshua) *Just as I have taken away your dirty clothes,* I have taken away your guilt from you. *In place of those clothes,* I will dress you in *pure,* expensive garments. *Then you will be ready to serve God and lead the festival.*

Zechariah *(to the Eternal's Special Messenger)*: [5]Your fellow council members should put a pure turban *befitting of the high priest* on his head. *It will indicate his dignity.*

So they placed a pure turban on his head and *finished* dressing him in *his new* clothes while the Eternal's Special Messenger stood by, *supervising the cleansing. Joshua could now safely approach God.*

[6]The Eternal's Special Messenger *then stood before* Joshua and cautioned him.

Special Messenger of the Eternal: [7]*Listen to* what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say: "If you *bind yourself to Me,* walk according to My teachings, and perform your priestly duties *without fail*; then you will be in charge of My house *in Jerusalem,* you will organize *the activities in* the courtyards *surrounding the most holy place,* and I will give you a place among all My heavenly council members gathered here. [8]Listen *to Me,* Joshua the high priest—you and your colleagues *who maintain the temple* alongside you. These men are a sign *of wonders to come.* Watch, because I am going to bring My servant, who is the Branch *of David, to lead you.*" [9]The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has this to say: "You will see the stone I set before Joshua: on it are seven eyes, on it I will engrave a *special* word, and in a single day I will purge guilt from the land. [10]And on that day I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promise everyone will invite one another to sit under *the shade of* his own vine and fig tree *and be at peace.*"

4 The heavenly messenger who had been talking with me returned and stirred me, as if I had been asleep. *It was time for a fifth vision.*

Heavenly Messenger: [2]What do you see *before you*?

A fifth vision shows the lamp of God's grace completing what has begun.

Zechariah: I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl on top of it and seven oil lamps on it. Each of the seven lamps has a spout, *which the wicks lie in to soak up oil as they're burned.* [3]There are also two olive trees nearby: one on the right and the other on the left of the bowl.

[4]But what are these things, lord?

Heavenly Messenger: [5]Do you not know what they are?

Zechariah: No, lord. *I don't.*

* 3:1 Literally, the satan

Heavenly Messenger *(changing the subject)*: 6The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has said this to Zerubbabel: "Your strength and prowess will not be enough to finish My temple, but My Spirit will be." *And He says this to those thwarting Zerubbabel's efforts:* 7"Who are you, O mighty mountain *of opposition*? Before Zerubbabel, you will become *nothing more than* a *smooth* plain, and he will *quarry* the capstone and bring it out to the sound of *people* shouting, '*God, grant it Your* grace! God bless it!' "

8The word of the Eternal came to me again *to reiterate what was just reported.*

Heavenly Messenger: 9Zerubbabel's *very own* hands have laid the foundation of this *new* temple, and his hands will complete it. When he does, it will be clear to you that the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has sent me to you. 10Now all who have frowned on the day when only slight progress was made *to reconstruct the temple* will celebrate when they see the *stone that centers the* plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel, *who will survey Jerusalem.*

(finally answering his earlier question) The seven *lamps on top of the lampstand* are the eyes of the Eternal One, diligently searching the earth.

Zechariah *(to the heavenly messenger)*: 11What are the two olive trees, the ones on the right and left of the lampstand? *What do these mean?*

12(persisting) And the two *fruitful* olive branches *that extend toward the lampstand,* the ones supported by the two gold pipes pouring out their gold oil—*what do these mean?*

Heavenly Messenger: 13Do you not know what they are?

Zechariah: No, lord. *I don't.*

Heavenly Messenger: 14The olive trees are the two men who have been anointed *with fresh oil, Zerubabbel and Joshua.* They *will rule Jerusalem jointly, one over politics and one over religion, and* serve the Master over all the earth.

5 That night I had a *sixth* vision. I looked up and saw a *large* scroll flying.

Heavenly Messenger: 2What do you see *before you*?

A sixth vision reveals the righteousness held in God's word, the true measure by which all are judged.

Zechariah: I see a *large* scroll flying. It's at least 30 feet long and 15 feet wide.

Heavenly Messenger: 3This scroll is *God's* curse *of judgment* that blankets all the land. On one side, it is written that all who steal will be banished from the land. On the other side, it says that all who break their solemn vows will be banished. 4The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, says, "I will dispatch this curse *of judgment* into the home of every thief and every perjurer who invokes My name. The decree will remain through the night in that house until it destroys everything, even its wood and stone."

5The heavenly messenger who had been talking with me went out. *It was time for a seventh vision.*

Heavenly Messenger: Look up. What do you see moving forward?

A seventh vision explains that the wickedness infecting the world will one day be contained by the agents of God.

Zechariah: 6What is it?

Heavenly Messenger: It is a six-gallon basket* moving forward. *Like the scroll,* it, too, is *a mark of judgment carrying* the iniquity that they committed in the land.

7Suddenly, the *basket's* lead cover was lifted, and I saw a woman inside. *She seemed to want out.*

Heavenly Messenger: 8This is *Lady* Wickedness.

The messenger pushed the woman back into the basket and replaced *the basket's stone* (*that is,* its lead cover) over the mouth *so she'd stay inside it.* 9Then *in this vision,* I looked up and saw two women moving forward with wings resembling the wings of storks. With *the power of* the wind in their wings, they lifted the basket up *to a place somewhere far away,* between heaven and earth.

* 5:6 Hebrew, *ephah*

Zechariah: [10]Where are they taking the basket?

Heavenly Messenger: [11]It is being delivered to the land of Shinar, *which you know as Babylon.* A temple is being built for it there; and once it is ready, they will put the basket on its own altar cart. *Let the Babylonians worship what God has condemned.*

► When Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem in 586 B.C., he carries her chief citizens off into exile in Babylon. Thousands don't survive the brutal journey. Those who do must start their lives over in a hostile land where they are subjects of violence, slavery, and every manner of wickedness. That's why Babylon becomes synonymous with evil. In this vision, the wickedness of Judah is contained and sent far away to Babylon, where it is not only tolerated but is worshiped. Civilization reaches its nadir when wickedness is worshiped.

6 That night *I had an eighth vision.* I looked up and saw four chariots emerging from between two mountains made of bronze. [2]The first chariot was pulled by red horses; the second was pulled by black horses. [3]The third was hitched to white horses and the fourth to spotted, strong horses.

A final vision echoes the first vision as four great spirits of heaven unleash judgment upon the whole earth.

Zechariah *(to the heavenly messenger)***:** [4]What are these, sir?

Heavenly Messenger: [5]These are the four winds of heaven *that disperse His power and enact His will.* They have been standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole earth *awaiting His command. Now the Lord* has dispatched them *to patrol the earth.* [6]The *chariot pulled by* black horses will travel to the north land, followed by the white horses and then the spotted horses, which travel to the south land.

[7]The strong horses *and their chariots* went on their patrols of the earth with great *speed and* excitement at God's command: "Go *now.* Patrol *the entire surface of* the earth." They did as they were told.

Eternal One: [8]Watch, *Zechariah.* The horses going to the north land have appeased My *restless, vengeful* Spirit.

[9]The word of the Eternal came to me *describing how He would fulfill His promise of restoring Jerusalem and His temple.*

Message: [10-11]Find three men who have returned *to Jerusalem* from exile in Babylon. Their names are Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah. Then collect *money,* silver and gold, *from the Babylonians for rebuilding Jerusalem,* and travel to the house of Josiah (Zephaniah's son) *who has also returned from Babylon.* You will find Joshua (Jehozadak's son) there. With the money you took *from the Babylonians,* fashion a crown for Joshua, the high priest, and place it on his head.

[12]*Once Joshua accepts the crown,* tell him these words from the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies: "Pay attention to a man who is named 'Branch.' He will branch out from where He is and will build the Eternal's temple. [13]Yes, He is the temple builder of the Eternal One and will carry honor. He will sit on the throne of His kingdom to rule, and He will sit on a throne as a priest. Between those two there will be a peace agreement."

[14]The crown will then be *taken from Joshua's head and* placed in the temple of the Eternal One as a reminder to Heldai,* Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah* (Zephaniah's son). [15]People will come from great distances to assist with the building of the Eternal One's temple. *Tell the men,* "If you do exactly what the Eternal, your True God, says, this will happen *as you have seen and heard it.* Then you will know for certain the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, sent me to you."

► "Branch" is a prophetic title for the Anointed One, that royal descendant of David whom God will send to usher

* 6:14 Hebrew manuscripts read, "Helem." * 6:14 Hebrew manuscripts read, "Hen."

in a new age of justice, peace, and joy. In Zechariah's day, the people wonder if Zerubbabel is that king. According to the prophet, God has designs on him as the one to rebuild the temple and occupy the throne, but he is not destined to reign alone as the Anointed One will. Zerubbabel reigns with Joshua, the high priest. Together they are anointed, acclaimed, and crowned leaders to watch over God's people.

7 *Two years after I saw the eight visions,* on the fourth day of the ninth month (called Chislev) of the fourth year of *the reign of Persian* King Darius, the word of the Eternal came to *me,* Zechariah. 2*The situation was this:* the citizens of Bethel had sent *a delegation, including* Sharezer and Regemmelech and his men, to seek the favor of the Eternal One 3by questioning the priests working in the temple of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, and by questioning the prophets.

Delegation: During the fifth month *of every year,* I *fast and* mourn. Should I continue separating myself *from the impure world on these occasions* as I have for so many years?

4The word of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies came to me *and told me how to address their question.*

Message: 5Ask the citizens of the land and the priests, "When you fasted and mourned during the fifth and seventh months for the last seventy years, were you really fasting for My benefit *or just for yourselves*? 6When you were feasting *on holy days,* weren't you just eating and drinking for yourselves *instead of honoring Me*? 7Aren't these the same directives the Eternal One gave you through the *work of* earlier prophets, when Jerusalem was *bustling* with people and prosperous, when the villages around Jerusalem throughout the south* and the western valleys were settled?"

8The word of the Eternal came to *me,* Zechariah, again.

Message: 9Here is what the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, has to say:

"Dispense true justice, have mercy *on others,* and show all people compassion. 10Do not take advantage of those who have lost a spouse or a parent, or those who are outsiders or poor. Don't purpose to do evil toward your fellow *Israelites.*"

11Some refused to listen. They turned their backs *on this message* and plugged their ears. 12They made their hearts *as hard* as flint, refusing to listen to the law or the messages the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, sent by His Spirit *and enacted* through earlier prophets. That's why His great wrath *and calamity* fell *upon His people.*

Eternal One: 13When I called out, they chose not to hear Me, so when they called out, I *returned the favor and* decided not to hear them. 14*Like a sweeping tornado,* I blew them throughout the nations, scattering them *in distant lands* where they were aliens, *all alone.* That's how the land *and its cities* were emptied out *and left so barren that* no one even traveled through it. This is how your pleasant *hills and valleys* turned into empty lands.

8 1-2The word of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, came, *this time bringing a series of five short messages about hope.*

Eternal One: *First,* I have a jealous desire *to be among My people in* Zion. I want it more than anything. I am burning with angry jealousy for her *and her welfare.*

3*Second,* I will return to Zion and live in the heart of Jerusalem. So it will then be known *far and wide* as the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will be called Holy Mountain.

4*Third,* elderly men and women will sit in Jerusalem's streets with staffs in hand because of their old age. 5The city streets will bustle with boys and girls playing *outside* on the roads *and in the squares.*

6*Fourth,* this may come as a surprise to the remnant of these people, *eking out an existence* during these *harsh* days, but what is surprising to you is not for Me.

7*Fifth,* I will rescue My people *from far and wide,* from east to west across the land, 8and I will bring them home to live *in peace* in Jerusalem where they will be My people *once more.* I will be truthful and just to them as their God.

* 7:7 Hebrew, *Negev*

Ultimately, God's purpose is redeeming His fallen creation. He initiated His plan of redemption by calling and equipping the children of Abraham to be a light to the nations. Zechariah foresees a day when Jerusalem is the center of the world; when people of every race, creed, and color journey to it; and when the Jews show the rest of the world the way to the one True God.

After chapter 8, the Book of Zechariah changes—its tone, its character, its focus. Chapters 1–8 have been about the people and times immediately after the exile ended, a period when Persia ruled the world. Chapters 9–14 seem removed from that world, its people, and its interests—but just how far removed is uncertain. It is possible that these last chapters were not written by Zechariah, and the debate about who wrote them and when they were written has raged since Jesus died. In 27:9-10 of his Gospel, Matthew identifies the author as Jeremiah, a forerunner of Zechariah. More recent scholarship has further confused the matter because the setting in chapter 9 could describe any time in Jerusalem between Hezekiah's rule before the exile and the Maccabean revolts 400 years later. This inability to positively identify the author and the audience, along with the lack of historical, contextual markers in the text itself, make these words universally applicable. They may even describe the end time when God judges the nations.

[9]Here is *an encouragement* from the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: To those of you who have been listening recently to My words through the prophets, who were *working for Me* when the foundation of the house of the Eternal One was being laid *just decades ago,* keep yourselves strong *so that the temple walls may now be built.* [10]Before then *no one could earn a living in Jerusalem or in exile.* Neither men nor their animals could find work. No one could move about safely for fear of his enemies because I had turned every man against each other. [11]However, that was the past. I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promise I will not treat the remnant of My people as I once did. [12]*What you witness now will be very different—a new day* when seeds of peace will be sown *in fertile soil. The seeds will grow into sheaves of wheat,* and the vines will produce *luscious grapes.* The ground will yield its crops, and pleasant dew will again fall from the heavens. And I will give these things to My remnant as their inheritance. [13]Because you, people of Judah and Israel, were once the objects of scorn among the nations, I will rescue you and you will become a blessing. Don't be afraid, and keep yourselves strong.

[14]When your ancestors angered Me, I was determined to bring disaster to your generation *as well as theirs,* and I refused to change My plan. [15]All the same, I have now determined to do good for Jerusalem and the people of Judah. Don't be afraid. [16]Here are the things you must do: Speak truth to each other. Pursue justice in your courts. Render decisions that reflect truth and bring peace *to the community.* [17]Do not conspire to bring harm against one another. Do not make promises you don't intend to keep. I hate all these things.

So said the Eternal.

[18]The word of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, came to me *with three brief messages about a happy future for His people and the entire world.*

Eternal One: [19]*From now on,* the fasting times of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will be happy occasions and times of celebration for the people of Judah. So *you should* love truth and *pursue* peace.

[20]Many people from many cities will come *streaming to My holy city.* [21]The citizens from one of these cities will approach *the citizens of* another and say, "*You must* come with me. *Let's journey to Jerusalem* to seek *the blessings of* the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, and ask for His favor *directly.* I am certainly going."

[22]*That is why* many people and powerful nations will come *together as one* to Jerusalem to seek *the blessings of* the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, and ask for His favor *directly.*

Eternal One: [23]A day is coming when 10 men, people from every nation speaking every language will grab the cloak of a Jew and beg him, "Let us come with you because we have heard the True God is among you *and we want Him to save us, too.*"

9 This is *the message with* which the Eternal burdened *His prophet.*

He has set His message against the land of Hadrach,
and *the city of* Damascus is its resting place.
For the eyes of all humanity—especially *His people from* the tribes of Israel—
are fixed on the Eternal.
[2]*His message is* also against Hamath, on the *northern* border *of Syria,*
and Tyre and Sidon, *coastal cities* filled with *self-proclaimed* wise citizens.
[3]Tyre, *that prosperous city,* has *strong defenses*
including an earthen rampart *around her thick walls*;
She mounds up silver like dust,
and gold is as *common as* dirt in the street.
[4]But the Lord will steal her treasures
and sink the ships of her livelihood in *the depths of* the sea.
Tyre, *that watery city,* will be consumed by *unquenchable* fire.
[5]Ashkelon will witness *the fall of Tyre from her own coast* and quake with fear;
Gaza, *not far to her south,* will writhe in great agony;
Ekron will, too, because all hope will be lost.
Gaza's *monarchy will end* when her king dies,
and Ashkelon's streets will be left empty.
[6]Children of unholy unions will live in Ashdod's houses,
the pride of the Philistines turned over *to mongrels.*

Eternal One: I will make this happen.
[7]I will cleanse those children from *pagan practices*
such as drinking blood and chewing on forbidden meats.

Those people will then belong to our God, a remnant *for the Lord.*
They will become like a clan* in Judah,
And those in Ekron will be like the *surviving* Jebusites
who became God's people when David conquered Jerusalem.

Eternal One: [8]*When that day comes,*
I will set up *an army* camp before My house
to guard My lands against those who'd march against *My people.*
Never again will they bow to an oppressor,
for I am watching over them Myself.

[9]Cry out with joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout *jubilantly,* O daughter of Jerusalem!
Look—your King is coming;
He is righteous and able to save.
He comes seated humbly on a donkey,
on a colt, a foal of a donkey.*
[10]I will dismantle Ephraim's chariots,
retire the warhorses from Jerusalem,
send home the archers *to their families in peace.*
He will make peace with the nations;
His sovereignty will extend from coast to coast,
from the *Euphrates* River to the limits of the earth.

► Like many earlier prophets, Zechariah tells of a day when an ideal King will enter Jerusalem to the uproarious shouts and jubilant celebration of the people. Unlike other kings, this King enters humbly riding on a donkey, a beast of burden, not on a warhorse. He comes to establish real justice. God has given Him the victory, and now He shares that victory with the people. In that day, as His reign reaches the ends of the earth, war and the instruments of war are laid aside in the greater interests of an abiding, universal peace.

* 9:7 Hebrew manuscripts read, "clan leader." * 9:9 Matthew 21:5; John 12:15

Eternal One: 11As for you, because
of the covenant promise I
made with you *through your*
ancestor David,
a covenant sealed in blood,
I will free your prisoners from
the waterless pits *of death.*
12Return to your walled cities, *safe*
and secure,
O hostages of hope.
I announce today that I will restore
to you twice as much *as*
what was taken.
13For *My people will be My weapons:*
Judah, My drawn bow, loaded
with Ephraim, *My arrow.*
I will stir your sons, Zion, *making*
them My attacking hordes
against the sons of Greece,
and I will brandish you like a
warrior's sword.

14Then the Eternal will appear over them,
and His arrow will move like lightning;
The Eternal Lord will sound the battle
trumpet
and *cloak* His marching forces in
an approaching storm from the
south.
15The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies, will shield His people,
and they will feast and trample the
sling stones *hurled uselessly by*
their enemies.
They will drink in and roar *at the battle*
like *men filled* with wine;
they will be full like a bowl *collecting*
the blood of a sacrifice,
drenched like the corners of the altar
during a festival offering.
16On that *glorious* day, the Eternal their
God will save His people, for they
are His flock;
they will sparkle over His lands like
jewels in a crown,
17For goodness and beauty will abound!
Grain will *grow and* nourish the
young men;
Wine *will flow and flourish* the young
women.

10 Pray to the Eternal, asking for
rain in the spring;
He is the One bringing the
storm clouds.
He fills them with *heavy* rain,
showers of rain for the plants of the
field for everyone.

2For *household* gods* speak nothing but
tricks,
diviners see deceptions, dreamers
tell lies,
And all offer useless comfort.
And so, the people wander *without*
purpose,
Suffering like sheep because they have
no shepherd.

Eternal One: 3My anger burns against
these *imitation* shepherds,
and I will bring punishment to
those goats.

The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly*
armies,
brings caring to His flock, the people
of Judah,
And will make them like His brave royal
steed, arrayed for battle.
4The people of Judah will supply *the*
leadership:
the *stable* cornerstone, the *secure*
tent peg, the *powerful* battle bow.
Every commander will come from there.
5Together they will be like *a formidable*
force of champions in battle,
trampling the enemy in the *muck*
and mire of the roads.
They will fight on because the Eternal
fights with them;
they will bring shame *and defeat* to
riders on horseback.

Eternal One: 6I will give strength to the
people of Judah
and liberate the *northern*
descendants of Joseph.
I will restore their standing because
I care for them,
and they will live as if I never
sent them away,
For I am the Eternal their God, and
I will answer their call.

7The Ephraimites, *too,* will grow strong
like warriors
and feel deep joy as if *they were*
warmed by wine.
Their children will see all this and be
happy;
their hearts will celebrate what the
Eternal has done.

Eternal One: 8I will whistle for My
people and gather them in,
for I will redeem them, *rescue*
them, ransom them,

* 10:2 Hebrew, *teraphim*

And restore their numbers to what
they were before *I turned My*
back on them.
9Even though I will scatter them
among the nations,
they will remember Me in
faraway lands.
They will make sure their children
will survive to return *one*
day.
10From the lands of Egypt and
Assyria I will restore them.
I will gather them to the lands
of Gilead and Lebanon
Until no room remains *in this good*
land for them.
11An ocean of trouble *will meet*
Him, but He will pass *safely*
through;
sea waves will be quieted, and
the Nile will dry up.
Assyria's prideful *domination* will be
reduced to nothing,
and Egypt's rule *of other nations*
will end.
12I will give strength to My people,
and in My name will they live.

So says the Eternal One.

11 **Eternal One:** Open your gates,
O Lebanon;
let the fire in to destroy
your cedars!
2Wail, O cypress, for the cedars have
fallen
and their glory lies smoldering
in the dust.
Wail, *stately* oaks of Bashan,
for your thick forest lies on the
ground!
3Listen to the shepherds *in the land,*
wailing for their *power and*
splendor that lies smoldering
in the dust!
Listen to the roar of the lions,
the pride of the Jordan that lies
smoldering in the dust!

► One of the most beautiful and pervasive images in prophetic poetry and praise psalms is that of the good shepherd. It's an appropriate and recognizable image for such a pastoral people. The Eternal One, the psalm says, is the Shepherd (Psalm 23). The Anointed King also comes to shepherd His people. But there are wicked shepherds, too; self-appointed and self-interested, they use and abuse the people.

4The Eternal my God has this to say:

Eternal One: Take care of the flock headed
for slaughter. 5The people who buy My
sheep kill them without repercussion.
Their sellers *mockingly* say, "I'm rich.
Praise the Eternal One!" Even their own
shepherds have no mercy on them.
6Because of this I promise that I, the Eternal One, will no longer show pity to the
citizens of this land. Instead, I will hand
each one over to his neighbor, each one
over to his king. Those power mongers
will oppress *them and abuse* the land, and
I will do nothing to free the sheep.

7And so I became the shepherd of the sheep headed for slaughter because of the poorest sheep. I took two staffs in my hand—one I named Favor *of God* and the other I named Unity *of the People*. With those I took care of the sheep. 8In the span of one month, I expelled three shepherds *who cared nothing for the sheep.* I had become tired of the way they have cared for my flock, and they have cared nothing for me.

Zechariah *(to the sheep)***:** 9I will watch over
you no longer. Those who are meant
to die will die. Those who are meant to
perish will perish. Whoever is left behind
will devour his neighbor!

10Then I took my staff named Favor *of*
God, and I snapped it in half, dissolving the covenant I had made with all
the people. 11On that very day when the
covenant was broken, the sheep traders*
watching me knew it was the word of the
Eternal One.

Zechariah *(to the sheep traders)***:** 12If you
think it is right, give me what I have
earned. If you don't, then keep it *for*
yourselves.

They took 30 pieces of silver, the price set as my wages, *the price of a slave.*

* 11:11 Hebrew manuscripts read, "poorest sheep."

Eternal One *(to Zechariah)*: 13Give *My deserved portion of* your fee to the potter.

And I did as He told me. I took the 30 shekels of silver—the noble price of my valuable service—and gave them to the potter in the Eternal's temple.* 14Afterward I broke my other staff, Unity *of the People,* which severed the bond between *the people of* Judah and Israel.

Eternal One *(to Zechariah)*: 15Take up once again the tools of *a shepherd, this time* a foolish shepherd, 16because I am going to raise up in this land a *new breed of* shepherd: one who does not care for the perishing, search for the young, heal the injured, or feed the hungry. This new shepherd will feast on the fat from his own flock, tearing their hoofs from their flesh.

17Watch out, worthless shepherd who
abandons the flock!
You will be made defenseless.
May the sword strike his *right* arm
and *pierce* his right eye!
May his arm hang limp at his side
so he has no strength,
and may his right eye be forever
blinded *so he can't shoot an arrow*!

12 This is the message with which the Eternal burdened *His prophet* concerning Israel—the Eternal One, who *began existence by* stretching out the sky and founding the earth and forming the spirit deep in man.

Eternal One: 2Watch *what I'm about to do*! I'm going to make Jerusalem *like* a cup of strong alcohol to *confuse* all her neighboring peoples. When they lay siege to Jerusalem, Judah will also be in the fight.* 3On that day, *when the enemies begin the attack,* I will make Jerusalem a solid stone *which cannot be moved*; any who try to lift her will only be weighed down and seriously hurt themselves. All the nations on earth will come together to oppose her. 4And on that day I promise I, the Eternal One, will confound every horse and drive every rider to madness. I will keep a watchful eye on the people of Judah even as I blind every *war* horse from every *enemy* nation. 5Every clan of Judah will *see what I am doing and* believe, "The people of Jerusalem cannot be beaten because the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies and their True God, leads them."* 6On that day, I will make the clans of Judah *unstoppable against their enemies,* a blazing pot igniting a pile of tinder, a flaming torch consuming dry bundles of wheat. They will devour all the surrounding peoples, those to the right and those to the left, but Jerusalem will remain *safe and* secure, bustling with citizens. 7The Eternal will ensure that victory comes first to the tents of Judah, so that the respect due the family of David and the citizens of Jerusalem will not outstrip the respect owed to Judah *as a whole. So Jerusalem need not boast, but neither should it fear.* 8When that day comes, the Eternal will protect her citizens as a shield does. He will make the weak who stumble become like David, *brave in battle;* the *royal* line of David will be like God, like the Special Messenger of the Eternal One who goes before them *in travels and in battle.*

9On that day, *rest assured,* I will set out to destroy all the nations who attack Jerusalem. 10And *I pledge that* I will pour out a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy on the family of David and the citizens of Jerusalem. As a result, they will look upon Me whom they pierced,* they will grieve over Him as one grieves for an only child, and they will moan and weep for Him as one weeps for a firstborn son. 11On that day, the grieving in Jerusalem will be as great as the *pagans'* grieving *ritual* honoring Hadadrimmon on the plain of Megiddo *each year*. 12-14The land *itself* will *seem to* mourn as family after family begins to grieve privately: the family of David and their wives, the family of Nathan's descendants and their wives, the family of Levi and their wives, the family of Shimei and their wives, and all the families that are left and their wives. *They will all mourn, a profound and private grief.*

13 A day is coming when a *special* spring will continually flow to purify the *royal* house of David and the citizens of Jerusalem from sin and *sexual and religious* impurities.

2The Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promises *to remove all idolatry from the land.*

* 11:13 Matthew 27:9-10 * 12:2 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 12:5 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.
* 12:10 John 19:37

Eternal One: On that day, I will certainly blot out the names of the *detestable* idols *and false gods* from the land. They will never again be remembered *or worshiped in this place*. What's more, I will cut off from the land the *disreputable* prophets and the impure spirits *they work for*. 3If prophets speak again, even their fathers and mothers who brought them into the world will *condemn them,* saying, "You don't *deserve to* live, for you speak lies and do so in the name of the Eternal." And if they *still* try to prophesy, their parents will pierce their bodies *to silence their lying voices*. 4On that day, the prophets will be clothed with the shame their visions will bring them. They will not be clothed with the hairy mantle, *the attire of some of My prophets,* to deceive *the people into believing they speak for Me*. 5And each of them will have to admit, "I am no prophet, *no servant of God*. I am a farmer, *bound to the land*. I work the soil because a man sold me into slavery when I was young." 6And if anyone happens to say, "How did you get these *ritual* wounds on your chest and back?" then the answer will come back—*another deception*—"Oh, I received these at my friend's house."

7This is a message of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

Eternal One: Sword, begin to stir; be
ready to strike My shepherd,
to strike the man at My side.
Strike the shepherd, and the sheep
of the flock will scatter.*
I'll turn My hand against the
little ones.
8It will spread across the land:
two of three will be cut down
and perish,
And one of three will be left to
survive.
9And I will put this one-third
through the fire—
refine them all as silver is
refined, test them all as gold
is tested.
They will invoke My name,
trust in My promises, and I will
answer them.
I will announce, "These are My
people";
and they will confess, "The
Eternal is our God."

14 Pay attention. The day for the Eternal is coming, *a day of judgment* when *your enemies* will plunder your goods and divide them right in front of you. 2For I am going to incite all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. The city will be *surrounded and* taken. The houses will be ransacked; *all of your treasured possessions will be looted*. Your wives and daughters will be raped. Half of the city will be forced into exile. The other half will remain in the city *to pick up the pieces*. 3The Eternal One will join in *the battle* and fight against those enemy nations *as your champion* as He would on any day of any battle. 4When that day comes, His feet will stand *securely* on the Mount of Olives, which sits east of Jerusalem. The mountain will *quake under His weight and* split in two, divided by a wide valley that runs east to west. Half of the mountain will retreat to the north, the other half to the south. 5That valley will become your escape route because the valley of My mountains will lead as far as Azel, and you shall run as you ran from the earthquake that hit during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah. *Once you are safe,* the Eternal my God will come to you with all His holy ones.

6On that day, there will be no light, no cold or *biting* frost. 7There will be a single, *continuous* day—*a unique kind of day* known only to the Eternal One—when night does not eclipse the day and when light shines through the evening. 8On that day, living waters will stream out of Jerusalem. Half of them will flow to the eastern *Dead* Sea; the other half will *descend the hills and cross the plains to* join the western *Mediterranean* Sea. These waters will flow throughout the *dry* summer as they do in the *wet* winter. 9And the Eternal will be *crowned as* King over all the earth. On that day, the Eternal will be one and His name will be one. 10The *mountainous* land around Jerusalem will be turned into plains from Geba to Rimmon, south of the city. Jerusalem itself will *then* sit prominently in her place between Benjamin's gate, the location of the first gate, and the corner gate; she'll sit between Hananel's Tower and the royal winepresses. 11And Jerusalem will remain secure, bustling with residents, because she will never again be destined for destruction.

12Every nation that attempts to wage war against Jerusalem will be struck with a plague. The Eternal will infect them *with a disease* making their flesh decay even as

* 13:7 Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27

they stand, their eyes decay in their sockets, and their tongues decay in their mouths. 13When that *horrible* day arrives, the Eternal will provoke them to panic, so that *in their confusion* they will grab each other *for safety and then turn* and attack each other. 14Even Judah will *be forced to* fight in Jerusalem. And the riches of all the surrounding *enemy* nations will be gathered together—gold, silver, and *costly* clothing piled deep. 15Then the same disease *that plagues the enemy forces* will infect the horses, mules, camels, donkeys—whatever domesticated animals are in their *battle* camps.

► The day of the Eternal One is coming. It is a day of judgment when a great final battle is fought. Jerusalem and her people are under attack; and the city, it seems, falls to her enemies. But ultimately, God's people do not fight alone. The Lord comes—commanding the army of heaven—to rescue and defend His people. Ultimately, He is crowned King over all the earth. In that day, Jerusalem is transformed and reinstated as God's holy city; it becomes the center of the world, the source of life-giving waters. Even her enemies make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship and adore the one True God.

16In days to come, all people who took up arms against Jerusalem *and survived will make a choice:* they will *either* journey to Jerusalem every year to keep the Feast of Booths and to worship the King—the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies—17or the families of nations will refuse the journey to Jerusalem to adore the King, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. The rains will never come to those *who refuse the journey*. 18Even the family of *people known as* Egypt, if they do not come up to and travel through *the gates of Jerusalem* to present themselves *to God,* the Eternal will afflict them with the same plague of drought He'll use to crush those nations who won't keep the Feast of Booths. 19This is the punishment Egypt and the *enemy* nations can expect if they refuse the journey to keep the Feast of Booths.

20On that day, *every aspect of the land will be ritually pure.* Engraved on the bells worn by horses will be *the same phrase on the high priest's turban*: "Sacred to the Eternal One." The cooking pots used in the house of the Eternal will be *as sacred* as those *collection* bowls used at the altar. 21*In fact* every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be *treated as* sacred to the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, so that anyone who offers a sacrifice may borrow them and use them to boil *the meat of the sacrifice*. In that day, no merchant* will be found in the temple of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

* 14:21 Literally, Canaanite

MALACHI

A call to remain faithful to God

The message of Malachi, a prophet

The Book of Malachi is the last of the so-called Minor Prophets and the final book in the Old Testament. It serves as a fitting conclusion to the collection, for it brings the story of God and Israel to a temporary close with an open question that will be resolved in the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth.

The identity of Malachi has been debated for centuries. Because the name "Malachi" means "My messenger," it may be understood either as the name of a prophet or as a title. That same title is employed in anticipation of the future coming of "My messenger," whose arrival prepares the way of the Lord (3:1). Since Malachi is not mentioned in any other book of the Bible or writing of the ancient Near East, all that is known about him comes from this one book; unfortunately, nothing biographical may be gleaned from it except that the writer and his audience are living in the shadow of a rebuilt temple.

When the Jews returned from exile, they found life back home less than promising. Over time they grew increasingly disheartened by the hardships and injustices they faced; as a result, they began to renege on some of their fundamental promises to God. They may have kept the superficial commitments required by religion, but they violated the spirit and heart of their relationship with God. He wants to remind Israel of two things: He is faithful to His promises, and He requires His covenant partners to remain faithful as well. One day He will come and judge all people on earth for their faithfulness or unfaithfulness to Him. To drive his message home, Malachi arranges his prose around a series of questions and answers designed both to challenge the poor behaviors and attitudes of God's people and to vindicate God for how he has chosen to deal with His people. This form of disputation is found nowhere else in the prophets. The prophet condemns a wide array of sins: offering to God less than the best, marrying outsiders and idol worshipers, divorcing, fornicating, withholding tithes, and oppressing the poor—widows, orphans, and outsiders. Such sins not only grieve God but threaten the well-being of the nation.

In the final verses, Malachi urges his audience to remember the law God gave at Mount Horeb. Israel's future—whether it be one of prosperity or adversity—will be tied to how well they keep the directives and rules God commanded. The prophet tells them to look forward to the coming of Elijah before the day of the Eternal arrives. Moses and Elijah represent the law and prophets, testify to God's covenant loyalty, and call God's own to a renewed sense of faithfulness and trust.

1 The Eternal One burdened *His messenger,* Malachi, with these words to deliver to Israel.

Eternal One: [2]I have loved you *as someone loves his dear family.*

Israelites: How have You loved us?

Eternal One: Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Even still I loved Jacob, [3]but I hated Esau.* *I chose you, and I rejected him.* I have made his highlands desolate and his inheritance for *scavenging* jackals in the wilderness.

Edom *(vowing)***:** [4]We are defeated *now, but we will be back.* We will return and rebuild out of the destruction.

Eternal One: They can build *again,* but I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will tear *Esau's descendants* down *again and again* and brand them as a land of wickedness and as a people whom the Eternal will despise forever. [5]You will see *what I've done for you* with your own eyes, *Jacob's children,* and you will say, "May the Eternal One be magnified beyond the border of Israel."

[6](to the priests who despise the name of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies) A son respects his father, and a servant fears* his master. If I am your Father, then where is My respect *from you*? And if I am your *glorious* Master, then where is your fear *of Me*? *From your self-centered oblivion* you ask, "How have we despised Your name?" [7]As you put polluted grain offerings on My *clean* altar, you ask, "In what way have we polluted You?" Your actions tell *your fellow priests and the people whose sacrifices you offer* that you all may despise the Eternal One's table. [8]When you offer blind *animals* for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you present sick and lame *animals,* isn't that evil? Try bringing these *useless animals* to your *foreign* governor when you need his favor; will he grant *your request* and lift up your face *to his to dignify you*? *Of course not.*

So said the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

[9]And now beg before *the face of* God and *try to* please Him so He might show you favor. With these offerings you present, will He *lift up your face to His to* show His approval?

God demands that they close the temple door; it is better to have no sacrifice than to offer service without full devotion. He wants devoted followers giving their best.

Eternal One: [10]Who among you would shut the doors that would keep *Me from smelling your sacrifice and* you from wasting time kindling the fire on My altar? I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, don't delight in you. I will not accept any *grain* offering you present, [11]for from the rising of the sun to its descent, My name is great among the nations and in every place smoke of a pure offering rises up to Me. Even those nations *whom I haven't chosen as My own recognize* My name is great—*those who don't recognize Me as* the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

[12]But you, *My chosen ones,* are soiling My name when you say, "The table of the Lord is dirty, and the food on it is despised," [13]and when you sigh contemptuously and say, "Don't you see how boring *all these required rituals are*?" You bring stolen or *dirty gifts*—your own lame and sick *animals* or *animals you found torn apart by beasts in the wilderness*—to the offering. Should I accept what you present? [14]*I say,* cursed is the deceiver who promises *to sacrifice* the *finest* male in his flock *if I grant his request* but who sacrifices the imperfect one to the Lord instead. I tell you, I am a great King. My name is feared among the nations *who aren't even My own.*

So says the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies.

2 And now this command is for your benefit, O priests *who despise the One you serve.*

Eternal One: [2]If you will not listen and if you will not devote yourselves to giving glory to My name, then I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will send the curse on you and will curse those blessings *you give to Me on behalf of yourselves and your laypeople.* In fact, I have cursed those blessings since you are refusing to dedicate yourselves *to Me.*

* 1:2-3 Romans 9:13 * 1:6 Most manuscripts omit "fears."

God's message to Judah through Malachi is a double entendre. On one level, God is rebuking people who commit adultery and abandon their spouses. God hates divorce because of its disastrous consequences on lives, families, and communities. The effects of broken marriages can last a lifetime, even if people fool themselves into thinking otherwise. God stands as the first and most important witness to every marriage contract, and He desires for His people to take those vows seriously. On another level, however, God is rebuking all of Israel—His bride—who has committed adultery against the Eternal One by abandoning Him to worship other gods. As chronic adulterers, God's people don't realize their illicit relationships with pagan goddesses and foreign governments have broken their covenant with Him and are causing them to stray from God's requirements. They mix cultic rituals with God's prescribed rituals, and they genuinely don't understand why God won't respond to their prayers, blessings, and sacrifices. Israel demonstrates how people can become insensitive to frequent sin and how that sin can affect their contemporaries and future generations. According to the prophet, naiveté is no excuse for breaking His commands.

3Look, I am rebuking your children—*your seed whom you offer.* I will spread dung on your faces, the dung *of your* festival offerings, and someone will take you away with it.* 4Then you will know I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, sent this command to you as a reminder of My covenant with Levi *and your responsibilities regarding it.** 5My covenant with Levi was filled with life and peace, and I gave those gifts to him out of respect. He feared Me, and he was in awe of My name *and all I was purported to be.* 6He spoke the law of truth, and falsehood was not found on his lips. In peace and justice he walked with Me, and he turned many from iniquity *by his words and example;* 7the lips of the priest should be a gateway to knowledge, and the laypeople should seek the law from his mouth because he is the messenger of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. 8-9But you *priests* have turned from the *straight and smooth* way *you should be guarding.* You have caused many to stumble upon the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi! So I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, have made you hated and humiliated *as you sit in that dung heap* in front of all the people because you are not keeping My ways. Instead you are picking and choosing which of My laws *to teach and follow.*

10Do we not all share one father? Has not one God created us all? Why do we all act deceitfully with our brothers *and sisters* and soil the covenant *between God and* our ancestors? 11*First of all,* Judah has acted deceitfully, and an atrocity has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem because Judah has soiled the holy place of the Eternal One—*His earthly throne* which He loves—by marrying a daughter of a foreign god, *by joining pagan families and worshiping pagan goddesses.* 12May the Eternal One cut off from *His community among* the tents of Jacob the man who does this—the one stirring, answering,* and presenting a *grain* offering to the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. 13And this is a second thing you do: you cover the altar of the Eternal One *not with the blood of perfect sacrifices but* with *your own* tears, weeping and groaning *as if you were worshiping other gods* because He does not accept the *grain* offering you present or receive it with delight. 14Yet you ask, "Why *won't He accept our offerings*?" It is because the Eternal One has been a witness to the way you have dealt deceitfully with the wife of your youth, although she is your companion and covenant wife, *by going off with that foreign woman!* 15Has He not made *you and your wife* one? You belong to Him, body and spirit. And what does He seek *from such a union*? Godly children.* So guard yourselves; *be true to* the wife of your youth, and stop being unfaithful.

Eternal One: 16For I, the God of Israel, hate divorce! I, the Commander of *heavenly* armies, despise it when people wrap themselves in violence like a garment. So

* 2:3 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. * 2:4 Deuteronomy 33:8-11 * 2:12 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.
* 2:15 Meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

guard yourselves; *be true to your wife* and not unfaithful.

17Your *constant* blathering has exhausted the Eternal One. Yet you ask, "How have we wearied Him *with our prayers*?" It is because you say, "All evildoers are good in the eyes of the Eternal One, and He delights in them," or *you ask*, "Where is the God of justice?"

3 These are the words of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies:

Eternal One: Pay attention! I am
sending My messenger,
and he will clear the road ahead
for Me.*
The Lord you seek will suddenly
arrive at His temple.
And the Messenger of God's
covenant, your soul's delight,
Watch, because He, too, is coming.

God declares His Anointed One will come, and the way will be prepared. Notice has been given: be ready.

2Can anyone live through the day when
He arrives?
Will anyone be left standing when
He appears?
He is a purifying fire;
He is like lye soap.
3Like a refiner of silver,
He will purify the descendants of
Levi—
Until they are pure, unalloyed gold and
silver.
Then they *will draw near to* the
Eternal One,
Presenting offerings with righteous,
clean hands.

4Then the Eternal One will *unequivocally* accept the sweet offering of Judah and Jerusalem as He did in the days of old, as in the former years *when the covenant was new*.

Eternal One: 5Then I will approach you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the *constant* sorcerers; the *chronic* adulterers; the *habitual* liars; those who *continue* cheating wages from their hired laborer, a widow, or an orphan; and those who always reject the immigrant, not fearing Me, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies. 6Because I am the Eternal One, I never change; as a result, you children of Jacob have not been destroyed *though your blessing may have been delayed*.

7From the days when your ancestors *served Me,* you have turned from and ignored My statutes. Return to Me and I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will return to you. But you *shameless people* ask, "How will we return? 8Will someone steal from God?" Yet you are *always* stealing from Me! But you *self-centered people still* ask, "How have we stolen from You?" In the tithes and the offerings *you have not given Me as the law requires*! 9You are cursed with a curse, for as an entire nation you are stealing from Me. 10*To rectify this situation, you must* bring the entire tithe into the storage house *in the temple* so that there may be food *for Me and for the Levites* in My house. *Feel free to* test Me now in this. See whether or not I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will open the windows of heaven to you and pour a blessing down upon you until all needs are satisfied. 11I will rebuke the *swarm of locusts* devouring your crops, and the devourer will not cause the produce you have grown in the earth to decay or the vines in the field to drop *their grapes*. 12And all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight. I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promise *you this*.

13Your words *of rebellion* against Me have been strong. Yet you ask, "What have we said against You?" 14You have said, "Serving God is a waste *of time*," and, "What benefits have we received by following Him as we mourned on our journey before the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies? 15Now we *believe the bluster of* the arrogant and agree they are blessed; we encourage the wicked who also test God and escape."

16Then those who fear the Eternal One consulted each other *about God's charges, each one to his neighbor,* and the Eternal One paid attention and heard. A book of remembrance was written before Him for those who honored the Eternal One and valued His name *and the good reputation*.

Eternal One: 17And they will be Mine on that day when I, the Eternal, Commander

* 3:1 Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27

of *heavenly* armies, make My unique treasure—*which is the kingdom of Israel.* I will have pity on them as a man has pity on his son who serves him.

18And you will return and notice the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those serving God and those not serving Him.

4 **Eternal One:** For behold the day *of burning* will come, smoldering like a furnace. The arrogant and the evil will be set ablaze like the *worthless* chaff *of grain.* Neither roots nor branch will remain. I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promise this. 2But for you, the ones who tremble at the sound of My name, *a warm* sun of righteousness will come forth with healing in its rays, and you will go out, springing from the stalls like calves in open pasture. 3Then you will trample the criminal; your feet will make them ash on the day I am preparing. I, the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, promise this.

4Remember the instructions which Moses, My *faithful* servant, received from Me at *Mount* Horeb and gave to all Israel. *Remember* its statutes and judgments.

5Keep watch. I am sending Elijah the prophet to you before the arrival of the great and terrible day of the Eternal One, 6and he will return parents' hearts to their children and children's hearts to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land *of promise* with a curse *of annihilation.*

► These verses simultaneously display retrospective and prospective dimensions of Malachi's conversation with the people, especially the temple priests, of Jerusalem. Malachi calls his contemporaries to remember the life and message of Moses and future generations to look forward to the life and message of the Elijah who is to come. As Ezra in the fifth century B.C. is like Elijah, reflecting these expectations, so John the Baptist is the messenger par excellence 400 years later when he prepares the world for Jesus of Nazareth, God's Anointed One.

TRANSITION
FROM THE
OLD TESTAMENT
TO THE
NEW TESTAMENT

THE NEW COVENANT:

Completing What God Started

The Eternal One and His Covenants

One of the clear challenges to reading the Bible is understanding how the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament relate to one another. Together, the Scriptures reveal a single divine drama detailing how God's good creation has become badly broken through the offenses Adam and Eve began and we perpetuate, and how He is reconciling the now alienated and dark world with His perfect and holy self. The Old Testament covenant, first shared with Abraham then detailed to Moses in the law, was God's first good and holy means of reconciling His people and recreating the land; but eventually the law proved inadequate to fix our broken-down world. The New Testament details God's new covenant not just with Abraham's descendants but with the whole world, enacted through the life and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

God's Covenant with Abraham (Blessing)

One of the most stirring stories in Scripture begins when an unsuspecting man from Ur, a city located in modern Iraq, is called by God to leave everything he knows—land, family, possessions, familiarity—and to travel to a place God promises to show him (Genesis 12). His name is Abram. If Abram (meaning "exalted father") is obedient, he is told, then he will receive a new land, become head of a large nation, have a great name, and become a blessing to all the people of the world. This is a spectacular offer, but a great name and influence over the nations comes at a cost: the sign of covenant blessing is the physical mark of male circumcision. Abram is commanded to circumcise himself and all males in his extended family. Further, even though Abram has many other offspring, God will select which son will inherit the covenant blessing (Genesis 17). Once Abram agrees to God's conditions, the Eternal establishes a covenant with Abram and grants him a new name, Abraham (meaning "father of a multitude"). Throughout the remaining chapters of Genesis, God shows the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He requires obedience to the covenant so that His people may remain in the land of Canaan and become a blessing for the surrounding nations.

God's Covenant with Israel (Law)

The law (or *torah*) is a key component to the covenant agreement between the Eternal One and Israel. Moses receives it from God on Mount Sinai and declares it to the people following their divine rescue from Egyptian captivity. Now that the Eternal has saved them from a harsh life in Egypt, He expects certain behaviors from them as they bind themselves to their covenant God and prepare to settle this new land He has designated for them. As the people rebel in all sorts of ways against these Ten Directives (Exodus 20), over 600 other stipulations (recorded in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are given to explain in greater detail how God expects Israel to live.

Even as physical circumcision marks the men of Israel as participants in the Abrahamic covenant of blessing, God destines all people to receive a spiritual

mark of covenant through a circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6). Prophets such as Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:26-27) look to a day when there will be a New Covenant in which God's Spirit "marks" people who obey the covenant requirements. The New Covenant brings about an internalized law so that a person does not have to depend on the mediation of a priest in the temple to know God; it institutes a universalized law so that any person—regardless of age, gender, class, or ethnicity—can participate in God's covenant.

God's Covenant with David *(Messiah)*

But how will Israel's covenant with God be internalized and universalized? Who will inaugurate the New Covenant? Genesis 3:15 hints that this individual will be a regular human being—a child of Adam and Eve—but perhaps this person will be something more. Several centuries after God gives the law on Mount Sinai, He makes another covenant oath. God promises to King David that one of his offspring will have a perpetual dynasty over Israel (2 Samuel 7:12-16). From then on the people of Israel look for a son of David to rule Israel and complete what King David started. Eventually this coming king came to be called *Messiah*, which means, "Anointed One."

Many in the first century A.D. wonder if the Anointed One, the person they expected to free the Jewish people from Roman rule, will come in their day. Some think he might be John the Baptist (Matthew 11:9). Others attempt to take up this royal mantle themselves and draw a large number of followers, but their movements come to nothing (Acts 5:36-37). Every Jew who longs for God's Anointed King knows that when He arrives, things will be different: the temple corruption will end, the Roman occupiers will be ousted, the impurity of the Gentiles will be removed, peace and justice will be established, and Jerusalem and Israel will be as they were in the glory days under King David.

When Jesus comes preaching the kingdom of God, performing miracles, and gathering a band of followers, questions are raised about His identity and role. But Peter, speaking for the rest of the disciples, gets it right when he confesses Jesus to be God's Anointed, the Liberating King (Luke 9:20). Gospel writers such as Matthew and Luke recognize Jesus as this longed-for ruler. They provide genealogies at the beginnings of their Gospels to show how Jesus is the true offspring of Eve (Genesis 3:15), the true son of David (2 Samuel 7:12). The Gospels go on to describe how Jesus fulfills the expectations for the Anointed One, in most unexpected ways.

God's Covenant with the Church (Spirit)

With the New Covenant and the enduring presence of Israel's Anointed One, there also comes an ethic inspired by them. Jesus does not come to set aside the law but to fulfill it; for Him that means living the law perfectly to demonstrate what the law looks like in practice. Unlike some of His opponents, Jesus is not concerned with theoretical debates, legal semantics, or pious minutia; rather He is concerned with the law's greater purpose—guiding members of the covenant to love God and love others. Remarkably, the 613 laws of the Old Testament can be summed up in these two great commandments (Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus intimates all the laws and prophecies in the Scripture are about this love ethic. Paul, Jesus' emissary, will later reflect this same teaching when he writes that the believer's view of and loyalty toward God directly correlates to how he or she treats others (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14).

This love ethic is actualized in the New Covenant God makes with the church. In a remarkable scene following Jesus' resurrection, the Lord appears to His disciples and breathes His Spirit on them (John 20:22). The Spirit then empowers them to go to other lands with authority and power to carry Jesus' love ethic and extend His eternal kingdom. A similar but more public event happens during the Pentecost festival in Jerusalem (Acts 2) when the Spirit comes on 120 of Jesus' followers as they are gathered in one place; the incident is so loud and raucous that crowds from other nations come to see the commotion. As they gather, they hear the good news in their own languages. For the Gospel writers and Paul, the genuine mark of being in the New Covenant and a member of the universal church is the mark of God's Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).

Reading the Old and New Testaments together is like reading two parts of a fantastic story. The first part is a cliffhanger without the second part, and the second part has no context without the first part. Before Jesus ascends into heaven, He explains to His followers how His suffering, death, and resurrection are foreshadowed in the law, the prophecies, and the psalms (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Therefore, these New Testament events are the culmination of God's Old Testament covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David. They allow all who obey Jesus' teachings to receive life, meaning, and purpose, both in this world and the next.

THE TITLES OF JESUS

Early Christians looked for language to do justice to who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. They told stories, used titles, composed hymns, formed new rituals, and adapted earlier traditions in order to convey something true and meaningful about what they had come to believe about the role Jesus of Nazareth is playing in the unfolding drama of redemption. Of all these ways of expressing His significance, it was the titles attributed to Jesus—perhaps more than any other element—that helped to shape early Christian beliefs about and devotion to Jesus.

We want to examine a few of His most significant titles, but first we must consider the role Jesus Himself played in using these titles. A casual glance at the Gospels reveals that Jesus used only one title when speaking of Himself: "Son of Man." He never referred to Himself as the Anointed One, the Lord, the Savior, or the Son of God. He reluctantly accepted certain claims about His identity, but He did not make them of Himself. However, many christological titles—as they are called—in one way or another go back to Jesus. The kinds of things Jesus said and did during His public ministry—especially those that landed Him in trouble with the authorities—are the raw materials for later Christian reflections on His significance and the titles they employ. When, for example, Jesus claimed to forgive sins, His opponents accused Him of blasphemy for usurping a role that properly belongs to God (Luke 5:21). When He stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee with a word, His disciples wondered who He was since the storm appeared to obey Him (Matthew 8:27). When asked directly by Jewish leaders whether He was the Anointed One, Jesus responded with a cryptic answer about the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). In the looming crisis after Jesus' death and resurrection, His followers considered all He had said and done so they could answer once and for all the question, who is this Jesus? Answers to ultimate questions never come quickly. Over time the early followers of Jesus constructed a coherent story of His life, adorned with these titles drawn from tradition, experience, and Scripture. We turn now to consider a few of those titles.

Rabbi

At first, the earliest followers of Jesus thought of Him primarily as a teacher because He exuded an authority no other teacher of their day appeared to have. For that reason, some called Him *rabbi,* which means, "teacher." A rabbi was expected to know the Hebrew Scriptures—which we call the Old Testament—teach them, and help people apply them to their lives. People came to Jesus with Scripture-based questions such as, What is the greatest commandment? Who is my neighbor? How should we pray? He answered sometimes directly and at other times indirectly in parables, but His answer was always consistent with the Scripture. Jesus developed a reputation as a master storyteller and purveyor of God's wisdom, and in the first century, teaching and wisdom went hand in hand.

Son of Man

Jesus spoke of Himself consistently and cryptically as the "Son of Man." This title, more than any other, has stirred a great deal of debate: Where did it come from? What does it mean? Is it really a title at all? While scholars disagree over answers to these questions, we can shed some light on the significance of this phrase to Jesus and His earliest followers. It likely comes from Daniel's vision of one like a "son of man" who comes with the clouds and is presented to the Ancient of Days (God). In this heavenly scene, God grants him a kingdom that includes every nation and lasts forever (Daniel 7:13-14). Although Daniel may not have intended "son of man" as a title, it became associated with Jesus because it hints at His heavenly origin, makes Him a representative of God's people, and foreshadows the universal rule He will exercise forever. If Daniel's vision is the background of Jesus' title, then Jesus' use of it to refer to Himself represents a bold claim about who He is and what He has come to do.

Anointed One

At some point it became clear to His followers that Jesus is the *Messiah* or "Anointed One" (other translations simply transliterate this title from the Greek as "Christ"). According to their conviction, God has anointed Jesus and set Him apart for a special mission, namely, to restore God's people, repair the brokenness that has overtaken the world, and establish true and lasting peace. Since their hope of such a leader was rooted in God's covenant with King David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), the title "Son of David" is a related title referring to Jesus' role as an ideal king who comes to rule in the place of His exalted ancestor.

In ***The Voice*** translation, we have often used the phrase "Liberating King" in conjunction with "Anointed One" to express both the royal and the saving aspects of the One who has been set apart. Jesus is truly a king who comes to liberate the world from sin, death, disease, evil, and oppression.

Son of God

The title "Son" or "Son of God" underscores both Jesus' intimate relationship with God and His exalted status. It is used in a variety of ways, depending on the context. On one level, "Son" describes Jesus' role as the "Anointed One" (Matthew 16:16), God's select agent to restore the world after the damage done by sin and death. To put it another way, this title is a way of expressing the claim that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. On another level, "Son" reflects Jesus' exalted status as Lord and Master. Paul writes that Jesus is designated the Son of God with power upon His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3-4). And on a third level, the New Testament teaches that the Son's coming makes it possible for those who believe to also become children of God. If Jesus is the natural born Son, then those who trust in God have been adopted into His eternal family and are fully enfranchised members of God's people.

Lord

Christians must be identified not only by what they believe but by what they do. As we read the New Testament, it becomes clear that Christians are those who gather together and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2). They direct prayers to Him, compose hymns in His honor, baptize in His name, and gather around the Lord's table for a sacred meal. These practices define the Christian faith and are associated with the title "Lord." This title was applied to

Jesus not long after His resurrection. Early Christians understood He was "master," which ranked His followers as "servants," a typical Christian self-designation. Since "Lord" is also used to translate God's divine name in the Greek Scripture, this title links Jesus with the divine name, character, and actions. In relationship with God the Father who is the source and goal of creation, the Lord Jesus is the agent of creation and the means of its ultimate redemption (1 Corinthians 8:6). Perhaps more than any, the title "Lord" situates Jesus in close association with God, so close that Jesus is included within the divine identity.

Savior

The title "Savior" occurs 24 times in the New Testament. Roughly half of those refer to God; the others refer to Jesus. The title emphasizes the close bond between God the Father and Jesus the Son and the similar functions shared by them in establishing peace and justice in the world. The title literally describes someone who provides salvation deliverance from enemies and protection from harm. This salvation could be more than temporal and physical or eternal and spiritual.

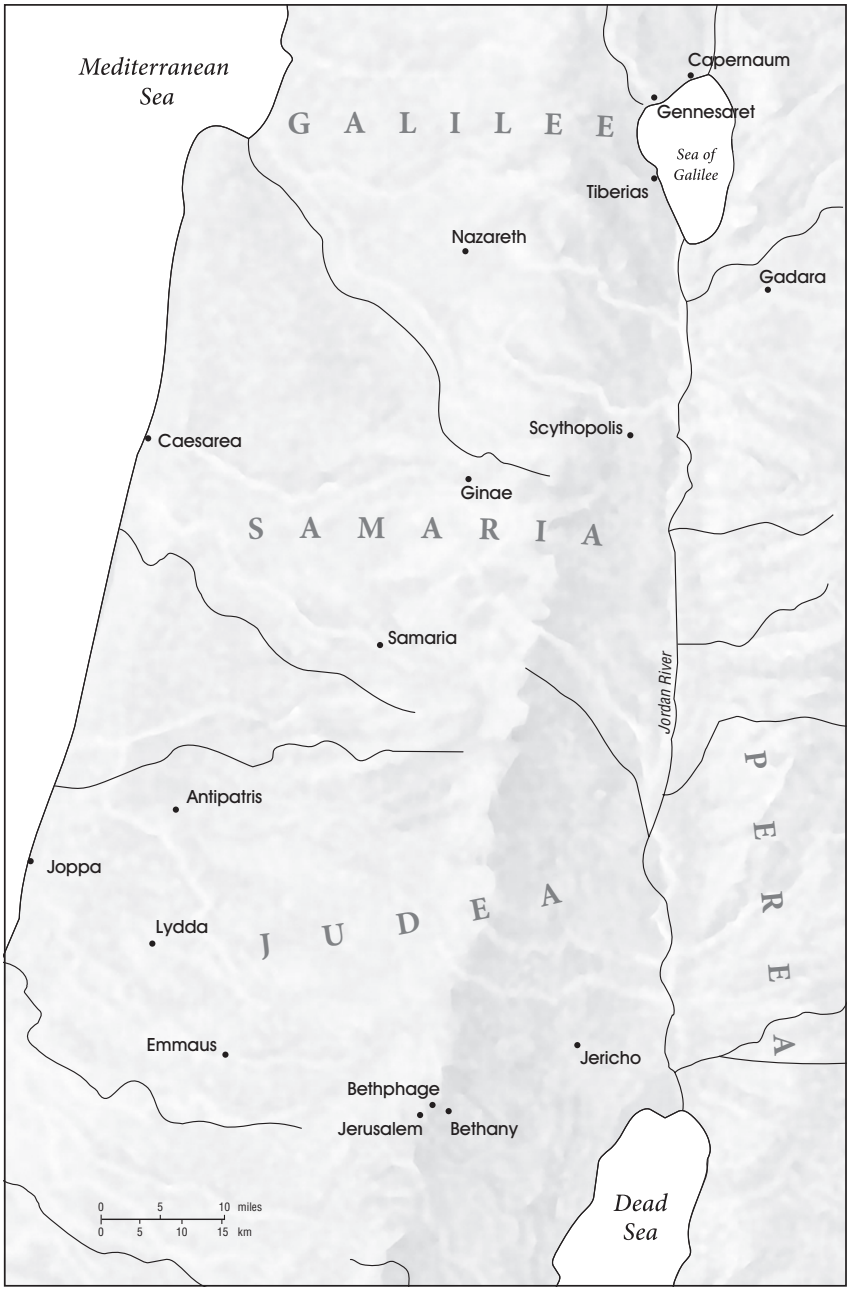
Confessing Jesus as "Savior" or "Lord" was risky in an empire dominated by powerful political figures who insisted they be hailed with the same titles. To be considered loyal to Rome, citizens were required publicly to praise and honor the emperor as "Lord" and "Savior." Christians refused to do so because they knew only Jesus was worthy of those honors. As a result, Roman officials distrusted the Christians and subjected them to persecution.

The Logos (the Voice)

Early Christians referred to Jesus as the *Logos*. By doing so, they were adopting and adapting an accepted religious and philosophical category to express select aspects of Jesus' nature and work (see especially John 1 and Hebrews 1). Recognizing that no one English word or category adequately conveys the meaning of *Logos,* we have elected to translate the word as "Voice." Some early Christian theologians employ the title to emphasize Jesus' existence prior to His entrance into our world, to underscore His unique role as mediator and sustainer of creation, to highlight His function as one who reveals the truth of God, and to express Jesus' divinity while at the same time distinguishing Him from God the Father. The title is closely associated with the claim that Jesus embodies the wisdom of God.

Many other titles in the New Testament express Jesus' significance: the Prophet like Moses, the Second Adam, the Image of God, the Wisdom of God, the High Priest, and the Alpha and the Omega, just to name a few. No title completely captures the truth of who Jesus is and what He has and will accomplish in redeeming the world. Still, early Christians tried—with the language and traditions available to them—to express key elements of Jesus' significance as they understood them. They went back to Scripture, mined their traditions, and discovered how various images, prophecies, hopes, dreams, and aspirations converged around Jesus whose remarkable life, death, and resurrection became for them, and for us, the center of life.

NEW TESTAMENT



The Holy Land in the Time of Jesus

MATTHEW

Royal lineage of Jesus of Nazareth

By Matthew, the apostle

All the Gospels are anonymous. But when early Christians began collecting them in the second century, they needed a way to distinguish each one from the others. So they gave them titles. The title "According to Matthew" is affixed to this Gospel because church tradition had credited it to Matthew, one of the twelve. It is fitting that Matthew's Gospel is the first book in the New Testament because it was the favorite Gospel of the early Christians. You see, the first disciples were all Jews; and Matthew sought to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of David, sent by God to rule His kingdom. So Matthew, more than the other Gospel writers, found Jesus' messiahship in strange and wonderful places where Jews would know to look: in genealogies, titles, numerology, and fulfilled prophecies.

Matthew wants his mainly Jewish audience, as God's chosen people, to consider how Jesus is the true son of Abraham, the ideal for Israel, even the perfect candidate to be the Anointed One. So he shows how Jesus identified with Israel—even with their spending time in exile in Egypt—and yet, unlike Israel, He did not fall into disobedience. As Matthew tells the story, Jesus has come to fill the Scripture full by His teachings and His example. In this way, Jesus is a new Moses, a new Lawgiver. But again, He is greater than Moses because He gives the law and writes it directly on the hearts of His disciples and of any who care to overhear the message of the kingdom of heaven. According to Matthew, five sermons of Jesus complete the picture of Jesus as Lawgiver. They don't replace the five books of Torah, but His words refine and complement God's instruction to the people of the new covenant.

For Matthew, Jesus is more than the Messiah, the fulfiller of prophecies, the true son of Abraham, and the new Moses who brings a new law: He is "God with us" who promises to be with us forever. That means that Jesus is no mere mortal: He is God in the flesh who saves us from our sins. The coming of Jesus into the world fulfills God's earlier promises to bring about redemption and a new creation. These images of Jesus that Matthew paints so beautifully fired the imaginations of Christians for centuries so that today, when we open our New Testaments, we find Matthew is first in line.

This is the story of Jesus the Son of David, the Anointed One, as told by Matthew, a disciple of the Lord. Now this account has been recorded for all those children of Abraham who have become followers of the true heir of the line of David so that they may know in whom they have believed. Because of the common Jewish heritage, Jesus of Nazareth can be understood—His miraculous healings, countless teachings filled with parables, righteous life, and lineage traced back to Abraham—as the One the prophets have spoken of since the early days.

This same Jesus is the One whom the Jews have been waiting for all these years. From the time when John was ritually cleansing people through baptism in the Jordan, as a sign of rethinking their lives of sin, to the wonderfully inspired teaching on the mountain in Galilee, throughout His parables, in His horrible death, and after His marvelous resurrection just days later, Jesus Himself is the King of the kingdom of heaven whom He taught about. There is no one like Jesus. The prophets of old looked for Him, David sang of Him, and Jewish leaders feared Him. He is the great King, the Teacher of wisdom, and the Prophet that Moses said was coming into the world.

The story begins with the lineage that establishes Jesus as the true Son of David.

1 This is the family history, the genealogy, of Jesus the Anointed, *the coming King. You will see in this history that* Jesus is descended from King David, and that He is also descended from Abraham.

It begins with Abraham, whom God called into a special, chosen, covenanted relationship, and who was the founding father of the nation of Israel.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac;
Isaac was the father of Jacob; Jacob was
the father of Judah and of Judah's *11*
brothers; 3 Judah was the father of Perez
and Zerah (and Perez and Zerah's mother
was Tamar);

Tamar was Judah's widowed daughter-in-law; she dressed up like a prostitute and seduced her father-in-law, all so she could keep this very family line alive.

Perez was the father of Hezron; Hezron
was the father of Ram; 4 Ram was the
father of Amminadab; Amminadab was
the father of Nahshon; Nahshon was the
father of Salmon; 5 Salmon was the father
of Boaz (and Boaz's mother was Rahab);

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who heroically hid Israelite spies from hostile authorities who wanted to kill them.

Boaz was the father of Obed (his mother
was Ruth, *a Moabite woman who converted to the Hebrew faith*); Obed was the father
of Jesse; 6 and Jesse was the father of David,
who was the king *of the nation of Israel.*
David was the father of Solomon (his
mother *was Bathsheba, and she* was married to a man named Uriah);

► Solomon's mother was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a soldier in David's army. She was bathing in her courtyard one evening when David spied her and became interested in her. Later Bathsheba got pregnant during an adulterous liaison with David, so David had Uriah killed in battle and then married his widow. David and Bathsheba's first baby died, but later Bathsheba got pregnant again and gave birth to Solomon.

7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam;
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah; Abijah
was the father of Asa; 8 Asa was the father
of Jehoshaphat; Jehoshaphat was the
father of Joram; Joram was the father of
Uzziah; 9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham;
Jotham was the father of Ahaz; Ahaz was
the father of Hezekiah; 10 Hezekiah was
the father of Manasseh; Manasseh was the
father of Amon; Amon was the father of

Josiah; [11]Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, and Josiah's family lived at the time *when God's chosen* people *of Israel* were deported *from the promised land* to Babylon.

[12]After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah had a son, Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel; [13]Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud; Abiud was the father of Eliakim; Eliakim was the father of Azor; [14]Azor was the father of Zadok; Zadok was the father of Achim; Achim was the father of Eliud; [15]Eliud was the father of Eleazar; Eleazar was the father of Matthan; Matthan was the father of Jacob; [16]Jacob was the father of Joseph, who married a woman named Mary. It was Mary who gave birth to Jesus, and it is Jesus who is *the Savior,* the Anointed One.

[17]Abraham and David were linked with 14 generations, 14 generations link David to the Babylonian exile, and 14 more take us from the exile to the birth of the Anointed.

► This long genealogy is given for a good reason: to show how this Jesus fulfills the prophecies that tell us the Anointed One will be a descendant of Abraham and of David.

Some of the women in Jesus' line are given to show how God is gracious to everyone, even to prostitutes and adulterers. Because some of the women listed weren't Israelites, but were strangers and foreigners, they foreshadow all the foreigners God will adopt into His church through Jesus. Some of the children in God's family are conceived under strange circumstances (like Tamar's twins being conceived as she played the harlot, and like King Solomon being born to adulterous parents). Now that it has been established this is an unusual family, what happens next shouldn't be a surprise—the conception of a baby under very strange circumstances.

[18]So here, *finally,* is the story of the birth of Jesus the Anointed* *(it is quite a remarkable story)*:

Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, *son of David.* They hadn't married. And yet, some time well before their wedding date, Mary learned that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. [19]Joseph, because he was kind and upstanding and honorable, wanted to spare Mary shame. He did not wish to cause her more embarrassment than necessary.

► This is remarkable, because Mary has never had sex. She and Joseph have not even spent very much time alone, but they are pledged to each other and their wedding feast has been planned.

She has never even kissed a man. She is a virgin, yet she is pregnant. Miraculous! On the other hand, Joseph suspects that Mary has cheated on him and had sex with another man. He knows he will have to break their engagement, but he decides to do this quietly. Mary understands that it is God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, who has made her pregnant.

[20]Now when Joseph had decided to act on his instincts, a messenger of the Lord came to him in a dream.

Messenger of the Lord: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to wed Mary *and bring her into your home and family* as your wife. *She did not sneak off and sleep with someone else*—rather, she conceived the baby she now carries through the miraculous wonderworking of the Holy Spirit. [21]She will have a son, and you will name Him Jesus, *which means "the Lord saves,"* because this Jesus is the person who will save *all of* His people from sin.

[24]Joseph woke up from his dream and did exactly what the messenger had told him to do: he married Mary and brought her into his home as his wife [25](though he did not consummate their marriage until after her son was born). *And when the baby was born,* Joseph named Him Jesus, *Savior.**

[22]Years and years ago, *Isaiah,* a prophet of Israel, foretold the story *of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus*:

* 1:18 "Christ" and "Messiah" are translated as "Anointed" or "the Anointed One." * 1:25 Verses 24 and 25 have been moved before verse 22 to help the reader understand the continuity of the passage.

23A virgin will conceive and bear a Son,
and His name will be Immanuel

(which is a Hebrew name that means "God with us").*

► Mary and Joseph name their baby Jesus, but sometimes He is referred to as Immanuel, because by coming to dwell with us, living and dying among us, He would be able to save us from our sin.

2 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in the province of Judea, at the time when King Herod reigned. *Not long after Jesus was born,* magi, wise men or seers from the East, made their way from the East to Jerusalem. These wise men made inquiries.

These men from the East come looking for the One who has been born who will save His people from sin.

Wise Men: 2Where is this newborn, who is the King of the Jews? When we were far away in the East we saw His star, and we have followed its glisten and gleam all this way to worship Him.

3King Herod began to hear rumors of the wise men's quest, and he, and all of his followers in Jerusalem, were worried. 4So Herod called all of the leading Jewish teachers, the chief priests and head scribes, and he asked them where *Hebrew tradition claimed* the long-awaited Anointed One would be born.

Scribes and Priests: 5*An ancient Hebrew* prophet, *Micah,* said this:

6But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are no poor relation—
For from your people will come a Ruler
who will be the shepherd of My
people Israel.*

► From that prophecy we learn that the Savior would be born in the town of Bethlehem, in the province of Judea. This information in hand, Herod orders the wise men to come to his chambers in secret; and when they arrive, Herod quizzes them.

7Herod called the wise men to him, demanding to know the exact time the special star had appeared to them. 8Then Herod sent them to Bethlehem.

Herod: Go *to Bethlehem* and search high and low for this *Savior* child; and as soon as you know where He is, report it to me so that I may go and worship Him.

9-10The wise men left Herod's *chambers* and went on their way. The star they had first seen in the East reappeared—*a miracle that, of course,* overjoyed and enraptured the wise men. The star led them to the house where Jesus lay; 11and as soon as the wise men arrived, they saw Him with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. They unpacked their satchels and gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

► These are exceptionally good gifts, for gold is what is given a king, and Jesus is the King of kings; incense is what you expect to be given a priest, and Jesus is the High Priest of all high priests; myrrh ointment is used to heal, and Jesus is a healer. But myrrh is also used to embalm corpses—and Jesus was born to die.

12And then, *just as Joseph did a few months before,* the wise men had a dream warning them not to go back to Herod. *The wise men heeded the dream. Ignoring Herod's instructions,* they returned to their homes in the East by a different route.

13After the wise men left, a messenger of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Messenger of the Lord *(to Joseph)***:** Get up, take the child and His mother, and head to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you *it is safe to leave.* For Herod *understands*

* 1:23 Isaiah 7:14 * 2:6 Micah 5:2

that Jesus threatens him and all he stands for. He is planning to search for the child and kill Him. *But you will be safe in Egypt.*

14So Joseph got up in the middle of the night; he bundled up Mary and Jesus, and they left for Egypt.*

16*After a few months had passed,* Herod realized he'd been tricked. The wise men *were not coming back.* Herod, *of course,* was furious. He simply ordered that all boys who lived in or near Bethlehem and were two years of age and younger be killed. *He knew the baby King was this age* because of what the wise men told him.

► Herod knows ordinary babies will die in this purge, but he doesn't care—Herod is not so much cold-blooded as pragmatic, willing to do whatever is necessary to kill this new supposed King. And so all those other baby boys die. But, of course, Herod's plan ultimately fails. He doesn't know the baby Savior has been whisked to safety in Egypt.

17This *sad event* had long been foretold by the prophet Jeremiah:

18A voice will be heard in Ramah,
weeping *and wailing* and mourning
out loud all day and night.
The voice is Rachel's, weeping for her children,
her children who have been killed;
she weeps, and she will not be comforted.*

15Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stayed *in Egypt* until Herod died. This fulfilled yet another prophecy. The prophet *Hosea* once wrote, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

19And after Herod died, a messenger of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt:

Messenger of the Lord: 20*You may go home now.* Take the child and His mother and go back to the land of Israel, for the people who were trying to take the child's life are now dead.

21So Joseph got up and took Mary and Jesus and returned to the land of Israel. 22Soon he learned that Archelaus, Herod's *oldest and notoriously brutal* son, was ruling Judea. *Archelaus might not be any friendlier than Herod had been.* Joseph was simply afraid. He had another dream, and in this dream, he was warned *away from Judea*; so Joseph *decided* to settle *up north* in a district called Galilee, 23in a town called Nazareth. And this, too, fulfilled what the prophets have taught, "*The Savior* will be a Nazarene."

Nazarene means, "tender, green, or living branch." Jesus is the living Branch, the branch of David that extends the reach of the tree of Israel eventually to foreigners and outsiders.

3 Around the same time, a man called John* began to travel, preach, and ritually wash people through baptism in the wilderness of Judea. *John preached a stern but exciting message.*

John: 2Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near.

3John's proclamation fulfilled a promise made by the *ancient* prophet Isaiah, who had said, "There will be a voice calling from the desert, saying,

Prepare the road for the Eternal One's journey;
repair and straighten out *every mile of* our God's highway."*

4John wore *wild* clothes made from camel hair with a leather belt around his waist—*the clothes of an outcast, a rebel.* He ate locusts and wild honey.

► Sometimes when people see John they are reminded of the last time God's people had wandered in a wilderness—after the exodus from Egypt. John is all about wilderness. He preaches in the wilderness, and he wears clothes just like the prophet Elijah had worn. They think perhaps John is inaugurating a new exodus. Actually,

* 2:14 Verse 15 has been moved to follow verse 18 to help the reader understand the continuity of the passage. * 2:18 Jeremiah 31:15 * 3:1 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 3:3 Isaiah 40:3

that is a pretty good way to think of it. The Anointed One, whose way John comes to prepare, will call humanity away from comfort and status; He will call His followers to challenge their assumptions and the things they take for granted.

5People from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and indeed from all around the river Jordan came to John. 6They confessed their sins, and they were baptized* by him in the Jordan.

But John is not exactly warm to all those who come to him seeking cleansing.

7He told some Pharisees and Sadducees who came for the ritual baptism,

John: *You children of serpents!* You brood of vipers! Did someone suggest you flee from the wrath that is upon us? 8-9*If you think that simply hopping in the Jordan will cleanse you, then you are sorely mistaken.* Your life must bear the fruits of turning toward righteousness. Nor are you correct if you think that being descended from Abraham is enough to make you holy and right with God. *Yes, the children of Abraham are God's chosen children,* but God can adopt as daughters and sons *anyone He likes—He can turn* these stones *into sons if He likes.*

To be made right with God, one must truly repent. It means to turn completely away from sin and completely toward God.

10Even now there is an ax poised at the root of every tree, and every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and tossed into the fire. 11I ritually cleanse you through baptism* as a mark of turning your life around. But someone is coming after me, someone whose sandals I am not fit to carry, someone who is more powerful than I. He will wash* you *not in water* but in fire and with the Holy Spirit. 12He carries a winnowing fork in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor; He will gather up the good wheat in His barn, and He will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out.

13And then, *the One of whom John spoke—the all-powerful* Jesus—came to the Jordan from Galilee to be washed* by John. 14At first, John demurred.

John: I need to be cleansed* by You. Why do You come to me?

Jesus: 15It will be right, true, and faithful to God's chosen path for you to cleanse Me *with your hands in the Jordan River.*

John agreed, and he ritually cleansed Jesus, *dousing Him in the waters of the Jordan.* 16Jesus emerged from His baptism;* and at that moment heaven was opened, and Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him, *alighting on His very body.*

Voice from Heaven: 17This is My Son, whom I love; *this is the Apple of My eye;* with Him I am well pleased.

4 The Spirit then led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. After this fast, He was, *as you can imagine,* hungry. 3*But He was also curiously stronger,* when the tempter came to Jesus.

Devil: If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

Jesus *(quoting Deuteronomy)***:** 4It is written, "Man does not live by bread alone. Rather, he lives on every word that comes from the mouth of the Eternal One."*

► The point, of course, is not that Jesus couldn't have turned these stones to bread. A little later in the story He can make food appear when He needs to. But Jesus doesn't work miracles out of the blue, for no reason, for show or proof or spectacle. He works them in intimate, close places; He works them to meet people's needs and to show them the way to the Kingdom.

5Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city, *Jerusalem,* and he had Jesus stand at the very highest point in the holy temple.

* 3:6 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 3:11 Literally, immerse, to show repentance * 3:11 Literally, immerse, in a rite of initiation and purification * 3:13 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 3:14 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification * 3:16 Literally, after being immersed, Jesus came up from the water. * 4:4 Deuteronomy 8:3

Devil: 6If You are the Son of God, jump! *And then we will see if You fulfill* the Scripture that says,

He will command His heavenly
messengers concerning You,
and the messengers will buoy You in
their hands
So that You will not *crash, or fall, or even*
graze Your foot on a stone.*

Jesus: 7That is not the only thing Scripture says. It also says, "Do not put the Eternal One, your God, to the test."*

8And still the devil *subjected Jesus to a third test. He* took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain, and he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in all their *splendor and* glory, *their power and pomp*.

Devil: 9If You bow down and worship me, I will give You all these kingdoms.

Jesus: 10Get away from Me, Satan. *I will not serve you. I will instead follow* Scripture, which tells us to "worship the Eternal One, your God, and serve only Him."*

11Then the devil left Jesus. And heavenly messengers came and ministered to Him.

12*It was not long until powerful people put* John in prison. When Jesus learned this, He went back to Galilee. 13He moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, a town by the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14He did this to fulfill one of the prophecies of Isaiah:

15In the land of Zebulun and the land of
Naphtali,
the road to the sea along the
Jordan in Galilee, the land of the
outsiders—
16*In these places*, the people who had been
living in darkness
saw a great light.
The light of life will overtake those who
dwelt in the shadowy darkness
of death.*

17From that time on, preaching was part of Jesus' work.

Jesus: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

► By now Jesus desires a community around Him, friends and followers who help Him carry this urgent, precious message to people. His message is not dissimilar to John's: Turn away from sin; turn toward God. And so He calls a community to join Him. These first beloved followers are called "disciples," which means "apprentices." The first disciples are two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They are fishermen.

18*One day* Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee when He saw Simon (also called Peter) and Andrew throwing their nets into the water. They were, of course, fishermen.

Jesus: 19*Come*, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20Immediately Peter and Andrew left their fishnets and followed Jesus.

21Going on from there, Jesus saw two more brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. *They, too, were fishermen.* They were in a boat with their father Zebedee getting their nets ready to fish. Jesus summoned them, *just as He had called to Peter and Andrew*, 22and immediately they left their boat and their father to follow Jesus.

23And so Jesus went throughout Galilee. He taught in the synagogues. He preached the good news of the Kingdom, and He healed people, ridding their bodies of sickness and disease. 24Word spread all over Syria, as more and more sick people came to Him. The innumerable ill who came before Him had all sorts of diseases, they were in crippling pain; they were possessed by demons; they had seizures; they were paralyzed. But Jesus healed them *all*. 25Large crowds from Galilee, from Jerusalem, from *the ten cities called* the Decapolis, from Judea, and from the region across the Jordan followed him.

► People talk about this Jesus, this Preacher and Healer. Word spreads of His charisma and wisdom and power and love. People who are too sick to walk persuade their friends and relatives to carry them to Jesus. These

* 4:6 Psalm 91:11-12 4:7 Deuteronomy 6:16 * 4:10 Deuteronomy 6:13 * 4:15-16 Isaiah 9:1-2

cripples and demonized and ill and paralytics come to Jesus, and He heals them, and they follow Him.

5 Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountain *(as Moses had done before Him)* and He sat down (*as Jewish teachers of His day usually did)*. His disciples gathered around Him.

► There on the mountain Jesus teaches them all. And as He is teaching, crowds gather around and overhear His teachings, listen in, and are captivated. This, the Sermon on the Mount, is the first of the five Mosaic-like sermons in Matthew.

2And He began to teach them.

Jesus: 3Blessed are the spiritually poor—
the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
4Blessed are those who mourn—they
will be comforted.
5Blessed are the *meek and* gentle—they
will inherit the earth.
6Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness—they
will be filled.
7Blessed are the merciful—they will be
shown mercy.
8Blessed are those who are pure in
heart—they will see God.
9Blessed are the peacemakers—they will
be called children of God.
10Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness—the
kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11And blessed are you, *blessed are all of you,* when people persecute you or denigrate you or despise you or tell lies about you on My account. 12*But when this happens*, rejoice. Be glad. Remember that God's prophets have been persecuted in the past. And know that in heaven, you have a great reward.

Salt draws out the good flavors subtly hidden in food and preserves what would otherwise spoil, as do those who claim to be children of God.

13You, *beloved*, are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes bland and loses its saltiness, can anything make it salty again? *No*. It is useless. It is tossed out, thrown away, or trampled.

14And you, *beloved*, are the light of the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden. 15Similarly it would be silly to light a lamp and then hide it under a bowl. When someone lights a lamp, she puts it on a table or a desk or a chair, and the light illumines the entire house. 16*You are like that illuminating light*. Let your light shine everywhere you go, *that you may illumine creation,* so men and women everywhere may see your good actions, *may see creation at its fullest, may see your devotion to Me*, and may turn and praise your Father in heaven *because of it*.

17Do not think that I have come to overturn or do away with the law or the words of our prophets. *To the contrary:* I have not come to overturn them but to fulfill them.

18This*, beloved*, is the truth: until heaven and earth disappear, not one letter, not one pen stroke, will disappear from the sacred law—for everything, everything in the sacred law will be fulfilled and accomplished. 19Anyone who breaks even the smallest, most obscure commandment—not to mention teaches others to do the same—will be called small *and obscure* in the kingdom of heaven. Those who practice the law and teach others how to live the law will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20For I tell you this: you will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless your righteousness goes deeper than the Pharisees', even more righteous than the most learned learner of the law.

Righteousness is the reason Jesus has come—to make the people righteous through and through. He then begins to interpret the law of Scripture for them with this in mind.

21As you know, long ago God instructed *Moses to tell* His people, "Do not murder;* those who murder will be judged *and punished*." 22*But here is the even harder truth*: anyone who is angry with his brother will be judged for his anger. Anyone who *taunts his friend, speaks contemptuously toward him, or*

* 5:21 Exodus 20:13

calls him "Loser" or "Fool" or "Scum," will have to answer to the high court. And anyone who calls his brother a fool may find himself in the fires of hell.

23Therefore, if you are bringing an offering to God and you remember that your brother is angry at you or holds a grudge against you, 24then leave your gift before the altar, go to your brother, *repent and forgive one another*, be reconciled, and then return to the altar to offer your gift to God.

25If someone sues you, settle things with him quickly. Talk to him as you are walking to court; otherwise, he may turn matters over to the judge, and the judge may turn you over to an officer, and you may land in jail. 26I tell you this: you will not emerge from prison until you have paid your last penny.

27As you know, long ago God forbade His people to commit adultery.* 28*You may think you have abided by this Commandment, walked the straight and narrow,* but I tell you this: any man who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. 29If your right eye leads you into sin, gouge it out and throw it *in the garbage*—for better you lose one part of your body than march your entire body *through the gates of sin and* into hell. 30And if your right hand leads you into sin, cut it off and throw it away—for better you lose one part of your body than march your entire body *through the gates of sin and* into hell.

31And here is something else: *you have read in Deuteronomy that* anyone who divorces his wife *must do so fairly*—he must give her the requisite certificate of divorce *and send her on her way, free and unfettered.** 32But I tell you this: unless your wife cheats on you, you must not divorce her, period. Nor are you to marry someone who has been married and divorces, for a divorced person who remarries commits adultery.

33You know that God expects us to abide by the oaths we swear and the promises we make. 34But I tell you this: do not ever swear an oath. *What is an oath?* You cannot say, "I swear by heaven"—*for heaven is not yours to swear by;* it is God's throne. 35And you cannot say, "I swear by this good earth," *for the earth is not yours to swear by;* it is God's footstool. And you cannot say, "I swear by *the holy city* Jerusalem," for *it is not yours to swear by;* it is the city *of God, the capital* of the King of kings. 36You cannot even say that you swear by your own head, *for God has dominion over your hands, your lips, your head.* It is He who determines if your hair be *straight or curly*, white or black; *it is He who rules over even this small scrap of creation.* 37*You need not swear an oath*—any impulse to do so is of evil. Simply let your "yes" be "yes," and let your "no" be "no."

38You know that *Hebrew Scripture* sets this standard *of justice and punishment*: take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* 39But I say this, don't fight against the one who is working evil against you. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, you are to turn and offer him your left cheek. 40If someone connives to get your shirt, give him your jacket as well. 41If someone forces you to walk with him for a mile, walk with him for two instead. 42If someone asks you for something, give it to him. If someone wants to borrow something from you, do not turn away.

43You have been taught to love your neighbor and hate your enemy.* 44But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you—45in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. *He, after all, loves each of us—good and evil, kind and cruel.* He causes the sun to rise *and shine* on evil and good alike. He causes the rain *to water the fields* of the righteous and *the fields* of the sinner. 46It is easy to love those who love you—even a tax collector can love those who love him. 47And it is easy to greet your friends—even outsiders do that! 48*But you are called to something higher:* "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Part of imitating the perfection of God is acting charitably and generously, doing good deeds, working for justice, and praying.

6 **Jesus:** But when you do these righteous acts, *do not do them in front of spectators.* Don't do them where you can be seen, *let alone lauded*, by others. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2When you give to the poor, *do not boast about it*,

* 5:27 Exodus 20:14 * 5:31 Deuteronomy 24:1 * 5:38 Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21 * 5:43 Leviticus 19:18

announcing your donations with blaring trumpets as the play actors do. Do not brazenly give your charity in the synagogues and on the streets; *indeed, do not give at all* if you are giving because you want to be praised by your neighbors. Those people who give in order to reap praise have already received their reward. 3-4When you give to the needy, do it in secret—even your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing. Then your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

5Likewise, when you pray, do not be as hypocrites who love to pray loudly at synagogue or on street corners—their concern is to be seen by men. They have already earned their reward. 6When you pray, go into a private room, close the door, and pray unseen to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. 7And when you pray, do not go on and on, excessively and strangely like the outsiders; they think their verbosity will let them be heard *by their deities*. 8Do not be like them. *Your prayers need not be labored or lengthy or grandiose*—for your Father knows what you need before you ever ask Him.

9Your prayers, rather, should be *simple,* like this:

Our Father in heaven,
let Your name remain holy.
10Bring about Your kingdom.
Manifest Your will here on earth,
as it is manifest in heaven.
11Give us each day that day's bread—*no more, no less*—
12And forgive us our debts
as we forgive those who owe us something.
13Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
[But let Your kingdom be,
and let it be powerful
and glorious forever. Amen.]*

Jesus says to declare forgiveness of those who have wronged us. This is because forgiveness of other people emulates God's forgiveness of us.

14If you forgive people when they sin against you, then your Father will forgive you *when you sin against Him and when you sin against your neighbor*. 15But if you do not forgive your neighbors' sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

16And when you fast, do not look miserable as *the actors and* hypocrites do when they are fasting—*they walk around town putting on airs about their suffering and weakness, complaining about how hungry they are*. So everyone will know they are fasting, they don't wash or anoint themselves with oil, *pink their cheeks, or wear comfortable shoes. Those who show off their piety,* they have already received their reward. 17When you fast, wash your face and beautify yourself with oil, 18so no one who looks at you will know about your discipline. Only your Father, who is unseen, will see your fast. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

19Some people store up treasures *in their homes* here on earth. *This is a shortsighted practice*—don't undertake it. Moths and rust will eat up any treasure you may store here. Thieves may break into *your homes* and steal *your precious trinkets*. 20Instead, put up your treasures in heaven where moths do not attack, where rust does not corrode, and where thieves are barred at the door. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22The eye is the lamp of the body. *You draw light into your body through your eyes, and light shines out to the world through your eyes.* So if your eye is well *and shows you what is true*, then your whole body will be filled with light. 23But if your eye is clouded *or evil*, then your body will be filled with *evil and* dark clouds. And the darkness that takes over the body *of a child of God who has gone astray*—that is the deepest, darkest darkness there is.

► When Jesus speaks of eyes and light, He means all people should keep their eyes on God because the eyes are the windows to the soul. Eyes should not focus on trash—pornography, filth, or expensive things. And this is what He means when He says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

* 6:13 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

Jesus: [24]No one can serve two masters. *If you try*, you will wind up loving the first master and hating the second, or vice versa. People try to serve both God and money—but you can't. *You must choose one or the other.*

[25]Here is the bottom line: do not worry about your life. Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink. Don't worry about how you clothe your body. Living is about more than merely eating, and the body is about more than dressing up. [26]Look at the birds in the sky. They do not store food for winter. *They don't plant gardens.* They do not sow or reap—and yet, they are always fed because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are even more precious to Him than a beautiful bird. *If He looks after them, of course He will look after you.* [27]*Worrying does not do any good;* who here can claim to add even an hour to his life by worrying?

[28]Nor should you worry about clothes. Consider the lilies of the field and how they grow. They do not work or weave or sew, *and yet their garments are stunning.* [29]Even King Solomon, dressed in his most regal garb, was not as lovely as these lilies. [30]*And think about grassy fields*—the grasses are here now, but they will be dead by winter. And yet God adorns them so radiantly. How much more will He clothe you, you of little faith, *you who have no trust*?

[31]So do not consume yourselves with questions: What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear? [32]Outsiders make themselves frantic over such questions; *they don't realize that* your heavenly Father knows exactly what you need. [33]Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you *too*. [34]So do not worry about tomorrow. Let tomorrow worry about itself. Living faithfully is a large enough task for today.

7 **Jesus:** If you judge *other people*, then you will find that you, too, are being judged. [2]Indeed, you will be judged by the very standards to which you hold other people.

► So when someone is tempted to criticize his neighbor because her house isn't clean enough, she seems ill-tempered, or she is a bit flighty—he should remember those same standards and judgments will come back to him. No one should criticize his neighbor for being short-tempered one morning, when he is snippish and snappish and waspish all the time.

Jesus: [3]Why is it that you see the dust in your brother's or sister's eye, but you can't see what is in your own eye? [4]Don't ignore the wooden plank in your eye, while you criticize the speck of sawdust in your brother's eyelashes. [5]That type of criticism and judgment is a sham! Remove the plank from your own eye, and then perhaps you will be able to see clearly how to help your brother flush out his sawdust.

[6]Don't give precious things to dogs. Don't cast your pearls before swine. If you do, the pigs will trample the pearls with their *little pigs'* feet, and then they will turn back and attack you.

Now Jesus returns to prayer, an important and sometimes difficult topic. Here He gives the very essence of prayer.

[7]Just ask and it will be given to you; seek after it and you will find. *Continue to* knock and the door will be opened for you. [8]All who ask receive. Those who seek, find what they seek. And he who knocks, will have the door opened.

[9]Think of it this way: if your son asked you for bread, would you give him a stone? *Of course not—you would give him a loaf of bread.* [10]If your son asked for a fish, would you give him a snake? *No, to be sure, you would give him a fish—the best fish you could find.* [11]So if you, who are sinful, know how to give your children good gifts, how much more so does your Father in heaven, who is perfect, know how to give great gifts to His children!

[12]This is what our Scriptures come to teach: in everything, in every circumstance, do to others as you would have them do to you.

[13]*There are two paths before you; you may take only one path.* One doorway is narrow. *And one door is wide.* Go through the narrow door. For the wide door leads to a wide path, and the wide path is broad; the wide, broad path is easy, and

the wide, broad, easy path has many, many people on it; but the wide, broad, easy, crowded path leads to death. 14Now then that narrow door leads to a narrow road that in turn leads to life. It is hard to find that road. Not many people manage it.

15Along the way, watch out for false prophets. They will come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath *that quaint and innocent wool,* they are hungry wolves. 16But you will recognize them by their fruits. You don't find *sweet, delicious* grapes growing on thorny bushes, do you? You don't find *delectable* figs growing in the midst of *prickly* thistles. 17*People and their lives are like trees.* Good trees bear beautiful, tasty fruit, but bad trees bear ugly, bitter fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear ugly, bitter fruit; nor can a bad tree bear fruit that is beautiful and tasty. 19And what happens to the rotten trees? They are cut down. They are used for firewood. 20*When a prophet comes to you and preaches this or that,* look for his fruits: *sweet or sour? rotten or ripe?*

21Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven. *Simply calling Me "Lord" will not be enough.* Only those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven *will join Me in heaven.* 22*At the end of time,* on that day *of judgment,* many will say to Me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not drive demons out *of the possessed* in Your name? Did we not perform miracles in Your name?" 23But I will say to them, "I never knew you. And now, you must get away from Me, you evildoers!"

24Those people who are listening to Me, those people who *hear what I say and* live according to My teachings—you are like a wise man who built his house on a rock, *on a firm foundation.* 25*When storms hit,* rain pounded down and waters rose, *levies broke* and winds beat all the walls of that house. But the house did not fall because it was built upon rock. 26Those of you who are listening and do not hear—you are like a fool who builds a house on sand. 27When a storm comes to his house, *what will happen*? The rain will fall, the waters will rise, the wind will blow, and his house will collapse with a great crash.

28With that Jesus finished His teaching, and the crowds were amazed by all He had said. 29But Jesus taught in His own name, on His own authority, not like the scribes.

This teaching is different. Usually rabbis cite generations of rabbis before them when making claims about the meaning of Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus honors the law, but He is clear—the law must be read in a new way.

8 Large crowds followed Jesus when He came down from the mountain. 2*And as Jesus was going along,* a leper approached Him and knelt down before Him.

Leper: Lord, if You wish to, *please* heal me and make me clean!

Jesus *(stretching out His hand)*: 3Of course I wish to. Be clean.

Immediately the man was healed.

Jesus: 4Don't tell anyone *what just happened.* Rather, go to the priest, show yourself to him, and give a wave offering as Moses commanded. Your actions will tell the story of what happened here today.

5Eventually Jesus came to *the little town of* Capernaum. In Capernaum a military officer came to Him and asked Him for help.

Officer: 6Lord, I have a servant who is lying at home in agony, paralyzed.

Jesus: 7I will come *to your house,* and I will heal him.

Officer: 8Lord, I don't deserve to have You in my house. *And, in truth, I know You don't need to be with my servant to heal him.* Just say the word, and he will be healed. 9That, after all, is how authority works. My troops obey me whether I am next to them or not—*similarly, this sickness will obey You.*

10Jesus was stunned by the depth of the officer's faith.

Jesus *(to His followers)*: This is the plain truth: I have not met a single person in Israel with as much faith *as this officer.* 11It will not be just the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who celebrate at their heavenly banquet at the end of time. No, people will come from the East and the West—*and those who recognize Me, regardless of their lineage, will sit with Me at that feast.* 12But those who have

feigned their faith will be cast out into outer darkness where people weep and grind their teeth.

13Then Jesus turned to the Centurion.*

Jesus: You may go home. For it is as you say it is; it is as you believe.

And the officer's servant was healed, right then.

What happens next seems to embody the officer's wise opinion about authority: over and over Jesus shows just what His authority means.

14Jesus went to Peter's house, and there He saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed, sick and burning up with a fever. 15Jesus touched her hand, and *then she was healed*—the fever vanished. She got up from bed and began to wait on Him.

16Toward nighttime many people who were possessed by demons were brought to Jesus, and He said one word of command and drove the demons out, healing everyone who was sick. 17These miraculous healings fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah had predicted:

> He took our infirmities upon Himself,
> and He bore our diseases.*

18Jesus saw that a crowd had gathered around Him, and He gave orders to go to the other side *of the sea*. 19A scribe came up to Him.

Scribe: Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.

Jesus: 20Foxes have dens *in which to sleep*, and the birds have nests. But the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.

Disciple: 21Jesus, before I do the things You've asked me to do, I must first bury my father.

Jesus: 22Follow Me! And let the dead bury their own dead.

► Does Jesus say, "Fair enough, you must of course bury your father. Just catch up with Me when you are done"? No. This is one of the strange and radical things Jesus brings about—our families are no longer our families. Our deepest bonds are not those of blood. Our family now is found in the bonds of fellowship made possible by this Jesus.

23And then Jesus got into a boat, and His disciples followed Him. 24Out of nowhere, a vicious storm blew over the sea. Waves were lapping up over the boat, threatening to overtake it! Yet Jesus was asleep. 25*Frightened (not to mention confused—how could anyone sleep through this?),* the disciples woke Him up.

Disciples: Lord, save us! We're going to drown!

Jesus: 26Please! What are you so afraid of, you of little faith?

Jesus got up, told the wind and the waves to calm down, and they did. The sea became still and calm *once again*. 27The disciples were astonished.

Disciples: Who is this? What sort of man is He, that the sea and the winds listen to Him?

28Eventually Jesus came to the other side *of the sea*, to the region of the Gadarenes. There, two men *who lived* near the tombs and were possessed by demons came out *to the seaside* and met Jesus. They were flailing about, so violent that they obstructed the path of anyone who came their way.

Demons *(screaming at Jesus)***:** 29Why are You here? Have You come to torture us even before the judgment day, O Son of God?

30A ways off, *though still visible,* was a large herd of pigs, eating.

Demons: 31If You cast us out *of the bodies of these two men*, do send us into that herd of pigs!

Jesus: 32*Very well then*, go!

* 8:13 A Roman military officer in charge of about 100 foot soldiers * 8:17 Isaiah 53:4

And the demons flew out of the bodies *of the two flailing men*, they set upon the pigs, and every last pig rushed over a steep bank into the sea and drowned. 33The pig herders *(totally undone, as you can imagine)* took off; they headed straight for town, where they told everyone what they'd just seen—even about the demon-possessed men. 34And so the whole town came out to see Jesus for themselves. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their area.

9 He got back in the boat, crossed *the sea*, and returned to His own town. 2When He got there, some men approached Him carrying a mat. On the mat was another man, a paralytic. *The men evidently believed that Jesus could heal the paralytic,* and Jesus saw their faith, how much faith they had in His authority and power.

Jesus: Rest assured, My son; your sins are forgiven.

3Now some scribes *and teachers of the law had been watching this whole scene.*

Scribes and Teachers *(to themselves)***:** This man is blaspheming!

4*Though they had only spoken in low whispers among themselves*, Jesus knew their thoughts.

Jesus: Why do you hold such hardness and wickedness in your hearts? 5Look, is it easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or "Get up and walk"? 6To make clear that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins (turning to the paralytic man *on the mat*), Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.

7And the man did. 8When the crowd saw this, they were amazed, *even a little scared,* and they praised God who had given humans the authority *to do such miraculous things.*

9Later Jesus was walking along and He saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax collector's office.

Jesus *(to Matthew)***:** Follow Me.

Matthew got up and followed Him.

10Once when He ate a meal at home with His disciples, a whole host of tax collectors and other sinners joined them. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they asked Jesus' disciples,

Pharisees: Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus *(overhearing this)***:** 12Look, who needs a doctor—healthy people or sick people? 13I am not here to attend to people who are already right with God; I am here to attend to sinners. *In the book of the prophet Hosea, we read*, "It is not sacrifice I want, but mercy."* Go and meditate on that for a while—*maybe you'll come to understand it.*

14And then some of the disciples of John came.

John's Disciples: *What's the story with fasting?* We fast and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast!

Jesus: 15When you celebrate—as at a wedding when one's dearest friend is getting married—you do not fast. The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. Then My friends and followers will fast. 16You would begin by washing and shrinking a patch you would use to mend a garment—otherwise, the patch would shrink later, pull away from the garment, and make the original tear even worse. 17You wouldn't pour new wine into old wineskins. If you did, the skins would burst, the wine would run out, and the wineskins would be ruined. No, you would pour new wine into new wineskins—and both the wine and the wineskins would be preserved.

18As He was saying these things, a certain official came before Jesus and knelt in front of Him.

Official: My daughter just died. Would You come and lay Your hands on her? Then, I know, she would live again.

19Jesus got up, and He and His disciples went with the man. 20-21*But as they were heading to the man's house,* a woman who had been hemorrhaging and bleeding for 12 years—*12 years!*—crept up behind Jesus.

She evidently believes that if she so much as touches the fringes of His cloak, she will be healed.

* 9:13 Hosea 6:6

And so she came up behind Him and touched His cloak. 22Jesus turned around and saw her.

Jesus: Take heart, daughter. Your faith has healed you.

And indeed, from that moment, the woman was healed. 23Then Jesus went to the official's house. He saw flute players and mourners.

Jesus *(to the crowd)*: 24Go away, *and do your ministering somewhere else.* This girl is not dead. She is merely asleep.

The crowd—*who knew with certainty that the girl was dead*—laughed at Him. 25But they *obeyed Him and* left the house, *and once they were gone,* Jesus went to the girl. When He took her hand, she *opened her eyes and* stood up. 26When the crowds outside learned that the girl was indeed alive, they spread throughout the town and the surrounding country telling everyone what had happened.

27Jesus left the official's house. And as He was walking, two blind men began to follow Him.

Blind Men: Son of David! Have mercy on us!

28Jesus went to their house, and the blind men sat in front of Him.

Jesus: Do you believe that I am able to do this?

Blind Men: Yes, Lord.

Faith in Jesus and His power is essential for healing, so it isn't surprising that all it takes is Jesus' touch to heal these men.

Jesus *(touching their eyes)*: 29According to your faith, it will be done to you.

30And they could see. Then Jesus spoke to them *as He had spoken to the leper.*

Jesus: Don't tell anyone about this.

31But when the men *(who could now see)* left, they told everyone in the area they met what had happened.

32Later a man who was possessed by demons and could not talk was brought to Jesus. 33Jesus drove out the demons, and the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed.

Crowd: Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.

Pharisees: 34It must be the prince of demons who gives Him the power to cast out demons.

35Jesus went through many towns and villages. He taught in their synagogues. He preached the good news of the kingdom of God. He healed every disease and sickness. 36Whenever crowds came to Him, He had compassion for them because they were so deeply distraught, malaised, and heart-broken. They seemed to Him like lost sheep without a shepherd. 37*Jesus understood what an awesome task was before Him,* so He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38Ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into His harvest field."

► Matthew gives a summary of what Jesus has done—teaching, preaching, and healing—and why He has done it—because of His compassion. Jesus then calls His disciples to this same type of ministry. The following sermon that Jesus gives to His disciples is the second of the five main sermons in Matthew.

10 Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him. He endowed them with the authority to heal sickness and disease and to drive demons out of those who were possessed.

► Up to this point, the disciples have been, mostly, following Jesus around, listening to Him teach, watching Him heal. And so now we call these twelve beloved men not merely "disciples," or "apprentices," but "apostles," which means "those who are sent as representatives, emissaries." Jesus is preparing to send them into the harvest field to do His Father's work.

2These are the names of the twelve
apostles: Simon (who is called Peter, *which*
means "the rock") and his brother Andrew;
James, son of Zebedee, and his brother
John; 3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas
and Matthew (the tax collector); James,
son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4Simon
the Zealot and Judas Iscariot (who would
betray Him).

5Jesus sent out these twelve with
clear instructions.

Jesus: Don't go to the outsiders or to the
towns inhabited by Samaritans, *a people*
whose Jewish ancestors married Gentiles.
6Go instead to find *and heal* the lost
sheep of Israel. 7As you go, preach this
message: "The kingdom of heaven is at
hand." 8Heal the sick, raise the dead, and
cleanse those who have leprosy. Drive
out demons *from the possessed.* You
received *these gifts* freely, so you should
give *them* to others freely. 9Do not take
money with you: don't take gold, silver,
or even small, worthless change. 10Do
not pack a bag with clothes. Do not
take sandals or a walking stick. Be fed
and sheltered by those who show you
hospitality. 11When you enter a town or
village, look for someone who is trust-
worthy and stay at his house as long as
you are visiting that town. 12When you
enter this home, greet the household
kindly. 13And if the home is indeed
trustworthy, let your blessing of peace
rest upon it; if not, keep your blessing
to yourself. 14If someone is inhospitable
to you or refuses to listen to your tes-
timony, leave that house or town and
shake the dust from your feet. 15This is
the truth: Sodom and Gomorrah, *those*
ancient pits of inhospitality, will fare bet-
ter on judgment day than towns *who*
ignore you tomorrow or next week.

16Listen: I am sending you out to be
sheep among wolves. You must be as
shrewd as serpents and as innocent as
doves. 17You must be careful. You must
be discerning. You must be on your
guard. There will be men who try to
hand you over to their town councils and
have you flogged in their synagogues.
18Because of Me, naysayers and doubters
will try to make an example out of you
by trying you before rulers and kings.
19When this happens—*when you are*
arrested, dragged to court—don't worry
about what to say or how to say it. The
words you should speak will be given to
you. For at that moment, 20it will not be
you speaking; it will be the Spirit of your
Father speaking through you.

21*Your task will be fraught with*
betrayal: brother will betray brother,
even to the point of death; fathers will
betray their children, and children will
rebel against their fathers, even to the
point of death. 22-23When you are perse-
cuted in one town, flee to the next town.
This is the truth: you will not be able to
witness to every town in Israel before
the Son of Man comes. Everyone will
hate you because of Me. But remember:
the one who stays on the narrow path
until the end will be saved.

24A student is no greater than his
teacher, and a servant is never greater
than his master. 25It is sufficient if the
student is like his teacher and the ser-
vant like his master. If people call the
head of a house "Beelzebul," *which means*
"devil," just imagine what they're calling
the members of his household.

26Do not be afraid of those *who may*
taunt or persecute you. Everything they
do—even if they think they are hiding
behind closed doors—will come to light.
All their secrets will eventually be made
known. 27And you should proclaim in
the bright light of day everything that
I have whispered to you in the dark.
Whatever whispers you hear—shout
them from the rooftops of houses.

28Don't fear those who *aim to* kill just
the body but are unable to touch the soul.
The One to fear is He who can destroy
you, soul and body, in the fires of hell.
29Look, if you sold a few sparrows, *how*
much money would you get? A copper coin
apiece, perhaps? And yet your Father in
heaven knows when those small spar-
rows fall to the ground. 30-31You, beloved,
are worth so much more than a whole
flock of sparrows. God knows *everything*
about you, even the number of hairs on
your head. So do not fear.

32*Whoever knows Me here on earth, I*
will know him in heaven. And whoever
proclaims faith in Me here on earth,
I will proclaim *faith in* him before My
Father in heaven. 33But whoever disowns
Me here, I will disown before My Father
in heaven.

34Do not imagine that I have come to
bring peace to the earth. I did not come
to bring peace, but a sword. 35I have
come to turn men against their fathers,
daughters against their mothers, and
daughters-in-law against their mothers-
in-law. 36You will find you have enemies

even in your own household.* 37If you love your father or mother more than you love Me, then you are not worthy of Me. If you love your son or daughter more than you love Me, then you are not worthy of Me. 38If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me *on the narrow road*, then you are not worthy of Me. 39To find your life, you must lose your life—and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

► Jesus calls His disciples to a radical commitment. Those who truly follow Jesus must be willing to follow Him to the point of death, just as He will later die for His commitment to God and others. Thus, whether they die literally or figuratively, His followers give up their lives for Him.

Jesus: 40Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me. 41Anyone who welcomes a prophet and surrenders to his prophecy will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who welcomes a righteous person and conforms to the righteousness that surrounds him and proceeds from him will receive a righteous man's reward. 42And anyone who has given so much as a cup of cold water to one of the little ones, because he is My disciple, I tell you, that person will be well rewarded.

11 With that, Jesus finished instructing His disciples, and He went on to preach and teach in the towns *of Galilee*. 2John, meanwhile, was still in prison. But stories about the Anointed One's teachings and healing reached him.

► Quite frankly, John is perplexed. He has been awaiting the Anointed, but he believes that person will be a great political ruler, a king, or a military hero. Jesus seems to be all about healing people and insisting that the poor and the meek are blessed.

So John sent his followers 3to question Jesus.

John's Followers: Are You the One we have been expecting as Savior for so long? *Are You the One Scripture promised would come?* Or should we expect someone else?

Jesus: 4Go back and tell John the things you have heard and the things you have seen. 5*Tell him you have seen* the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers cured, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and the good news preached to the poor. 6Blessed are those who *understand what is afoot and* stay on My narrow path.

7John's disciples left, and Jesus began to speak to a crowd about John.

Jesus: What did you go into the desert to see? Did you expect to see a reed blowing around in the wind? 8No? Were you expecting to see a man dressed in the finest silks? No, of course not—you find silk in the sitting rooms of palaces and mansions, not in the middle of the wilderness. 9So what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes. Yes, a prophet and more than a prophet. 10When you saw John, you saw the one whom the prophet *Malachi envisioned when he* said,

> I will send My messenger ahead of You,
> and he will prepare the way for You.*

11This is the truth: no one who has ever been born to a woman is greater than John the Baptist.* And yet the most insignificant person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12-13All of the prophets of old, all of the law—that was all prophecy leading up to the coming of John. *Now, that sort of prepares us for this very point, right here and now.* When John the Baptist* came, the kingdom of heaven began to break in upon us, and those in power are trying to clamp down on it—*why do you think John is in jail?* 14If only you could see it—John is the Elijah, the prophet we were promised would come *and prepare the way*. 15He who has ears *for the truth*, let him hear.

In this way, Jesus invites His followers to understand who John is, and, in turn, who He must be.

* 10:36 Micah 7:6 * 11:10 Malachi 3:1 * 11:11 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 11:12-13 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance

16What is this generation like? You
are like children sitting in the market-
place and calling out, 17"When we played
the flute, you did not dance; and when
we sang a dirge, you did not mourn."
18*What I mean is this:* When John came,
he dressed in the clothes of a prophet, and
he did not eat and drink *like others but*
lived on honey and wild locusts. And peo-
ple wondered *if he was crazy*, if he had
been possessed by a demon. 19Then the
Son of Man appeared—*He didn't fast, as*
John had, but ate *with sinners* and drank
wine. And the people said, "This man is
a glutton! He's a drunk! And He hangs
around with tax collectors and sinners,
to boot." Well, Wisdom will be vindicated
by her actions—*not by your opinions*.

20Then Jesus began to preach about the towns He'd visited. He'd performed some of His most fantastic miracles *in places like Chorazin and Bethsaida*, but still the people in those places hadn't turned to God.

Jesus: 21Woe to you, Chorazin! And woe
to you, Bethsaida! Had I gone to Tyre
and Sidon and performed miracles there,
they would have repented immediately,
taking on sackcloth and ashes. 22But I
tell you this: the people from Tyre and
Sidon will fare better on the day of judg-
ment than you will. 23And Capernaum!
Do you think you will reign exalted in
heaven? *No*, you'll rot in hell. Had I gone
to Sodom and worked miracles there,
the people would have repented, and
Sodom would still be standing, *thriving,*
bustling. 24*Well, you know what happened*
to Sodom. But know this—the people
from Sodom will fare better on the day
of judgment than you will.

25And then Jesus began to pray:

Jesus: I praise You, Father—Lord of
heaven and earth. You have revealed Your
truths to the lowly *and the ignorant, the*
children and the crippled, the lame and
the mute. You have hidden wisdom from
those who pride themselves on being so
wise and learned. 26You did this, simply,
because it pleased You. 27The Father has
handed over everything to My care. No
one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the
Son—and those to whom the Son wishes
to reveal the Father. 28Come to Me, all
who are weary and burdened, and I will
give you rest. 29Put My yoke upon your
shoulders—*it might appear heavy at first,*
but it is perfectly fitted to your curves.
Learn from Me, for I am gentle and hum-
ble of heart. *When you are yoked to Me,*
your weary souls will find rest. 30For My
yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

12 The Sabbath came, and Jesus walked through a field. His disciples, who were hungry, began to pick some of the grain and eat it.

► The Sabbath is a day of rest when one creates nothing, breaks nothing, gives nothing, makes no contracts, cuts no flowers, and boils no water; it is a day set aside by the Lord to remember the creative work of God, to experience the peace of the Lord, and to rest in the provision of God.

2When the Pharisees saw this, they reacted.

Pharisees: Look! Your disciples are break-
ing the law of the Sabbath!

Jesus: 3Haven't you read what David did?
When he and his friends were hungry,
4they went into God's house and they
ate the holy bread, even though neither
David nor his friends, but only priests,
were allowed that bread. 5*Indeed,* have
you not read that on the Sabbath priests
themselves do work in the temple,
breaking the Sabbath law yet remaining
blameless? 6Listen, One who is greater
than the temple is here.
7Do you not understand *what the*
prophet Hosea recorded, "I desire mercy,
not sacrifice"*? If you understood *that*
snippet of Scripture, you would not con-
demn these innocent men *for ostensibly*
breaking the law of the Sabbath. 8For the
Son of Man *has not only the authority to*
heal and cast out demons, *He also* has
authority over the Sabbath.

9Jesus left the field and went to the synagogue, 10and there He met a man with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees wanted to set up Jesus.

Pharisees: Well, is it lawful to heal on the
Sabbath too?

* 12:7 Hosea 6:6

Jesus: 11Look, imagine that one of you
has a sheep that falls into a ditch on the
Sabbath—*what would you do?*

Jesus—who can see the Pharisees are testing Him and basically have missed the point—is growing a little testy. The Pharisees say nothing.

(to the Pharisees) You would dive in and
rescue your sheep. 12Now what is more
valuable, a person or a sheep? *So what do
you think—should I heal this man on the
Sabbath?* Isn't it lawful to do good deeds
on the Sabbath? 13(to the man *with the
shriveled hand*) Stretch out your hand.

As the man did so, his hand was com-
pletely healed, as good as new.
14The Pharisees went and mapped
out plans to destroy Jesus.
15Jesus knew *that the Pharisees were
plotting to kill Him* and left the area. Many
people followed Him, and He healed them
all, 16always insisting that they tell no one
about Him. 17He did this in keeping with
the prophecy Isaiah made so long ago:

18This is My servant, whom I have *well*
chosen;
this is the One I love, the One in
whom I delight.
I will place My Spirit upon Him;
He will proclaim justice to all the
world.
19He will not fight or shout
or talk loudly in the streets.
20He will not crush a reed under His heel
or blow out a smoldering candle
until He has led justice *and
righteousness* to final victory.
21All the world will find its hope in His
name.*

22Some of the faithful brought Jesus a
man who was possessed by a demon, who
was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him.
The man could see and talk, *and demons
no longer crawled around in him.*

People *(astonished)***:** 23Could this be the
Son of David?

Pharisees: 24It is only through Beelzebul,
the prince of demons, that this Jesus can
cast out demons.

25Jesus knew what the Pharisees were
thinking.

Jesus: That would be like a father split-
ting his own household down the middle
or a king cutting his kingdom in half—
the household and the kingdom would
fall apart. 26So, too, if Satan *imbued peo-
ple with the power to* drive out demons,
Satan's kingdom would collapse. 27And
you should think about this too: you
have friends who drive out demons. If I
am working as a tool of Beelzebul, whom
are your people working for? 28When I
come to you and drive out demons by
the Spirit of your Father in heaven—*for
the glory of your Father in heaven—you
should recognize and rejoice that* the
kingdom of God has come to you.
29Imagine you wanted to break into
the house of your neighbor, a strong
brawny man, and steal his furniture.
First, you'd have to tie up your neighbor,
yes? Once he was bound and tied, you
could take whatever you wanted. 30*Sim-
ilarly*—he who is not with Me is against
Me, and he who is not doing the Father's
work of gathering *up the flock* may as
well be scattering *the flock*.
31-32It is one thing for you to speak ill
of the Son of Man. People will be forgiven
for every sin they commit and blasphemy
they utter. *But those who call the work of
God the work of Satan utterly remove them-
selves from God, and* those who blaspheme
God's Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in
this world nor in the world to come.
33Good trees produce good fruits;
bad trees produce bad fruits. You can
always tell a tree by its fruits. 34You chil-
dren of snakes, you who are evil—how
could you possibly say anything good?
For the mouth simply shapes the heart's
impulses into words. 35And so the good
man (who is filled with goodness) speaks
good words, while the evil man (who
is filled with evil) speaks evil words. 36I
tell you this: on the day of judgment,
people will be called to account for every
careless word they have ever said. 37*The
righteous* will be acquitted by their own
words, and you *evildoers* will be con-
demned by your own words.

Scribes and Pharisees: 38Teacher, we want
to see some miraculous sign from You.

Jesus: 39You wicked and promiscuous
generation—you are looking for signs,
are you? The only sign you will be given
is the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40Jonah

* 12:18-21 Isaiah 42:1-4

spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, as the Son of Man will spend three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. 41One day, the people of Nineveh will rise up in judgment and will condemn your present generation—for the Ninevites turned from sin to God when they heard Jonah preach, and now One far greater than Jonah is here. 42The Queen of the South will also stand in judgment and condemn this generation—for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom. And today One greater *and wiser* than Solomon is among you.

43*Let Me tell you what will happen to this wicked generation:* When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it rattles around through *deserts and other* dry places looking for a place to rest—but it does not find anywhere to rest. 44So the spirit says, "I will return to the house I left." And it returns to find that house unoccupied, tidy, swept, and sparkling clean. 45Well, then not only does one spirit set up shop in that sparkling house, but it brings seven even more wicked spirits along. And the poor man—the house—is worse off than he was before. This evil generation will suffer a similar fate.

46While Jesus was speaking to the crowd, His mother and brothers came up and wanted to speak to Him.

Someone in the Crowd: 47Your mother and brothers are waiting outside to speak to You.

Jesus: 48Who is My mother? And who are My brothers? 49(pointing to His disciples) These are My mother and brothers. 50Anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven is My mother and brother and sister.

13 That same day, Jesus left the house and went to sit by the sea. 2Large crowds gathered around Him, and He got into a boat on the sea and sat there. The crowd stood on the shore *waiting for His teaching.*

This next sermon series, the third of Jesus' five Mosaic-like sermons, is filled with parables or stories with a deeper meaning about the kingdom of heaven.

3And so Jesus began to teach. *On this day,* He spoke in parables. *Here is His first parable:*

Jesus: Once there was a sower who scattered seeds. 4One day he walked in a field scattering seeds as he went. Some seeds fell beside a road, and a flock of birds came and ate all those seeds. 5So the sower scattered seeds *in a field,* one with shallow soil and strewn with rocks. But the seeds grew quickly amid all the rocks, 6without rooting themselves in the shallow soil. Their roots got tangled up in all the stones. The sun scorched these seeds, and they died. 7And so the sower scattered seeds *near a path,* this one covered with thorny vines. *The seeds fared no better there*—the thorns choked them, *and they died.* 8*And so finally* the sower scattered his seeds in a patch *of* good earth. *At home in the good earth, the seeds grew and grew. Eventually* the seeds bore fruit, *and the fruit grew ripe and was harvested. The harvest was immense*—30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

9He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Disciples: 10Why do You speak to the people in parables?

Jesus: 11The knowledge of the secrets of heaven has been given to you, but it has not been given to them. 12Those who have something will be given more—and they will have abundance. Those who have nothing will lose what they have—*they will be destitute.* 13I teach in parables so the people may look but not see, listen but not hear or understand.* 14They are fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy:

You will listen, but you will not
understand;
you will look, but you will not see.
15The people's hearts have turned to flab;
their ears are clogged;
their eyes are shut.
They will try to see, but they will not see;
they will try to hear, but they will
not hear;
they will try to understand, but
they will not comprehend.
If they, with their blindness and deafness,
so choose, then I will heal them.*

16-17Many holy prophets and righteous men and women *and people of prayer and doers of good* have wanted to see but did

* 13:13 Psalm 78:2 * 13:14-15 Isaiah 6:9-10

not see, and have wanted to hear but did not hear. Your eyes and ears are blessed.

18This is what the parable of the sower means. 19*It is about the kingdom of heaven.* When someone hears the story of the Kingdom and cannot understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away whatever *goodness and holiness* had been sown in the heart. This is like the seeds sown beside the road. 20-21*You know* people who hear the word of God and receive it joyfully—but then, somehow, the word fails to take root in their hearts. It is temporary. As soon as there is trouble for those people, they trip: those people are the seeds strewn on the rocky soil. 22And you know people who hear the word, but it is choked inside them because they constantly worry and prefer the wealth and pleasures of the world: *they prefer drunken dinner parties to prayer, power to piety, and riches to righteousness.* Those people are like the seeds sown among thorns. 23The people who hear the word and receive it and grow in it—those are like the seeds sown on good soil. They produce a bumper crop, 30 or 60 or 100 times what was sown.

Our Father in heaven plants many seeds in order to ensure that some seeds bear fruit. The final harvest, however, is worth any amount of hard work.

24Jesus told them another parable.

Jesus: The kingdom of heaven is like this: Once there was a farmer who sowed good seeds in his field. 25While the farmer's workers were sleeping, his enemy crept into the field and sowed weeds among all the wheat seeds. Then he snuck away again. 26Eventually the crops grew—wheat, but also weeds. 27So the farmer's workers said to him, "Sir, why didn't you sow good seeds in your field? Where did these weeds come from?"

28"My enemy must have done this," replied the farmer.

"Should we go pull up all the weeds?" asked his workers.

29"No," said the farmer. "*It's too risky*. As you pull up the weeds, you would probably pull up some wheat as well. 30We'll let them both grow until harvesttime. I will tell the harvesters to collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, and only then to harvest the wheat and bring it to my barn."

31Jesus told them another parable.

Jesus: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a sower took and planted in his field. 32Mustard seeds are minute, tiny—but the seeds grow into trees. Flocks of birds can come and build their nests in the branches.

33And Jesus told a *fourth* parable.

Jesus: *Imagine a woman preparing a loaf of bread.* The kingdom of heaven is like the leaven she folds into her dough. She kneads and kneads until the leaven is worked into all the dough.

Without the leaven, the dough remains flat. But the secret is the almost invisible leaven making her loaves fluff and rise.

34Jesus gave all these teachings to the crowd in parables. Indeed, He spoke only in parables 35in fulfillment of the prophetic words *of the psalms:*

> I will open My mouth in parables;
> I will tell them things that have
> been hidden and obscure since
> the very beginning of the world.*

36Then Jesus left the crowds and returned to His house. His disciples followed Him.

Disciples: Explain to us the story You told about the weeds.

Jesus: 37The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38The field is the world; the good seed represents the children of the Kingdom. The weeds—*who do you think the weeds are?* They are the children of the evil one, 39and the enemy who threw the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the workers are God's heavenly messengers. 40*In the parable*, I told you the weeds would be pulled up and burned—well, that is how it will be at the end of this age. 41The Son of Man will send His messengers out into the world, and they will root out from His kingdom everything that is poisonous,

* 13:35 Psalm 78:2

ugly, and malicious, and everyone who does evil. 42They will throw all that wickedness into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. 43And the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

44The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is hidden in a field. A *crafty* man found the treasure buried there and buried it again *so no one would know where it was*. Thrilled, he went off and sold everything he had, and then he came back and bought the field *with the hidden treasure part of the bargain*.

45Or the kingdom of heaven is like a jeweler on the lookout for the finest pearls. 46When he found a pearl more beautiful and valuable than any jewel he had ever seen, the jeweler sold all he had and bought that pearl, *his pearl of great price*.

47Or *think of it this way*: the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea, a net that caught a world of flickering fish. 48When the net was full, the fishermen hauled it to shore. They separated the good fish from the bad, placing the good fish in a bucket and throwing out the inedible fish. 49That is what the end of time will be like. The heavenly messengers will separate *the good from the bad*, the righteous from the wicked, *the repentant from the prideful, the faithful from the hard-hearted*. 50*The bad, the wicked, the prideful, and the hard-hearted* will be thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

51Do you understand?

Disciples: Yes, *we understand*.

Jesus: 52Every scribe *and teacher of the law* who has become a student of the ways of the Kingdom is like the head of the household who brings some new things and some old things, both out of the storeroom.

53With that Jesus finished teaching His parables, and He moved on. 54-56He came to *Nazareth*, the town where He had grown up. He taught at the local synagogue, and the people were astonished.

People: *Is this our little Jesus?* Is this Mary's son? Is this the carpenter's son? Is this Jesus, brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Didn't we just see His sisters *yesterday at the market*? Where did He learn all this? Whence His power?

57They were offended by Him—*by His teachings, by who He was*.

Jesus: Prophets are respected—except in their hometowns and in their own households. *There the prophet is dishonored.*

58Jesus didn't bother to work wondrous miracles there *in Nazareth* because the people did not believe.

14 At this time, the ruler *of Galilee* was Herod *Antipas*. He began to hear reports about all that Jesus was doing.

2*Like the people of Nazareth,* Herod wondered *where Jesus' power came from.*

Herod *(to his servants)*: He must be John the Baptist,* raised from the dead; thus his powers are at work in him.

Herod is concerned with the attention that John is receiving, but he doesn't want to be seen killing a holy man. And now, Jesus is creating an even greater problem.

3-5Herod's brother Philip had married a woman named Herodias, *who eventually married Herod*. John denounced Herod's marriage to her as adulterous. Herod was incensed *(not to mention a little fearful)* and wanted to kill John, but he knew the people considered John a prophet. Instead, he bound John and put him in jail.

6-7*There John sat until* Herod's birthday. On that night, *Salome,* Herodias's daughter *by Philip,* came and danced for her stepfather and all his birthday guests. Herod so enjoyed her dancing that he vowed to give her whatever she wanted.

Salome *(after whispering with her mother)*: 8Bring me the head of John the Baptist,* displayed on a platter.

This is not what Herod expected—he imagined his stepdaughter would ask for a necklace or maybe a slave.

* 14:2 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 14:8 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance

9Herod still thought it unwise to kill John, but *because he had made such a show of his promise*—because he had actually sworn an oath and *because the scene was playing out* in front of *the watchful eyes* of so many guests—Herod felt bound *to give his stepdaughter what she wanted.* 10And so he sent orders to the prison to have John beheaded, 11and there was his head, displayed on a platter, given first to *Salome* and then passed on to her mother.

12John's disciples went to the prison, got John's body, and buried him. Then they went to tell Jesus.

13When Jesus learned what had happened, He got on a boat and went away to spend some time in a private place. The crowds, of course, followed Jesus on foot from their cities. 14*Though Jesus wanted solitude,* when He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, and He healed the sick *and the lame.* 15At evening-time, Jesus' disciples came to Him.

Disciples: We're in a fairly remote place, and it is getting late; *the crowds will get hungry for supper.* Send them away so they have time to get back to the villages and get something to eat.

Jesus: 16They don't need to go back to the villages in order to eat supper. Give them something to eat here.

Disciples: 17*But we don't have enough food.* We only have five rounds *of flatbread* and two fish.

Jesus: 18Bring the bread and the fish to Me.

So the disciples brought Him the five rounds of flatbread and the two fish, 19and Jesus told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the bread and the fish, He looked up to heaven, He gave thanks, and then He broke the bread. Jesus gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples gave the bread to the people; 20everyone ate and was satisfied. *When everyone had eaten,* the disciples picked up 12 baskets of *crusts and* broken pieces *of bread and crumbs.* 21There were 5,000 men there, not to mention all the women and children.

22Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on to the other side of the sea while He dismissed the crowd. 23Then, after the crowd had gone, Jesus went up to a mountaintop alone *(as He had intended from the start).* As evening descended, He stood alone on the mountain, praying.

In the midst of the burdens of life and ministry, like when news of John's death reaches Him, Jesus seeks refreshment in solitary prayer.

24The boat was in the water, some distance from land, buffeted and pushed around by waves and wind. 25Deep in the night, *when He had concluded His prayers,* Jesus walked out on the water to His disciples *in their boat.* 26The disciples saw a figure moving toward them and were terrified.

Disciple: It's a ghost!

Another Disciple: A ghost? *What will we do?*

Jesus: 27Be still. It is I. You have nothing to fear.

Peter: 28Lord, if it is really You, then command me to meet You on the water.

Jesus: 29*Indeed,* come.

Peter stepped out of the boat onto the water and began walking toward Jesus. 30But when he remembered how strong the wind was, his courage caught in his throat and he began to sink.

Peter: Master, save me!

31Immediately Jesus reached for Peter and caught him.

Jesus: O you of little faith. Why did you doubt *and dance back and forth between following* Me *and heeding fear*?

32Then Jesus and Peter climbed in the boat together, and the wind became still. 33And the disciples worshiped Him.

Disciples: Truly You are the Son of God.

34All together, Jesus and the disciples crossed *to the other side of the sea.* They landed at Gennesaret, *an area famous for its princely gardens.* 35The people of Gennesaret recognized Jesus, and they spread word of His arrival all over the countryside. People brought the sick *and wounded* to Him 36and begged Him for permission

to touch the fringes of His robe. Everyone who touched Him was healed.

15 Some Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to ask Jesus a question.

Scribes and Pharisees: 2The law of Moses has always held that one must ritually wash his hands before eating. Why don't Your disciples observe this tradition?

3Jesus turned the Pharisees' question back on them.

Jesus: Why do you violate God's command because of your tradition? 4God said, "Honor your father and mother.* Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death."* 5-6But you say that one need no longer honor his parents so long as he says to them, "What you might have gained from me, I now give to the glory of God." Haven't you let your tradition trump the word of God? 7You hypocrites! Isaiah must have had you in mind when he prophesied,

8People honor Me with their lips,
but their hearts are nowhere
near Me.
9Because they elevate mere human
ritual to the status of law,
their worship of Me is a
meaningless sham.*

10(to the multitude) Hear and understand this: 11What you put into your mouth cannot make you *clean or* unclean; it is what comes out of your mouth that can make you unclean.

12Later the disciples came to Him.

Disciples: Do You realize the Pharisees were shocked by what You said?

Jesus: 13Every plant planted by someone other than My heavenly Father will be plucked up by the roots. 14So let them be. They are blind guides. What happens when one blind person leads another? Both of them fall into a ditch.

Peter: 15Explain that riddle to us.

Jesus: 16Do you still not see? 17Don't you understand that whatever you take in through your mouth makes its way to your stomach and eventually out *of the bowels* of your body? 18But the things that come out of your mouth—*your curses, your fears, your denunciations*—these come from your heart, and it is the stirrings of your heart that can make you unclean. 19For your heart harbors evil thoughts—fantasies of murder, adultery, and whoring; fantasies of stealing, lying, and slandering. 20These make you unclean—not eating with a hand you've not ritually purified with a splash of water *and a prayer*.

21Jesus left that place and withdrew to Tyre and Sidon. 22A Canaanite woman—*a non-Jew*—came to Him.

Canaanite Woman *(wailing)*: Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is possessed by a demon. *Have mercy, Lord!*

23Jesus said nothing. *And the woman continued to wail.* His disciples came to Him.

Disciples: Do something—she keeps crying after us!

Jesus: 24I was sent here only to gather up the lost sheep of Israel.

25The woman came up to Jesus and knelt before Him.

Canaanite Woman: Lord, help me!

Jesus: 26It is not right to waste the children's bread by feeding dogs.

Canaanite Woman: 27But, Lord, even dogs eat the crumbs that fall by the table as their master is eating.

28Jesus—*whose ancestors included Ruth and Rahab*—spoke *with kindness and insight.*

Jesus: Woman, you have great faith. And your request is done.

And her daughter was healed, right then and from then on.

29Jesus left and went to the Sea of Galilee. He went up on a mountaintop and sat down. 30Crowds thronged to Him there, bringing the lame, *the maimed,* the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many other *sick and broken* people. They laid them at His feet, and He healed them.

* 15:4 Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 * 15:4 Leviticus 20:9 * 15:8-9 Isaiah 29:13

31The people saw the mute speaking, the lame walking, *the maimed made whole,* the crippled dancing, and the blind seeing; and the people were amazed, and they praised the God of Israel.

Jesus *(to His disciples)***:** 32*We must take pity on* these people for they have touched My heart; they have been with Me for three days, and they don't have any food. I don't want to send them home this hungry—they might collapse on the way!

Disciples: 33We'll never find enough food for all these people, out here in the middle of nowhere!

Jesus: 34How much bread do you have?

Disciples: Seven *rounds of flatbread* and a few small fish.

35He told the crowd to sit down. 36He took the bread and the fish, He gave thanks, and then He broke the bread and divided the fish. He gave the bread and fish to the disciples, the disciples distributed them to the people, 37and everyone ate and was satisfied. When everyone had eaten, the disciples picked up seven baskets of *crusts and* broken pieces *and crumbs.*

38There were 4,000 men there, not to mention all the women and children. 39Then Jesus sent the crowd away. He got into the boat and went to Magadan.

16 They came to Him together, a band of Pharisees and a band of Sadducees, trying to trick and trap Him.

► Now at this time in Judea, the Jews, the children of Israel, are a diverse bunch. One group of Jews, which Jesus has already encountered, is called the Pharisees. Another group of Jews is called the Sadducees. The two groups do not agree about how to read Scripture, they do not see eye-to-eye, and they do not get along. They rarely partner with each other, but here they are partnering—because they are so perplexed, befuddled, and panicked about this Jesus.

They asked Him for a sign from heaven.

Jesus: 2At evening time, you read the sky as a sign—you say, "The weather will be fine because the sky is shading red," 3and in the morning, *you read the sky as a sign, saying,* "The red, stormy sky tells me that today we will have storms." So you are skilled at interpreting the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times? 4Only a cheating and evil generation *such as this* would beg for a miraculous sign *from heaven.* The only sign you will get will be the sign of Jonah.

And then Jesus left them and went away.

5When next the disciples crossed *the Sea of Galilee*, they forgot to bring any bread with them.

Jesus: 6Be careful; avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

7The disciples *were not quite sure what Jesus meant, so they* discussed His warning among themselves.

Disciples: *He must mean not to buy any bread from a baker who associates with the Pharisees or Sadducees.* He must have given us this warning because we showed up here without any bread.

8Jesus knew what the disciples were saying among themselves, *and He took them to task.*

Jesus: You men of little faith, *do you really think that I care which baker you patronize? After spending so much time with Me, do you still not understand what I mean?* So you showed up without bread; why talk about it? 9-10Don't you remember that we fed 5,000 men with five rounds of flatbread? Don't you remember that we fed 4,000 men with seven rounds of bread? Don't you remember what excess, what abundance there was—*how many broken pieces and crusts you collected after everyone had eaten and was sated*? 11So when I speak about leaven, I am not talking about what we will eat for dinner. I say again, avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

12And then the disciples understood: Jesus was not talking about the bread you eat, *but about the food that feeds your soul. He was speaking in metaphor;* He was warning

them against imbibing the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

13Jesus then went to Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus *(to His disciples)*: Who do people say the Son of Man is?

Disciples: 14Some say John the Baptist.* And some say Elijah. And some say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.

Jesus: 15And you? Who do you say that I am?

Peter: 16You are the Anointed One. You are the Son of the living God.

Jesus: 17Simon, son of Jonah, your knowledge is a mark of blessing. For you didn't learn this truth from your friends or from teachers or from sages you've met on the way. You learned it from My Father in heaven. 18This is why I have called you Peter *(rock)*: for on this rock I will build My church. The church will reign triumphant even at the gates of hell. 19Peter, I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

► With Peter's confession that Jesus is the Anointed One, the foundation of the church is laid. In the days ahead, the church will storm the gates of hell and nothing will be able to stop it. No darkness, no doubt, no deception—not even death will be able to stand against it.

20And Jesus ordered His disciples *to keep these teachings secret.*

Jesus: You must tell no one that I am the Anointed.

21Then Jesus began to tell the disciples *about what would happen to Him. He said* He would have to go to Jerusalem. There the elders, chief priests, and scribes would meet Him; He would suffer at their hands; and He would be killed. But three days later, He would be raised *to new life.*

22*As Jesus spoke of the things to come,* Peter took Him aside. *Sad and confused, and maybe a little bit prideful,* Peter chastised Jesus.

Peter: No, Lord! Never! These things that You are saying—they will never happen to You!

Jesus *(turning to Peter)*: 23Get away from Me, Satan!

This is the very thing He said to the devil during those wilderness temptations.

You are a stumbling block before Me! You are not thinking about God's story; you are thinking about *some distorted story of fallen, broken* people. 24(to His disciples) If you want to follow Me, you must deny yourself *the things you think you want.* You must pick up your cross and follow Me. 25The person who wants to save his life must lose it, and she who loses her life for Me will find it. 26Look, does it make sense to truly become successful, but then to hand over your very soul? What is your soul really worth? 27The Son of Man will come in His Father's glory, with His heavenly messengers, and then He will reward each person for what has been done. 28I tell you this: some of you standing here, you will see the Son of Man come into His kingdom before you taste death.

► Jesus is providing an entirely different perspective on success and happiness. The new Kingdom is breaking in, and the new community is coming together. This is the logic of that Kingdom and that community: to inhabit God's story, this is what must be done. To accrue fame and comfort and riches is counter to this new community. In the economics of this new community, real success is marked by a willingness to sacrifice one's very life to God, and the promised rewards are immense.

17 Six days later, Jesus went up to the top of a high mountain with Peter, James, and John.

* 16:14 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance

2There, *something spectacular happened:* Jesus' face began to glow and gleam and shine like the morning sun. His clothes gleamed too—bright white, like sunlight *mirroring off a snowfall.* He was, *in a word,* transfigured. 3Suddenly there at the top of the mountain were Moses and Elijah, *those icons of the faith, beloved of God.* And they talked to Jesus.

Peter: 4Lord, how amazing that we are here *to see these heroes of our faith, these men through whom God spoke.* Should I quickly build some shelter, three *small* tabernacles, for You, for Moses, and for Elijah?

5As Peter spoke, a bright cloud enveloped all of them.

Voice from the Cloud: This is My beloved Son. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.

► This is but an echo of the Voice that spoke at Jesus' ritual cleansing in baptism. It is an echo of what God said through Moses during his final sermon on the mount. God promised that although Moses could not enter the promised land, He would send His people another prophet. Moses' very last wish for his beloved people was that they would listen to this new prophet when He would come.

6This voice from heaven terrified the three disciples, and they fell prostrate on the ground. 7But Jesus—*who was, by this time, used to His disciples being plagued by fear*—touched them.

Jesus: Get up. Don't be afraid.

8And when the disciples got up, they saw they were alone with their Lord.

9The four men hiked back down the mountain, and Jesus told His disciples to stay silent.

Jesus: Don't tell anyone what happened here, not until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

► Why does Jesus often instruct His disciples to keep secrets? In this case, perhaps He does because He realizes they will not understand the meaning of the transfiguration until they live through that other hilltop event, the death of Jesus on the cross. Believers, like the disciples, will better understand this bath of light and revelation when they, too, come to Golgotha and the cross.

Disciples: 10Master, why do the scribes teach that the prophet Elijah must come first?

Jesus: 11*Scripture tells us clearly that indeed* Elijah will come to restore all things. 12But see this: Elijah has come already. No one recognized him for who he was, so he was arrested and killed. *That is part of the preparation of which our Scripture speaks:* for the Son of Man, too, will be arrested and killed at the hands of people *who do not see Him for who He is.*

13And then the disciples realized the man they knew as John the Baptist* was the one Jesus was speaking of.

14*They had come down from the mountain, and as they headed toward town,* they came to a crowd. As they approached the crowd, a man rushed up to Jesus and knelt before Him.

Man from the Crowd: 15Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures. Sometimes when they come on, my son falls into the fire or into a pond. *We are very concerned for him.* 16I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him.

Jesus: 17This generation *is no better than the generation who wandered in the desert,* who lost faith and bowed down *to golden idols as soon as Moses disappeared upon Mount Sinai!* How long will I have to shepherd these unbelieving sheep? *(turning to the man)* Bring the boy to Me.

18*The man did, and* Jesus castigated the demon who had taken up residence in the

* 17:13 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance

boy. And the demon fled the boy's body *at the sound of Jesus' voice*, and the boy was healed from that moment on. *No more shaking. No more falling into fires.*

19*Later,* when they were away from the crowds, the disciples asked Jesus why they hadn't been able to drive out the demon themselves.

Jesus: 20Because you have so little faith. I tell you this: *if you had even a faint spark of faith*, even faith as *tiny as* a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and *because of your faith,* the mountain would move. *If you had just a sliver of faith*, you would find nothing impossible. [21But this kind is not realized except through much prayer and fasting.]*

22Jesus and the disciples came to Galilee.

Jesus: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. 23They will kill Him, and on the third day, He will be resurrected, *vindicated, newly alive.*

The disciples were filled with grief.

24Then Jesus and His disciples went toward Capernaum, and when they arrived there, some people who had collected the two-drachma tax *that went for the upkeep of the temple* came up to Peter.

Temple Tax Collectors: Does your Teacher not pay the *temple* tax?

Peter: 25He does pay the tax.

► Jesus knows that He and His followers are the true temple, and yet Jesus is canny. It is not quite time to shake the foundations of the temple or of the old way of doing things. And so He pays the tax and bides His time.

So when Peter came into the house where they were staying, Jesus explored the subject.

Jesus: Simon, what do you think? When kings collect taxes and duties and tolls, from whom do they collect? Do they levy taxes on their own people or on strangers and foreigners?

Peter: 26The foreigners, my Lord.

Jesus: Well, then, we children of the King should be exempt from this two-drachma tax. 27But all in all, it's better not to make any waves; *we'd better go on and pay the tax.* So do this: go out to the lake and throw out your line. And when you catch a fish, open its jaws and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take this to the tax collectors, and pay your taxes and Mine.

18 Around that same time, the disciples came to Jesus and questioned Him about the kingdom of heaven.

A Disciple: In the kingdom of heaven, who is the greatest?

► The disciples struggle with the concept of the kingdom of heaven. They do not yet understand that who is most important or most powerful is a contradiction in terms. This is the fourth of the five great sermons in Matthew.

2Jesus called over a little child. *He put His hand on the top of the child's head.*

Jesus: 3This is the truth: unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4In that kingdom, the most humble who are most like this child are the greatest. 5And whoever welcomes a child, *welcomes her* in My name, welcomes Me. 6And do not lead astray one of the weak and friendless who believes in Me. If you do, it would be better for you to be dragged down with a millstone and drowned in the bottom of the sea.

7Beware indeed of those in a world filled with obstacles and temptations *that cause people to turn away from Me.* Those temptations are woven into the fabric of a world *not yet redeemed*, but beware to anyone who lures righteous women and men off the narrow path. 8If your hand constantly grasps at the things of this world rather than serves the Kingdom—cut it off and throw it

* 17:21 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 21.

away. If your foot is always leading you to wander, then cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to hobble, crippled, into *the kingdom of* life than to burn in hell with two hands and two feet. 9And if your eye always focuses on things that cause you to sin, then pull your eye out and throw it away. It is better for you to see *the kingdom of* life with one eye than to see the fires of hell with perfect sight.

10Make sure that you do not look down on the little ones, *on those who are further behind you on the path of righteousness.* For I tell you: they are watched over by those *most beloved* messengers who are always in the company of My Father in heaven. [11The Son of Man has come to save all those who are lost.]* 12A shepherd in charge of 100 sheep notices that one of his sheep has gone astray. What do you think he should do? Should the shepherd leave the flock on the hills unguarded to search for the lost sheep? *God's shepherd goes to look for that one lost sheep,* 13and when he finds her, he is happier about her return than he is about the 99 who stayed put. 14Your Father in heaven does not want a single one of the *tripped, waylaid, stumbling* little ones to be lost.

► The wisdom of the world says the shepherd should forget that one missing sheep and chalk it up as a loss. In God's economy, each soul has its own value apart from all others. Jesus calls the people of His kingdom to help the weak and the friendless, the small and the frail, the mute and the poor, the ugly and the disfigured.

Jesus: 15This is what you do if one of your brothers or sisters sins against you: go to him, in private, and tell him just what you perceive the wrong to be. If he listens to you, you've won a brother. 16*But sometimes he will not listen.* And if he does not listen, go back, taking a friend or two friends with you (*for, as we have learned in Deuteronomy*, every matter of communal import should be testified to by two or three witnesses).* 17Then, if your brother or sister still refuses to heed, you are to share what you know with the entire church; and if your brother or sister still refuses to listen to the entire church, you are to cast out your unrepentant sibling and consider him no different from outsiders and tax collectors.

What God desires most is not the casting out of an unrepentant member, but loving chastisement for the sake of bringing the sinful back to God.

18Remember this: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19And this: if two *or three* of you come together as a community *and discern clearly* about anything, My Father in heaven will bless that discernment. 20For when two or three gather together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

Peter: 21Lord, when someone has sinned against me, how many times ought I forgive him? *Once? Twice?* As many as seven times?

Jesus: 22You must forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven.

► The response of Jesus is like the story of Lamech in Genesis. He was Adam and Eve's great-great-great-great-grandson who had two wives. One day he said to his wives, "Wives of Lamech, I need to tell you something! I killed a man who struck me. *Surely* Lamech *must be avenged* seventy-seven times" (Genesis 4:23-24). In this new Kingdom of forgiveness, we reverse and invert Lamech's plan. As Christians, we should forgive others' transgressions more readily than the world would avenge them.

Jesus: 23If you want to understand the kingdom of heaven, think about a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24Just as the king began to get his accounts in order, his assistants

* 18:11 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 11. * 18:16 Deuteronomy 19:15

called his attention to a slave who owed a huge sum to him—what a laborer might make in 500 lifetimes.* 25The slave, *maybe an embezzler,* had no way to make restitution, so the king ordered that he, his wife, their children, and everything the family owned be sold *on the auction block*; the proceeds from the slave sale would go toward paying back the king. 26Upon hearing this judgment, the slave fell down, prostrated himself before the king, and begged for mercy: "Have mercy on me, and I will somehow pay you everything." 27The king was moved by the pathos of the situation, so indeed he took pity on the servant, told him to stand up, and then forgave the debt.

28But the slave went and found a friend, another slave, who owed him about a hundred days' wages.* "Pay me back that money," shouted the slave, throttling his friend and shaking him with threats and violence. 29The slave's friend fell down prostrate and begged for mercy: "Have mercy on me, and I will somehow pay you everything." 30But the first slave *cackled and was hard-hearted and* refused *to hear his friend's plea.* He *found a magistrate and* had his friend thrown into prison "where," he said, "you will sit until you can pay me back." 31The other servants saw what was going on. They were upset, so they went to the king and told him everything that had happened.

32The king summoned the slave, *the one who had owed so much money, the one whose debt the king had forgiven. The king was livid.* "You slovenly scum," he said, *seething with anger.* "You begged me to forgive your debt, and I did. 33*What would be the faithful response to such latitude and generosity?* Surely you should have shown the same charity to a friend who was in your debt."

34The king turned over the unmerciful slave to his brigade of torturers, *and they had their way with him* until he should pay his whole debt. 35And that is what My Father in heaven will do to you, unless you forgive each of your brothers *and each of your sisters* from *the very cockles of* your heart.

19 After Jesus had finished His teaching about forgiveness, He left Galilee and He went to the section of Judea on the other side of the Jordan River. 2Large crowds followed Him, *and when He got to Judea,* He set about healing them.

The religious leaders who are eyeing the crowds and watching the healings decide it is again time to try to trip up Jesus.

3So some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked Him this tricky question *about divorce*:

Pharisees: Is it ever lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Jesus: 4Haven't you read that in the beginning God created humanity male and female?* *Don't you remember what the story of our creation tells us about marriage?* 5"For this reason, a man will leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* 6If a husband and wife are one flesh, *how can they divorce? Divorce would be a bloody amputation, would it not*? "What God has brought together, let no man separate."

Pharisees: 7Why did Moses explain that if a man leaves his wife, then he must give her a certificate of divorce and send her away, free and clear of him?

Jesus: 8Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. *But divorce was an innovation, an accommodation to a fallen world.* There was no divorce at creation. 9Listen, friends: if you leave your wife, unless there is adultery, and then marry another woman, you yourself are committing adultery. *Only if there is adultery can you divorce your wife.*

► Why? Because adultery itself is the divorce. Adultery is the thing that breaks the bond of marriage. Just as an excommunication merely recognizes the fact that someone has already been removed from the people, a divorce merely legalizes what harlotry has created. But should someone leave his wife for any other reason—because he has nothing to say to her, because she

* 18:24 Literally, 10,000 talents * 18:28 Literally, denarii, Roman coins * 19:4 Genesis 1:27 * 19:5 Genesis 2:24

continually burns his food, because she is profligate with the household resources, because he simply cannot stand the sight of her—this is outside of the message Jesus offers here. If we behave as if a marriage has been undone—indeed, some may believe that a marriage has been undone—then we are deluding ourselves. In the eyes of God, the marriage bonds still hold a man to his wife.

Disciples: 10If this is how it is, then it is better to avoid marrying in the first place.

Jesus: 11Not everyone can hear this teaching, only those to whom it has been given. 12*Some people do not marry, of course.* Some people are eunuchs because they are born that way, others have been made eunuchs by men, and others have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who can embrace that call should do so.

13At this, some *of Jesus' followers* brought their children before Jesus; they wanted Him to place His hands on the children and pray *for them.* Some of the disciples, *mistakenly thinking that Jesus wouldn't want to be bothered with the likes of children,* began to rebuke the crowd.

Jesus: 14Let the little children come to Me; do not get in their way. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to children like these.

15He laid His hands on them, *He prayed with them,* and then He left that spot *and went elsewhere.* 16Then a *young* man came up to Jesus.

Young Man: Teacher, what good deed can I do to assure myself eternal life?

Jesus: 17Strange that you should ask Me what is good. There is only One who is good. If you want to participate in His *divine* life, obey the Commandments.

Young Man: 18Which Commandments *in particular*?

Jesus: *Well, to begin with,* do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

Young Man: 20I've kept those Commandments faithfully. What else do I need to do?

Jesus can see the man wants to know how to participate in God's reality, and He knows his shoulders will sag under the weight of the next hard instruction.

Jesus: 21If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give all your money to the poor; then you will have treasure in heaven. And then come, follow Me.

22The young man went away sad because he was very wealthy indeed.

Jesus: 23This is the truth: it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24Yes, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

25The disciples, hearing this, were stunned.

Disciples: Who then can be saved?

Jesus: 26People cannot save themselves. But with God, all things are possible.

Peter: 27*You just told that man to leave everything and follow You.* Well, all of us have done just that. So what should we be expecting?

Jesus: 28I tell you this. When *creation is consummated and* all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on His throne in glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on thrones. There will be twelve thrones, and you will sit and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. 29You who have left your house and your fields, or your brothers and sisters, or your father and mother, or even your children in order to follow Me, *at that time when all is renewed, you will receive so much more*: you will receive 100 times what you gave up. You will inherit eternal life. 30Many of those who are the first will be last, and those who are the last will be first.

* 19:19 Exodus 20:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:16-20; Leviticus 19:18

20 **Jesus:** The kingdom of heaven is like a wealthy landowner who got up early in the morning and went out, first thing, to hire workers to tend his vineyard. 2He agreed to pay them a day's wage* for the day's work. The workers headed to the vineyard *while the landowner headed home to deal with some paperwork.* 3About three hours later, he went back to the marketplace. He saw *some unemployed* men standing around with nothing to do.

Landowner: 4*Do you need some work?* Go over to my vineyard *and join the crew there.* I'll pay you well.

So off they went *to join the crew at the vineyard.* 5About three hours later, and then three hours after that, *the landowner went back to the market and saw another crew of men and hired them, too, sending them off to his vineyard and promising to pay them well.* 6Then finally late in the afternoon, *at the cusp of night*, the landowner walked again through *the marketplace*, and he saw other *workers* still standing around.

Landowner: Why have you been standing here all day, doing nothing?

Workers: 7Because no one has hired us.

Landowner: Well, you should go over to my vineyard *and work.*

And off the workers went. 8When quitting time arrived, the landowner called to his foreman.

Landowner: Pay the workers their day's wages, beginning with the workers I hired most recently and ending with the workers who have been here all day.

9So the workers who had been hired just a short while before came to the foreman, and he paid them each a day's wage.* 10*Then other workers who had arrived during the day were paid, each of them a day's wage.* Finally, the workers who'd been toiling since early morning came thinking they'd be paid more, but the foreman paid each of them a day's wage.* 11As they received their pay, this last group of workers began to protest.

First Workers: 12*We've been here since the crack of dawn!* And you're paying us the exact same wage you paid the crew that just showed up. *We deserve more than they do.* We've been slogging in the heat of the sun all day—*these others haven't worked nearly as long as we have!*

13*The landowner heard these protests.*

Landowner *(to a worker)***:** Friend, no one has been wronged here today. *This isn't about what you deserve.* You agreed to work for a day's wage,* did you not? 14So take your money and go home. *I can give my money to whomever I please, and* it pleases me to pay everyone the same amount of money. 15Do you think I don't have the right to dispose of my money as I wish? Or does my generosity somehow prick at you?

16*And that is your picture:* The last will be first and the first will be last.

► God's glory and kingdom are His, so He is free to lavish goodness on anyone He pleases. If someone feels jealous because her friend's husband seems nicer than her husband, or because another's brother works no harder than he does but somehow earns far more money, or because another's classmate who has the intelligence of a sponge always seems to get better grades, then God's generosity will indeed undo all we have come to know and expect.

17As Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem, He took His twelve disciples aside and *once again* told them *what was about to happen.*

Jesus: 18We are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the teachers of the law. He will be condemned to death, 19and the priests and teachers will turn Him over to the Romans, who will mock Him and flog Him and crucify Him. But on the third day, He will be raised from the dead *to new resurrected life.*

20*As Jesus was speaking about the things that were to come,* Zebedee's wife, whose

* 20:2 Literally, a denarius, a Roman coin * 20:9 Literally, a denarius, a Roman coin * 20:10 Literally, a denarius, a Roman coin
* 20:13 Literally, a denarius, a Roman coin

After a great parade, Jesus and His disciples walk into the temple area, and what He sees enrages Him. He sees moneychangers, buying and selling. He sees men sitting on benches, hawking doves to those who have come from the countryside to make a sacrifice. He sees that the salesmen and teachers have turned a sanctuary of worship into a place of spiritual prostitution. This is the place where Jesus came as a boy to sit with the great teachers. It is the place where His Father receives the offerings of His people. It is more than Jesus can take.

Can anyone be surprised at this other side to Jesus? He has turned out to be not just a kindly teacher; instead, He is the Anointed One, not to be taken lightly. In the midst of this scene filled with joy and chaos, there are extremes. Some are beginning to understand who this man from Galilee is—the Anointed—but the rulers are having great difficulty with the disruption to their orderly world.

sons were among Jesus' disciples, came to Jesus with her sons and knelt down before Him to ask a favor.

Jesus: 21What do you want?

Zebedee's Wife: When the kingdom of God is made manifest, I want one of my boys, *James and John*, to sit at Your right hand, and one to sit at Your left hand.

► Apparently the wife of Zebedee secretly thinks her sons have worked harder and sacrificed more for Jesus than the other disciples, and she probably suspects that Jesus loves them best. She thinks He will at least do the right thing and reward their hardest work and most loyal service. She also hopes that if her sons are there on the nearest, closest thrones, she may spend eternity near and close, too, clutching onto their coattails.

Jesus *(to all three)*: 22You don't understand what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? Can you be ritually washed in baptism just as I have been baptized?*

Zebedee Brothers: Of course!

Jesus: 23Yes, you will drink from My cup, and yes, you will be baptized* as I have been. But the thrones to My right and My left are not Mine to grant. My Father has already given those seats to those for whom they were created.

24The other ten disciples learned what the Zebedee brothers had asked of Jesus, and they were upset. 25So Jesus called the disciples together.

Jesus: Do you want the Kingdom run like the Romans run their kingdom? Their rulers have great power over the people, *but God the Father doesn't play by the Romans' rules.* 26*This is the Kingdom's logic:* whoever wants to become great must first make himself a servant; 27whoever wants to be first must bind himself as a slave—28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as the ransom for many.

29So finally Jesus and His disciples left Jericho *and headed for Jerusalem*; and, *of course*, a large crowd followed them. 30Two blind men, sitting on the roadside, heard the crowd approaching with Jesus.

Two Blind Men: Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!

31The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted louder.

Two Blind Men: Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!

Jesus *(taking the two blind men aside)*: 32What is it that you want, *brothers*?

Two Blind Men: 33Lord, we want to see.

34Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and so they followed Him.

21 Jesus, the disciples, and the great crowds were heading toward Jerusalem when they

* 20:22 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 20:23 Literally, immersed, to show repentance

came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus stopped and beckoned to two of the disciples.

Jesus: [2]Go to the village over there. There you'll find a donkey tied *to a post* and a foal beside it. Untie them and bring them to Me. [3]If anyone tries to stop you, then tell him, "The Master needs these," and he will send the donkey and foal immediately.

[4]*He sent the disciples on ahead so His entry into Jerusalem could* fulfill what the prophet *Zechariah* had *long since* foretold:

> [5]Tell this to Zion's daughter,
> "Look—your King is approaching,
> seated humbly on a donkey,
> a young foal, a beast of burden."*

[6]So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. [7]They brought the donkey and foal *to Jesus*, they spread their cloaks on the animals, and Jesus sat down on them. [8]The great crowd followed suit, laying their cloaks on the road. Others cut leafy branches from the trees and scattered those *before Jesus*. [9]And the crowds went before Jesus, *walked alongside Him*, and processed behind—all singing.

Crowd: Hosanna, praises to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Eternal One! Hosanna in the highest!*

The way Jesus enters the city on a lowly donkey, with crowds surrounding Him singing praises, surprises many within Jerusalem.

[10]*And that is how* Jesus came into Jerusalem. The people noticed this strange parade. They wondered who this could be, *this humble bearded man on a donkey who incited such songs.*

Crowd: [11]This is Jesus, the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.

[12]Jesus came to the temple. He drove out all those who were buying and selling. He upended the moneychangers' tables and the dove-sellers' benches.

Jesus: [13]It is written, "My house will be a house of prayer *for all people*," but you have turned this house of prayer into a den of robbers.*

[14]Then the blind and the lame came to the temple, and Jesus healed them. [15]Rings of children circled round and sang, "Hosanna to the Son of David." But the priests and scribes didn't understand. When they saw *the upturned tables, the walking paralytics, and the singing children,* they were *shocked,* indignant, *and angry, and they did not understand.*

Priests and Scribes: [16]Do you hear what these children are saying?

Jesus: Yes. Haven't you read *your own psalter*? "From the mouths *and souls* of infants and toddlers, *the most innocent,* You have decreed praises for Yourself."*

[17]At that, Jesus left *Jerusalem*. He went to Bethany, where He spent the night.

[18]The next morning, Jesus went back to the city. *It was early and* He was wanting breakfast, so [19]He stopped at a lone fig tree by the road. The fig tree, *disappointingly,* had no figs, only leaves.

Jesus: May you never bear fruit again!

Immediately the tree shriveled up. [20]The disciples were amazed.

Disciples: How did that fig tree wither so quickly?

Jesus: [21]I tell you this: if you have faith and do not doubt, then you will be able to wither a fig tree with one glance. You will be able to tell mountains to throw themselves into the ocean, and they will obey.

► As Jesus says this, one or two disciples probably glance around the shadows of the early morning, confused and afraid. Jesus has just paraded into Jerusalem and upset the vendors and leaders with His bold talk. Now He is challenging His disciples to expect the physical creation to respond to their commands and faith. But Jesus isn't finished.

* 21:5 Zechariah 9:9 * 21:9 Psalm 118:26 * 21:13 Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11 * 21:16 Psalm 8:2

Jesus: 22If you believe, whatever you ask for in prayer will be granted.

23Jesus returned to the temple and began to teach. The chief priests and elders came to Him and wanted to know who had given Him permission to disturb the temple precincts and to teach *His crazy notions in this most sacred of spots.*

Chief Priests and Elders: Who gave You the authority to do these things?

Jesus: 24I will answer your question if first you answer one of Mine: 25You saw John ritually cleansing people through baptism* *for the redemption of their sins.* Did John's cleansing come from heaven, or was he simply washing people of his own whim?

The elders knew that this question was tricky; there was no simple answer. If they acknowledged that John's ritual cleansing was from heaven, Jesus would ask why they had not accepted John's authority. 26But if they said he had dipped people simply by his own accord, they would outrage the people who believed John was a prophet.

Chief Priests and Elders: 27We don't know.

Jesus: Then neither will I tell you about the authority under which I am working. 28*But I will tell you a story, and* you can tell Me what you make of it: There was a man who had two sons. He said to his first son,

Father: Go and work in the vineyard today.

First Son: 29No, I will not.

But later the first son changed his mind and went. 30Then the father went to his second son.

Father: Go and work in the vineyard today.

Second Son: Of course, Father.

But then he did not go. 31So which of the sons did what the father wanted?

Chief Priests and Elders *(answering at once)***:** The first.

Jesus: I tell you this: the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32John came to show you *the straight path*, the path to righteousness. You did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. Even as you saw *the prostitutes and the tax collectors forgiven and washed clean, finding their footing on the straight path to righteousness,* still you did not change your ways and believe.

33Here is another story: A landowner planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, fitted it with a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard and left town. 34When harvesttime came, the landowner sent his servants to collect rent—in the form of grapes—*from his tenants.* 35The tenants attacked these rent-collecting servants. They killed one, stoned another, and beat a third. 36The *dismayed* landowner sent another band of servants *to try to collect his due*, a larger group of servants this time, but the tenants did the same thing—*capturing, beating, killing.* 37Finally the landowner sent his son to the tenants, thinking, "They will at least respect my son." 38*But the tenants knew the son was the best way to get to the landowner,* so when they saw the son approaching they said,

Tenants: This is the landowner's heir apparent! Let's kill him and take his inheritance.

39And so they did; they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40What do you think the landowner will do when he comes and sees those tenants?

Chief Priests and Elders: 41He will eviscerate them, *to be sure*! Then he will rent the vineyard to other tenants who will pay him at harvesttime.

Jesus: 42I wonder if any of you has ever opened your own psalter:

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very stone that
holds together the entire
foundation.
This is the work of the Eternal One,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

43Therefore, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to

* 21:25 Literally, immersing, an act of repentance * 21:42 Psalm 118:22-23

people who will tend its *sweet* fruit *and who will give the Creator His due.* [44]He who falls on the stone will be broken to pieces, and he on whom the stone falls will be crushed.]*

► Jesus has just confronted the spiritual leaders of the land with hard reality. They have two choices: they can believe Him and repent, or they can disbelieve Him and call His stories rabble-rousing and craziness. In their minds, the cost of believing is just too high. Everything they have—their positions and standings in the community, their worldviews, their own images of themselves—is at stake. But they can't openly condemn this popular teacher of the people.

[45]And so the chief priests and the Pharisees, *the teachers and the elders*, knew that when Jesus told these stories He was speaking about them. [46]*Not believing*, they looked for a way to arrest Him—*a stealthy way, though.* They were afraid *to make too bold a move against Him* because all the people believed He was a prophet.

22 Jesus went on speaking in parables.

Jesus: [2]The kingdom of heaven is like a king whose son was getting married. The king organized a great feast, *a huge wedding banquet.* [3]*He invited everyone he knew. The day of the wedding arrived, and* the king sent his servants into town to track down his guests—but *when the servants approached them with the king's message,* they refused to come. [4]So the king sent out another batch of servants.

King: Tell those people I've invited to come to the wedding banquet! *Tell them* I have prepared a great feast! Everything is ready! The oxen and fattened cattle have all been butchered, *the wine is decanted, and the table is laid out just so.*

[5]*And off the servants went, and they carried the king's message to the errant guests*—who still paid not a whit of attention. One guest headed into his field *to work*; *another* sat at his desk to attend to his accounts. [6]The rest of the guests actually turned on the servants, brutalizing them and killing them. [7]*When he learned of this*, the king was furious. He sent his army to kill the murderers and burn their towns. [8]*But there was, of course, still a wedding to celebrate.*

King *(to his remaining servants)***:** The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited didn't rise to the occasion. [9]So go into the streets and invite anyone you see; invite everyone you meet.

[10]And the servants did just that—they went into the streets and invited everyone they met, *rich and poor*, good and bad, *high and low*, *sick and well.* Everyone who was invited came, and the wedding hall practically burst with guests.

[11]The king looked around the wedding party *with glee,* but he spotted one man who was not dressed *appropriately*. *In fact, he was dressed rather plainly,* in clothes not at all fitting for a fine nuptial feast.

King: [12]Kind sir, how did you get in here without a proper suit of wedding clothes?

The man was speechless. *He had been invited in off the street, after all!* [13]*Getting no response,* the king told his servants,

King: Tie him up, and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and grinding of teeth.

[14]For many are invited, but few are chosen.

[15]At that, the Pharisees left. They determined to trap this Jesus with His own words—*hang Him by His own rope, you might say*. [16]They sent a batch of students to Him, along with a group that was loyal to Herod.

Students: Teacher, we know You are a man of integrity and You tell the truth about the way of God. We know You don't cotton to public opinion. [17]*And that is why we trust You and want You to* settle something for us: should we, *God's chosen people*, pay taxes to Caesar or not?

* 21:44 Some manuscripts omit verse 44.

18Jesus knew these men were out to trap Him.

Jesus: You hypocrites! Why do you show up here with such a transparent trick? 19Bring Me a coin you would use to pay tax.

Someone handed Him a denarius.* 20*Jesus fingered the coin.*

Jesus: Of whom is this a portrait, and who owns this inscription?

Students: 21Caesar.

Jesus: Well then, render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

22And those *who had come hoping to trick Jesus* were confounded and amazed. And they left Him and went away.

23That same day, a band of Sadducees—*a sect of Jewish aristocrats who, among other things,* did not expect a resurrection *or anticipate any sort of future life at all*—put their own question to Jesus.

Sadducees: 24Teacher, *the law of* Moses teaches that if a *married* man dies with no children, then his brother must marry the widow and father children in his brother's name. 25Now we knew a family of seven brothers. The eldest brother married and died, and since he had no children, the next brother married his widow. 26*And shortly thereafter,* that second brother *died* and the next until there were seven marriages *with the same woman.* 27Eventually the wife died. 28So now, *Teacher*, whose wife will she be at the resurrection? *Will she have seven husbands,* since they were each married to her?

► According to Deuteronomy 25:5-6, a family member is supposed to marry a relative's widow to carry on the deceased's family name. Each man in this story dies, having fathered no children; that poor widow keeps marrying these brothers, and they keep dying. So in heaven, who is the husband?

Jesus: 29You know neither God's Scriptures nor God's power—and so your assumptions are all wrong. 30At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the messengers of heaven.

In heaven all will be devoting themselves to praise. It will not be a simple continuation of life on earth.

31A key to this resurrected life can be found *in the words of Moses*, which you do claim to read: 32"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* Our God is not the God of the dead. He is the God of the living.

33And again the crowd was amazed. They were astonished at His teaching.

34Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, *a group of* Pharisees met *to consider new questions that might trip up Jesus.* 35A legal expert thought of one that would certainly stump Him.

Pharisees: 36Teacher, of all the laws, which commandment is the greatest?

Jesus *(quoting Scripture)*: 37"Love the Eternal One your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind."* 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is nearly as important, "Love your neighbor as yourself."* 40The rest of the law, and all the teachings of the prophets, are but variations on these themes.

41Since the Pharisees were gathered together there, Jesus *took the opportunity to* pose a question of His own.

Jesus: 42What do you think about the Anointed One? Whose Son is He?

Pharisees: *But, of course,* He is the Son of David.

Jesus: 43Then how is it that David—*whose words were surely shaped* by the Spirit—calls Him "Lord"? *For in his psalms* David writes,

44The Master said to my master
"Sit here at My right hand,
in the place of honor and power,

* 22:19 A Roman coin, equivalent to a day's wage * 22:32 Exodus 3:6 * 22:37 Deuteronomy 6:5 * 22:39 Leviticus 19:18

And I will gather Your enemies together,
lead them in on hands and knees,
and You will rest Your feet on their backs."*

45How can David call his own Son "Lord"?

46No one had an answer to Jesus' question. And from that day forward, no one asked Him anything.

23

Jesus spoke to His disciples and to the crowds that had gathered around.

► Jesus with the Pharisees listening uses them as an example of the pious but truly unrighteous. He calls the people to mind the Pharisees' words, not their examples, because they talk about righteousness and faithfulness, but they are a faithless and unrighteous crew.

Jesus: 2The Pharisees and the scribes occupy the seat of Moses. 3So you should do the things they tell you to do—but don't do the things they do. 4They heap heavy burdens upon their neighbors' backs, and they prove unwilling to do anything to help shoulder the load. 5They are interested, above all, in presentation: they wrap their heads and arms in the accoutrements of prayer, they cloak themselves with flowing tasseled prayer garments, 6they covet the seats of honor at fine banquets and in the synagogue, 7and they love it when people recognize them in the marketplace, call them "Teacher," and beam at them.

8But you: do not let anyone call you "Rabbi," *that is, "Teacher."* For you are all brothers, and you have only one teacher, the Anointed One. 9Indeed, do not call anyone on earth "Father," for you have only one father, and He is in heaven. 10Neither let anyone call you "leader," for you have one leader—the Anointed One. 11If you are recognized at all, let it be for your service. *Delight in the one who calls you servant.* 12For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

13Woe to you, you teachers of the law and Pharisees. *There is such a gulf between what you say and what you do.* You will stand before a crowd and lock the door of the kingdom of heaven *right in front of everyone*; you won't enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from doing so.

[14Woe to you, you teachers of the law and Pharisees. What you say is not what you do. You steal the homes from under the widows while you pretend to pray for them. You will suffer great condemnation for this.]*

15Woe to you Pharisees, woe to you who teach the law, hypocrites! You traverse hills and mountains and seas to make one convert, and then when he does convert, you make him much more a son of hell than you are.

16Woe to you who are blind but deign to lead others. You say, "Swearing by the temple means nothing, but he who swears by the gold in the temple is bound by his oath." 17Are you fools? You must be blind! For which is greater: the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18You also say, "Swearing by the altar means nothing, but he who swears by the sacrifice on the altar is bound by his oath." 19You must be blind! Which is greater: the sacrifice or the altar that makes it sacred? 20So anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by the sacrifices and gifts laid upon it. 21And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the God who sanctifies it. 22And when you swear by heaven, you are swearing by God's throne and by Him who sits upon it.

23So woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees. You hypocrites! You tithe from *your luxuries and your spices, giving away a tenth of* your mint, your dill, and your cumin. But you have ignored the essentials of the law: justice, mercy, faithfulness. It is practice of the latter that makes sense of the former. 24You *hypocritical,* blind leaders. You spoon a fly from your soup and swallow a camel.

25Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You remove fine layers of film and dust from the outside of a cup or bowl, but you leave the inside full of *greed and* covetousness and self-indulgence. 26You blind Pharisee—can't you see that if you clean the inside of the cup, the outside will be clean too?

27Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like a

* 22:44 Psalm 110:1 * 23:14 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 14.

grave that has been whitewashed. You look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside you are full of moldering bones and decaying rot. 28You appear, at first blush, to be righteous, *selfless, and pure*; but on the inside you are *polluted*, sunk in hypocrisy *and confusion* and lawlessness.

29Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build monuments to your dead, *you mouth pieties over the bodies of prophets,* you decorate the graves of your righteous ancestors. 30And you say, "If we had lived when our forefathers lived, *we would have known better*—we would not have joined them when they rose up against the prophets." 31*Even when you are preening*, you make plain that you descended from those who murdered our prophets. 32So why don't you finish what your forefathers started? 33You are children of vipers, you *belly-dragging* snakes. You won't escape the judgment of hell.

34That is why I am sending you prophets and wise men, teachers *of breadth and depth and substance*. You will kill some of them and crucify others. You will flog others in your synagogues. You will pursue them from town to town. 35And on your heads, *stained through your hands and drenching your clothes, my friends*, will be all the righteous blood ever shed on this earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah whom you murdered *in the house of the Lord* between the sanctuary and the altar. 36I tell you: this generation will bear the blood of all that has gone before.

37O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. You kill the prophets *whom God gives you*; you stone those God sends you. I have longed to gather your children the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you refuse to be gathered. 38Surely you can see that God has already removed His blessing from the house *of Israel*. 39I tell you this: you will not see Me again until you say, *with the psalmist*, "Anyone who comes in the name of the Eternal One will be blessed."*

24 Jesus left the temple. As He was walking away, His disciples came up to Him and asked what He thought about the temple buildings.

Jesus: 2Look around you. All of it will become rubble. I tell you this: not one stone will be left standing.

3*Later*, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately.

Disciples: *We don't understand Your predictions.* Tell us, when will these things happen: *When will the temple be destroyed?* What will be the sign that You are returning? How will we know that the end of the age is upon us?

► In this, the last of the five major sermons, Jesus focuses on prophetic and apocalyptic themes of judgment and the end times. The disciples have been listening to the prophetic judgment Jesus has issued on the religious leaders. They have images of collapsing temple buildings, of prophets pursued from town to town, of floggings, and of blood-soaked garments. They can imagine themselves blood-soaked. When will this all happen, and what does it mean?

Jesus: 4Take care that you are not deceived. 5For many will come in My name claiming they are the Anointed One, and many poor souls will be taken in. 6You will hear of wars, and you will hear rumors of wars, but you should not panic. It is inevitable, *this violent breaking apart of the sinful world, but remember*, the wars are not the end. *The end is still unfolding.* 7Nations will do battle with nations, and kingdoms will fight neighboring kingdoms, and there will be famines and earthquakes. 8*But these are not the end.* These are the birth pangs, the beginning. *The end is still unfolding.*

9They will hand you over to your enemies, who will torture you and then kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. 10And many *who have followed Me and claimed to love Me and sought God's kingdom* will turn away—*they will abandon the faith and* betray and hate one another. 11-12The love that they had for one another will

* 23:39 Psalm 118:26

grow cold because few will obey the law.
False prophets will appear, many will be
taken in by them, and the only thing that
will grow is wickedness. *There will be no
end to the increase of wickedness.* 13But
those who do not waver from our path
and do not follow those false prophets—
those *among you* will be saved. 14And
this good news of God's kingdom will be
preached throughout the whole world,
a testimony to *all people and* all nations.
Then, *beloved,* the end, *the consumma-
tion of all things*, will come.

15You will remember that the prophet
Daniel predicted this—predicted the
abomination that causes desolation*—
when you see the prophesied desolation
of the holy place. (Reader, take notice; it
is important that you understand this.)
16*When you see this*, let those in Judea flee
to the mountains. 17If you are *relaxing*
on your rooftop *one evening and the signs
of the temple's destructions come,* don't
return to your house *to rescue a book or
a pet or a scrap of clothing.* 18If you are
in the field *when the great destruction
begins,* don't return home for a cloak.
19Pregnant women and nursing moth-
ers will have the worst of it. 20*And as for
you,* pray that your flight *to the hills* will
not come on the Sabbath or in the cold
of winter. 21For the tribulation will be
unparalleled—hardships of a magnitude
that has not been seen since creation
and that will not be seen again. 22*Indeed
the Lord God your merciful judge* will cut
this time of trial short, and this will be
done for the benefit of the elect *that some
might indeed be saved*—for no one could
survive *the depravity* for very long.

23*I cannot say this clearly enough: dur-
ing this time*, someone will say to you,
"Look, here is the Anointed One!" or
"*Aren't you relieved?* Haven't you seen the
Savior *down there, around the bend, over
the hill and dale*?" Do not believe them.
24False liberators and false prophets will
appear, and *they will know a few tricks*—
they will perform great miracles, *and
they will make great promises*. If it were
possible, they would even deceive God's
elect. 25But I am warning you ahead of
time: *remember—do not fall for their lies
or lines or promises.* 26If someone says,
"He's out there in the desert"—do not go.
And if someone says, "He's here at our
house, *at our table*"—do not believe him.
27When the Son of Man comes, *He will
be as visible* as lightning in the East is
visible even in the West. 28And where the
carcass is, there will always be vultures.

29*And as the prophets have foretold it:*
after the distress of those days,

The sun will grow dark,
and the moon will be hidden.
The stars will fall from the sky,
and all the powers in the heavens
will be dislodged and shaken
*from their places.**

30That is when the sign of the Son
of Man will appear in the sky. All the
nations of the earth will mourn. They
will see the Son of Man coming; they will
see Him powerful and glorious, *riding
on chariots* of clouds in the sky. 31With a
loud trumpet call, He will send out *bat-
talions of* heavenly messengers; and they
will gather His *beloved faithful* elect from
the four corners of creation, from one
end of heaven to the other.

32Now think of the fig tree. As soon as
its twigs get tender *and greenish*, as soon
as it begins to sprout leaves, you know to
expect summer. 33In the same way, when
you see *the wars and the suffering and
the false liberators and the desolations*,
you will know the Son of Man is near—
right at the door. 34I tell you this: this
generation will see all these things take
place before it passes away. 35*My words
are always true and always here with you.*
Heaven and earth will pass away, but My
words will never pass away.

36No one knows the hour or the day,
not even the messengers in heaven, not
even the Son. Only the Father knows.
37As it was at the time of Noah, so it will
be with the coming of the Son of Man.
38In the days before the flood, people
*were busy making lives for themselves:
they* were eating and drinking, marrying
and giving in marriage, *making plans and
having children and growing old,* until
the day Noah entered the ark. 39Those
people *had no idea what was coming;
they* knew nothing *about the floods* until
the floods were upon them, sweeping
them all away. That is how it will be with
the coming of the Son of Man. 40Two
men will be plowing a field: one will be
taken, and the other will be left *in the
field.* 41Two women will be *somewhere*
grinding at a mill: one will be taken, and
the other will be left *at the mill.*

* 24:15 Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 * 24:29 Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

42So keep watch. You don't know
when your Lord will come. 43But you
should know this: If the owner of a house
had known his house was about to be
broken into, *he would have stayed up
all night, vigilantly*. He would have kept
watch, and he would have thwarted the
thief. 44So you must be ready because
you know the Son of Man will come, but
you can't know precisely when.

45The trustworthy servant is the
one whom the master puts in charge
of *all the servants of* his household; it is
the trustworthy servant who *not only
oversees all the work, but also* ensures
the servants are properly fed and cared
for. 46*And it is, of course, crucial that a
servant who is given such responsibility
performs his responsibility to his master's
standards*—so when the master returns
he finds his trust has been rewarded.
47For then the master will put that good
servant in charge of all his possessions.
48But imagine *that the master's trust was
misplaced,* that the supposedly respon-
sible servant is actually a thief who says
to himself, "My master has been gone
so long, *he is not possibly coming back*."
49Then he beats his fellow servants and
dines and drinks with drunkards. 50*Well,
when the master returns—as certainly he
will—the servant will be caught unawares.*
The master will return on a day and at
an hour when he isn't expected. 51And
he will cut his worthless servant into
pieces and throw him out *into dark-
ness* with the hypocrites, where there is
weeping and grinding of teeth.

25 **Jesus:** *Or picture* the kingdom
of heaven *this way*. *It* will be
like ten bridesmaids who each
picked up a lantern and went out to
meet a certain bridegroom. 2-4Five of
these women were sensible, *good with
details,* and remembered to bring small
flasks of oil for their lanterns. But five of
them were flighty, *too caught up in the
excitement of their jaunt*, and forgot to
bring oil with them. 5The bridegroom
did not turn up right away. Indeed, all
the women, *while waiting*, found them-
selves falling asleep. 6And then in the
middle of the night, they heard someone
call, "The bridegroom is here, finally!
Wake up and greet him!" 7The women
got up and trimmed the wicks of their
lanterns *and prepared to go greet the
groom*. 8The five women who had no oil
turned to their friends for help.

Ill-prepared Bridesmaids: Please give
us some of your oil! Our lanterns are
flickering and will go out soon.

9But the five women who'd come
prepared with oil said they didn't have
enough.

Prepared Bridesmaids: If we give
you some of our oil, we'll all run out
too soon! You'd better go wake up a
dealer and buy your own supply.

10So the five *ill-prepared* women
went in search of oil to buy, and while
they were gone, the groom arrived. The
five who stood ready *with their lanterns*
accompanied him to the wedding party,
and *after they arrived*, the door was shut.

11Finally the rest of the women
turned up *at the party*. They knocked on
the door.

Ill-prepared Bridesmaids: Master,
open up and let us in!

Bridegroom *(refusing)*: 12I certainly
don't know you.

13So stay awake; you neither know
the day nor hour [when the Son of Man
will come].*

► Jesus provides a picture of the coming reality of the kingdom of heaven. As they approach the time of His sacrifice, Jesus makes sure the disciples know that soon it will be too late; the door of opportunity will close, and for many the door will remain shut. He gives them another image of the same reality to bring the picture into focus. Once they were bridesmaids waiting for their bridegroom; now they are slaves waiting for their Master. This time they are given responsibilities that will be rewarded. The blessings of the Kingdom bring risks along with the benefits.

* 25:13 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

Jesus: 14*This is how it will be.* It will be like
a landowner who is going on a trip. He
instructed his slaves about caring for his
property. 15He gave five talents to one
slave, two to the next, and then one tal-
ent to the last slave—each according to
his ability. Then the man left.
16Promptly the man who had been
given five talents went out and bartered
and sold and turned his five talents into
ten. 17And the one who had received two
talents *went to the market and* turned his
two into four. 18And the slave who had
received just one talent? He dug a hole
in the ground and buried his master's
money there.
19Eventually the master came back
from his travels, *found his slaves,* and
settled up with them. 20The slave who
had been given five talents came forward
and told his master how he'd turned five
into ten; *then he handed the whole lot
over to his master.*

Master: 21Excellent. *You've proved your-
self not only clever but loyal.* You've
executed a rather small task master-
fully, so now I am going to put you in
charge of something larger. *But before
you go back to work,* come join my
great feast and celebration.

22Then the slave who had been given
two talents came forward and told his
master how he'd turned two into four,
*and he handed all four talents to his
master.*

Master: 23Excellent. *You've proved your-
self not only clever but loyal.* You've
executed a rather small task master-
fully, so now I am going to put you in
charge of something larger. *But before
you go back to work,* come join my
great feast and celebration.

24Finally the man who had been
given one talent came forward.

Servant: Master, I know you are a
hard man, *difficult in every way. You
can make a healthy sum when oth-
ers would fail.* You profit when other
people are doing the work. You grow
rich on the backs of others. 25So I was
afraid, *dug a hole,* and hid the talent
in the ground. Here it is. You can
have it.

26*The master was furious.*

Master: You are a pathetic excuse for a
servant! *You have disproved my trust
in you and squandered my generos-
ity.* You know I always make a profit!
27You could have at least put this
talent in the bank; then I could have
earned a little interest on it! 28Take
that one talent away, and give it to
the servant who doubled my money
from five to ten.

29You see, everything was taken away
from the man who had nothing, but the
man who had something got even more.
30And as for the slave who made no
profit *but buried his talent in the ground*?
His master ordered his slaves to tie
him up and throw him outside into the
utter darkness where there is miserable
mourning and great fear.
31When the Son of Man comes in all
His majesty accompanied by throngs of
heavenly messengers, His throne will be
wondrous. 32All the nations will assem-
ble before Him, and He will judge them,
distinguishing them from one another as
a shepherd isolates the sheep from the
goats. 33He will put some, the sheep, at
His right hand and some, the goats, at
His left. 34Then the King will say to those
to His right,

King: Come here, *you beloved,* you
people whom My Father has blessed.
Claim your inheritance, the Kingdom
prepared for you from the begin-
ning of creation. 35*You shall be richly
rewarded,* for when I was hungry,
you fed Me. And when I was thirsty,
you gave Me something to drink.
I was alone as a stranger, and you
welcomed Me *into your homes and
into your lives.* 36I was naked, and you
gave Me clothes to wear; I was sick,
and you tended to My needs; I was in
prison, and you comforted Me.

37Even then the righteous *will not
have achieved perfect understanding and
will not recall these things.*

Righteous: Master, when did we find
You hungry and give You food? When
did we find You thirsty and slake Your
thirst? 38When did we find You a
stranger and welcome You in, or find
You naked and clothe You? 39When
did we find You sick *and nurse You to
health*? When did we visit You when
You were in prison?

King: 40I tell you this: whenever you saw a brother *or sister hungry or cold*, whatever you did to the least of these, so you did to Me.

41At that He will turn to those on His left hand.

King: Get away from Me, *you despised* people whom My Father has cursed. *Claim your inheritance*—the pits of flaming hell where the devil and his minions suffer. 42For I was starving, and you left Me with no food. When I was *dry and* thirsty, you left Me *to struggle with* nothing to drink. 43When I was *alone as* a stranger, you turned away from Me. When I was *pitifully* naked, you left Me unclothed. When I was sick, *you gave Me no care.* When I was in prison, you did not comfort Me.

Unrighteous: 44Master, when did we see You hungry and thirsty? When did we see You friendless *or homeless or excluded*? When did we see You without clothes? When did we see You sick or in jail? *When did we see You in distress* and fail to respond?

King: 45I tell you this: *whenever you saw a brother hungry or cold, when you saw a sister weak and without friends,* when you saw the least of these and ignored their suffering, so you ignored Me.

46So these, *the goats,* will go off to everlasting punishment. But the beloved, *the sheep* (the righteous), will go into everlasting life.

26 And so this is what happened, *finally*. Jesus finished all His teaching, and He said to His disciples,

Jesus: 2The feast of Passover begins in two days. That is when the Son of Man is handed over to be crucified.

3*And almost as He spoke,* the chief priests were getting together with the elders at the home of the high priest, Caiaphas. 4They schemed *and mused* about how they could *trick Jesus*, sneak around and capture Him, and then kill Him.

Chief Priests: 5We shouldn't try to catch Him at the great public festival. The people would riot *if they knew what we were doing.*

6Meanwhile Jesus was at Bethany staying at the home of Simon the leper. 7*While He was at Simon's house,* a woman came to see Him. She had an alabaster flask of very valuable ointment with her, and as Jesus reclined at the table, she poured the ointment on His head. 8The disciples, seeing this scene, were furious.

Disciples: This is an absolute waste! 9The woman could have sold that ointment for lots of money, and then she could have given it to the poor.

10Jesus knew what the disciples were saying among themselves, *so He took them to task.*

Jesus: Why don't you leave this woman alone? She has done a good thing. 11*It is good that you are concerned about the poor*, but the poor will always be with you—I will not be. 12In pouring this ointment on My body, she has prepared Me for My burial. 13I tell you this: the good news *of the kingdom of God* will be spread all over the world, *and wherever the good news travels,* people will tell the story of this woman and her good discipleship. And people will remember her.

14At that, one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests.

Judas Iscariot: 15What will you give me to turn Him over to you?

They offered him 30 pieces of silver. 16And from that moment, he began to watch for a chance to betray Jesus.

Here begins the account of Jesus' last night before His trial and crucifixion.

17On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples said to Jesus,

Disciples: Where would You like us to prepare the Passover meal for You?

Jesus: 18Go into the city, find a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, 'My time is near, and I am going to celebrate Passover at your house with My disciples.'"

They find the man's house and secure the owner's permission, and there they will praise God for redeeming His people from bondage in Egypt.

19So the disciples *went off,* followed Jesus' instructions, and got the Passover meal ready. 20When evening came, Jesus sat down with the twelve. 21And they ate their dinner.

Jesus: I tell you this: one of you here will betray Me.

22The disciples, *of course*, were horrified.

A Disciple: Not me!

Another Disciple: *It's not me, Master, is it?*

Jesus: 23It's the one who shared this dish of food with Me. That is the one who will betray Me. 24Just as our sacred Scripture has taught, the Son of Man is on His way. But there will be nothing but misery for he who hands Him over. That man will wish he had never been born.

25At that, Judas, who was indeed planning to betray Him, said,

Judas Iscariot: It's not me, Master, is it?

Jesus: I believe you've just answered your own question.

26As they were eating, Jesus took some bread. He offered a blessing *over the bread*, and then He broke it and gave it to His disciples.

Jesus: Take this and eat; it is My body.

27And then He took the cup *of wine*, He made a blessing over it, and He passed it around the table.

Jesus: Take this and drink, all of you: 28this is My blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29But I tell you: I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until I am with you once more, drinking in the kingdom of My Father.

30*The meal concluded.* Together, all the men sang a hymn *of praise and thanksgiving*, and then they took a late evening walk to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus: 31Scripture says,

> I shall strike the shepherd,
> and the sheep of the flock will
> scatter.*

Just so, each of you will stumble tonight, *stumble and fall,* on account of Me.
32Afterward I will be raised up. And I will go before you to Galilee.

Peter: 33*Lord*, maybe everyone else will *trip and* fall tonight, but I will not. *I'll be beside You. I won't falter.*

Jesus: 34*If only that were true.* In fact, this very night, before the cock crows *in the morning*, you will deny Me three times.

Peter: 35*No!* I won't deny You. Even if that means I have to die with You!

And each of the disciples echoed Peter.

It is indeed a dark, bitter night. The disciples are sad and confused, and maybe a little bit prideful. Peter can not believe that he could ever betray his Lord.

36At that, Jesus led His disciples to the place called Gethsemane.

Jesus: I am going over there to pray. You sit here *while I'm at prayer*.

37Then He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and He grew sorrowful and deeply distressed.

Jesus: 38My soul is overwhelmed with grief, to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.

39He walked a little farther and finally fell prostrate and prayed.

Jesus: Father, *this is the last thing I want.* If there is any way, please take this *bitter* cup from Me. Not My will, but Yours be done.

40When He came back to the disciples, He saw that they were asleep. *Peter awoke a little less confident and slightly chagrined.*

* 26:31 Zechariah 13:7

Jesus *(to Peter)*: So you couldn't keep watch with Me for just one short hour? 41*Now maybe you're learning*: the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Watch and pray and take care that you are not pulled down during a time of testing.

42With that, Jesus returned *to His secluded spot* to pray again.

Jesus: Father, if there is no other way for this cup to pass without My drinking it—*then not My will*, but Yours be done.

43Again Jesus returned to His disciples and found them asleep. Their eyes were heavy-lidded. 44So Jesus left them again and returned to prayer, praying the same sentiments with the same words. 45Again He returned to His disciples.

Jesus: Well, you are still sleeping; are you getting a good long rest? Now the time has come; the Son of Man is just about to be given over to *the betrayers and* the sinners. 46Get up; we have to be going. Look, here comes the one who's going to betray Me.

47There he was, Judas, one of the twelve leading a crowd of people from the chief priests and elders with swords and clubs; the chief priests and the elders were right there, *ready to arrest* Jesus. 48*And Judas,* the one who intended to betray Him, had said *to the elders and the chief priests* that he would give them a sign.

Judas Iscariot: *I'll greet Him with a kiss.* And you will know that the one I kiss is the one you should arrest.

49So at once, he went up to Jesus.

Judas Iscariot: Greetings, Teacher (he kisses Him).

Jesus: 50My friend, do what you have come to do.

And at that, the company came and seized Him. 51One of the men with Jesus grabbed his sword and swung toward the high priest's slave, slicing off his ear.

Jesus: 52Put your sword back. People who live by the sword die by the sword. 53Surely you realize that if I called on My Father, He would send 12 legions of messengers to rescue Me. 54But if I were to do that, I would be thwarting the scriptural story, wouldn't I? And we must allow the story *of God's kingdom* to unfold. 55(to the crowds) Why did you bring these weapons, these clubs and bats? Did you think I would fight you? That I would try to dodge and escape like a common criminal? You could have arrested Me any day when I was teaching in the temple, but you didn't.

56This scene has come together just so, so that the prophecies in the sacred Scripture could be fulfilled.

And at that, all the disciples ran away and abandoned Him. 57The crowd that had arrested Jesus took Him to Caiaphas, the high priest. The scribes and elders had gathered *at Caiaphas's house and were waiting for Jesus to be delivered.* 58Peter followed Jesus (though at some distance *so as not to be seen*). He slipped into Caiaphas's house and attached himself to a group of servants. And he sat watching, waiting to see how things would unfold.

59The high priest and his council of advisors first produced *false evidence against Jesus*—false evidence meant to justify some charge and Jesus' execution. 60But even though many men were willing to lie, the council couldn't come up with the evidence it wanted. Finally, two men stood up.

Two Men: 61Look, He said, "I can destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days." *What more evidence do you need?*

62Then Caiaphas the high priest stood up and addressed Jesus.

Caiaphas: Aren't You going to respond to these charges? What exactly are these two men accusing You of?

63Jesus remained silent.

Caiaphas *(to Jesus)*: Under a sacred oath before the living God, tell us plainly: are You the Anointed One, the Son of God?

Jesus: 64So you *seem to be* saying. I will say this: beginning now, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God's power and glory and coming on heavenly clouds.

65The high priest tore his robes *and screeched.*

Caiaphas: Blasphemy! We don't need any more witnesses—we've all just witnessed this most grievous blasphemy, *right here and now*. 66So, gentlemen, what's your verdict?

Gentlemen: He deserves to die.

67Then they spat in His face and hit Him. Some of them smacked Him, slapped Him across the cheeks, 68and jeered.

Some of the Men: Well, Anointed One, prophesy for us, *if You can*—who hit You? *And who is about to hit You next?*

69*As all this was going on in Caiaphas's chamber,* Peter was sitting in the courtyard with some servants. One of the servant girls came up to him.

Servant Girl: You were with Jesus the Galilean, *weren't you?*

70*And just as Jesus had predicted,* Peter denied it before everyone.

Peter: Not me! I don't know what you're talking about.

71He went out to stand by the gate. And as he walked past, another servant girl recognized him.

Another Servant Girl *(speaking to those standing around)*: That man over there—he was here with Jesus the Nazarene!

72Again, *just as Jesus had predicted*, Peter denied it, swearing an oath.

Peter: I don't know Him!

73Peter then went to chat with a few of the servants. A little while later, some other servants approached him:

Other Servants: Look, we know that you must be one of Jesus' followers. You speak like you are from the same area as His followers. You've got that tell-tale Galilean accent.

74Cursing and swearing, *Peter denied Him again.*

Peter: I do not know Him!

As the exclamation left his mouth, a cock crowed. 75And Peter remembered. He remembered that Jesus had *looked at him with something like pity and* said, "This very night, before the cock crows in the morning, you will deny Me three times." And Peter went outside, *sat down on the ground,* and wept.

27 Eventually the chief priests and the elders looked around and saw that it was morning. They convened a council meeting whose sole purpose was to hand down Jesus' death sentence. 2They tied Jesus up, took Him away, and handed Him over to the governor *of Judea*, a man called Pilate.

3Judas—the one who had betrayed Him *with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver*—saw that Jesus had been condemned, and suddenly Judas regretted what he had done. He took the silver back to the chief priests and elders *and tried to return it to them.*

Judas Iscariot: 4*I can't keep this money!* I've sinned! I've betrayed an innocent man! *His blood will be on my hands.*

The priests and elders want nothing to do with Judas, and they refuse to take his money.

Chief Priests and Elders: *We're through with you, friend.* The state of your soul is really none of our affair.

5Judas threw down the money in the temple, went off, and hanged himself.

6The chief priests looked at the silver coins and picked them up.

Chief Priests and Elders: You know, according to the law, we can't put blood money in the temple treasury.

7After some deliberation, they took the money and bought a plot of land called Potter's Field; they would use it to bury foreigners, *suicides, and others who were unfit for a full Jewish burial.* 8(To this day, the field is called Blood Field, *because it was bought with blood money.*) 9*And when the priests bought Potter's Field,* they *unwittingly* fulfilled a prophecy made long ago by the prophet Jeremiah: "They took 30 pieces of silver, the price set on the head of the man by the children of Israel, 10and they gave them for the Potter's Field as the Eternal One instructed."*

* 27:10 Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 32:6-9

11Jesus was standing before the governor, *Pilate*.

Pilate: Are You the King of the Jews?

Jesus: So you say.

12The chief priests and the elders *stood and poured out their accusations: that Jesus was a traitor, a seditious rebel, a crazy, a would-be Savior, and a would-be king.* Jesus stood in the stream of accusations, but He did not respond.

Pilate: 13Do You hear these accusations they are making against You?

14Still Jesus said nothing, which Pilate found rather astounding—*no protests, no defense, nothing.*

15Now the governor had a custom. During the *great Jewish* festival *of* Passover, he would allow the crowd to pick one of the condemned men, and he, *Pilate,* would set the man free. *Just like that. Gratuitous, gracious freedom.* 16At this time, they had a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. 17So when the crowd gathered, Pilate offered them a choice:

Pilate: Whom do you want me to free? Barabbas or Jesus, whom some call the Anointed One?

► Pilate could call Him "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus the Carpenter," but he says, "whom some call the Anointed One." It is significant that Pilate is in a position where he passes judgment. He determines who will live and who will die, and he is preparing to hold court.

18Pilate knew the chief priests and elders hated Jesus and had delivered Him up because they envied Him.

19Then Pilate sat down on his judgment seat, and he received a message from his wife: "Distance yourself utterly from *the proceedings against* this righteous man. I have had a dream about Him, a dream full of twisted sufferings—*He is innocent, I know it, and we should have nothing to do with Him.*"

20But the chief priests and the elders convinced the crowd to demand that Barabbas, not Jesus, *whom-some-call-the-Anointed-One*, be freed and that Jesus be put to death.

Pilate *(standing before the crowd)***:** 21Which of these men would you have me free?

Crowd *(shouting)***:** Barabbas!

Pilate: 22What would you have me do with this Jesus, whom some call the Anointed One?

Crowd *(shouting)***:** Crucify Him!

Pilate: 23Why? What crime has this man committed?

Crowd *(responding with a shout)***:** Crucify Him!

It is clear Pilate has laid his own trap. He realizes he has given the crowd a choice, but the crowd doesn't choose as he expects them to.

24Pilate saw that unless he wanted a riot on his hands, he now had to bow to their wishes. So he took *a pitcher of* water, stood before the crowd, and washed his hands.

Pilate: You will see to this crucifixion, for this man's blood will be *upon you* and not upon me. *I wash myself of it.*

Crowd: 25Indeed, let His blood be upon us—upon us and our children!

26So Pilate released Barabbas, and he had Jesus flogged and handed over to be crucified.

27The governor's soldiers took Jesus into a great hall, gathered a great crowd, 28and stripped Jesus of His clothes, draping Him in a bold scarlet cloak, *the kind that soldiers sometimes wore.* 29They gathered some thorny vines, wove them into a crown, and perched that crown upon His head. They stuck a reed in His right hand, and then they knelt before Him, *this inside-out, upside-down King.* They mocked Him *with catcalls.*

Soldiers: Hail, the King of the Jews!

30They spat on Him and whipped Him on the head with *His scepter of* reeds, 31and when they had their fill, they pulled off the bold scarlet cloak, dressed Him in His

own simple clothes, and led Him off to be crucified.

32As they were walking, they found a man called Simon of Cyrene and forced him to carry the cross. 33Eventually they came to a place called Golgotha, which means "Place of the Skull." 34There they gave Him a drink—wine mixed with bitter herbs. He tasted it but refused to drink it.

35And so they had Him crucified. They divided the clothes off His back by drawing lots,* 36and they sat on the ground and watched Him *hang*. 37They placed a sign over His head: "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." 38And then they crucified two thieves next to Him, one at His right hand and one at His left hand.

39Passersby shouted curses and blasphemies at Jesus. They wagged their heads *at Him and hissed.*

Passersby: 40You're going to destroy the temple and then rebuild it in three days? Why don't You start with saving Yourself? Come down from the cross if You can, if You're God's Son.

Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders *(mocking Him)***:** 41-42He saved others, but He can't save Himself. If He's really the King of Israel, then let Him climb down from the cross—then we'll believe Him. 43He claimed communion with God—well, let God save Him, if He's God's beloved Son.

44Even the thieves hanging to His right and left poured insults upon Him. 45And then, starting at noon, the entire land became dark. It was dark for three hours. 46In the middle of the dark afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice.

Jesus: Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani—My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*

Bystanders: 47He's calling on Elijah.

48One bystander grabbed a sponge, steeped it in vinegar, stuck it on a reed, and gave Jesus the vinegar to drink.

Others: 49We'll see—we'll see if Elijah is going to come and rescue Him.

50And then Jesus cried out once more, loudly, and then He breathed His last breath. 51At that instant, the temple curtain was torn in half, from top to bottom. The earth shook; rocks split in two; 52tombs burst open, and bodies of many sleeping holy women and men were raised up. 53After Jesus' resurrection, they came out of their tombs, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and showed themselves to people.

54When the Centurion and soldiers who had been charged with guarding Jesus felt the earthquake *and saw the rocks splitting and the tombs opening*, they were, of course, terrified.

Soldiers: He really was God's Son.

55A number of women, who had been devoted to Jesus and followed Him from Galilee, were present, too, watching from a distance. 56Mary Magdalene was there, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

57At evening time, a rich man from Arimathea arrived. His name was Joseph, and he had become a disciple of Jesus. 58He went to Pilate and asked to be given Jesus' body; Pilate assented and ordered his servants to turn Jesus' body over to Joseph. 59So Joseph took the body, wrapped Jesus in a clean sheath of white linen, 60and laid Jesus in his own new tomb, which he had carved from a rock. Then he rolled a great stone in front of the tomb's opening, and he went away. 61Mary Magdalene was there, and so was the other Mary. They sat across from the tomb, *watching, remembering.*

62The next day, which is the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went together to Pilate. 63They reminded him that when Jesus was alive He had claimed that He would be raised from the dead after three days.

Chief Priests and Pharisees: 64So please order someone to secure the tomb for at least three days. Otherwise His disciples might sneak in and steal His body away, and then claim that He has been raised from the dead. If that happens, then we would have been better off just leaving Him alive.

Pilate: 65You have a guard. Go and secure the grave.

66So they went to the tomb, sealed the stone in its mouth, and left the guard to keep watch.

* 27:35 Psalm 22:18 * 27:46 Psalm 22:1

28 After the Sabbath, as the light of the next day, the first day of the week, crept over Palestine, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb *to keep vigil*. 2Earlier there had been an earthquake. A messenger of the Lord had come down from heaven and had gone to the grave. He rolled away the stone and sat down on top of it. 3He *veritably* glowed. He was vibrating with light. *His clothes were light,* white *like transfiguration,* like fresh snow. 4The soldiers guarding the tomb were terrified. They froze like stone.

5The messenger spoke to the women, *to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.*

Messenger of the Lord: Don't be afraid. I know you are here keeping watch for Jesus who was crucified. 6But Jesus is not here. He was raised, just as He said He would be. Come over to the grave, and see for yourself. 7And then go straight to His disciples, and tell them He's been raised from the dead and has gone on to Galilee. You'll find Him there. Listen carefully to what I am telling you.

8The women were both terrified and thrilled, and they quickly left the tomb and went to find the disciples and give them this *outstandingly good* news. 9But while they were on their way, they saw Jesus Himself.

Jesus *(greeting the women)***:** Rejoice.

The women fell down before Him, kissing His feet and worshiping Him.

Jesus: 10Don't be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee. Tell them I will meet them there.

11As the women were making their way to the disciples, some of the soldiers who had been standing guard *by Jesus' tomb recovered themselves*, went to the city, and told the chief priests everything that had happened—*the earthquake just after dawn, the heavenly messenger, and his commission to the Marys.* 12The chief priests gathered together all the elders, *an emergency conference of sorts. They needed a plan. They decided the simplest course was bribery:* they would pay off the guards 13and order them to say that the disciples had come in the middle of the night and had stolen Jesus' corpse while they slept. 14The chief priests promised the soldiers they would run interference with the governor so that the soldiers wouldn't be punished *for falling asleep when they were supposed to be keeping watch.* 15The guards took the bribe and spread the story around town—and indeed, you can still find people today who will tell you *that Jesus did not really rise from the dead, that it was a trick, some sort of sleight of hand.*

16The eleven disciples, *having spoken to the Marys*, headed to Galilee, to the mountain where they were to meet Jesus. 17When the disciples saw Jesus there, many of them fell down and worshiped, *as Mary and the other Mary had done*. But a few hung back. They were not sure *(and who can blame them?).* 18Jesus came forward and addressed *His beloved disciples.*

The disciples don't know what to think or how to act. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

Jesus: I am here speaking with all the authority of God, *who has commanded Me to give you this commission*: 19Go out and make disciples in all the nations. Ceremonially wash them through baptism in the name of the *triune God*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 20Then disciple them. *Form them in the practices and postures that* I have taught you, and show them how to follow the commands I have laid down for you. And I will be with you, day after day, to the end of the age.

MARK

Record of the servant of God

By Mark, a follower of Jesus

This Gospel is probably the first written account of the life of Jesus. It focuses on Jesus as the Servant of God who works miracles, makes disciples, and suffers on the way to bring salvation to the world. Tradition has it that Mark accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys and later became Peter's associate in his ministry, hearing and writing down his eyewitness accounts. Apparently Mark was a Jewish Christian who grew up in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary. His intended audience was likely Roman Christians who were not Jews; so his Gospel explains Jewish words, phrases, and customs. That may also be why it does not often appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures to explain Jesus' words and deeds.

For Mark, the life of Jesus—from His ritual cleansing by John in the Jordan River to His resurrection in Jerusalem—is the beginning of the good news. It is "the mustard seed stage" of the kingdom of God. Ultimately God's kingdom is destined to fill the world and become a place where the nations come to find shelter and salvation. So Mark invites his readers to understand that, in following Jesus, their lives make up the next part of the story. As the people of the Kingdom, they are the next step in preparing the way for God's salvation. So when Jesus invites His disciples to "follow Me," Mark takes that as an invitation to imitate His life and follow His teachings.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the New Testament Gospels. It is especially fast-paced and action-oriented. It moves quickly from episode to episode as Jesus demonstrates that He has authority over nature, disease, death, and evil. For Mark, Jesus' miracles are more than powerful acts done by a good man; they are manifestations of God's coming reign. They show us what the world will be like when God's kingdom comes finally and completely. But until then, Jesus and His followers are locked in conflict with powerful forces—spiritual, religious, and political. Ultimately these forces join together to oppose and crucify Him, but even this is God's plan; His torturous death is not the last word. Instead, the last word is God's, and it is a word of life and resurrection. Implicitly Mark's story of Jesus is a promise that those who suffer on their journey as His disciples will one day share in the resurrection. While the way of Jesus may well lead to suffering, it will ultimately lead to glory.

When Mark writes in the first chapter about a mysterious man entering the scene, instantly the reader recognizes there's something very different about Jesus. He comes into the picture not as a rock star but rather as someone humble, kind, and yet, still kingly. Mark describes the people who are drawn toward this man as regular people who have become affected by the character, passion, and light of this strange Galilean.

Maybe that's why Mark jumps right into the action of Jesus' story. He offers little by way of introduction. He writes nothing about Jesus' family tree. Unlike Matthew and Luke, he doesn't mention His birth. Mark's retelling begins with Scripture and the preaching of John the Baptist who calls people to repent. Like all the greats of history, Jesus doesn't just arrive—He is announced—and who better than John to do that? Right before Jesus makes His entrance into Mark's narrative, John says, "I've washed you here with water, *but when He gets here,* He will wash you in the Spirit of God."

1 This is the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* the Son of God.
2 Isaiah the prophet told us *what would happen before He came*:

Watch, I will send My messenger in front of You
to prepare Your way and make it clear *and straight.**
3 *You'll hear him,* a voice crying in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way of the Eternal One,
a straight way in the wandering desert, a highway for our God."*

4 *That messenger was* John the Baptist,* who appeared in the desert *near the Jordan River* preaching that people should be ritually cleansed through baptism *with water as a sign of* both their changed hearts* and God's forgiveness of their sins. 5 People from across the countryside of Judea and from the city of Jerusalem came to him and confessed that they were deeply flawed and needed help, so he cleansed* them with the waters of the Jordan. 6 John dressed *as some of the Hebrew prophets had,* in clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He made his meals *in the desert* from locusts and wild honey. 7 He preached a message *in the wilderness.*

John the Baptist: Someone is coming who is a lot more powerful than I am—One whose sandals I'm not worthy to bend down and untie. 8 I've washed you here through baptism* with water; *but when He gets here,* He will wash* you in the Spirit of God.

▶ The Jordan River is the setting of some of the most memorable miracles in the Old Testament. On their journey through the wilderness to the promised land, the Israelites walked across the Jordan River on dry ground because God parted its waters. Elisha, one of the prophets of God, healed Naaman by telling him to bathe seven times in its waters. Partly because of miracles like these and partly because of a growing wilderness spirituality, many of the Jews in John's day are out to hear him and be ritually baptized in the Jordan's cool, cleansing waters. They are looking for God to intervene miraculously in their lives as He has done in the past. What they don't know is that God is about to intervene, for at that time Jesus leaves Nazareth and heads south.

9 It was in those days that Jesus left Nazareth (*a village in the region* of Galilee) and came down to the Jordan, and John cleansed Him through baptism there *in the same way all the others were ritually cleansed.* 10 But as Jesus was coming out of the waters, He looked up and saw the sky split open. The Spirit *of God* descended

* 1:2 Malachi 3:1 * 1:3 Isaiah 40:3 * 1:4 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 1:4 Literally, repentance * 1:5 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 1:8 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 1:8 Literally, immerse, in a rite of initiation and purification

upon Him like a dove, 11and a voice echoed in the heavens.

Voice: You are My Son,* My beloved One, and I am very pleased with You.

12After that the Spirit compelled Him to go into the wilderness, 13and there in the desert He stayed for 40 days. He was tested by Satan himself and surrounded by wild animals; *but through these trials,* heavenly messengers *cared for Him and* ministered to Him.

14After John was arrested *by Herod, who ruled the Jewish lands on behalf of Roman interests,* Jesus went back into *the region of* Galilee and began to proclaim the good news of God.

Jesus: 15It's time! The kingdom of God is near! Seek forgiveness, change your actions,* and believe this good news!

16As Jesus walked along the *shore of the* Sea of Galilee, He met *the first of His disciples,* two brothers, Simon and Andrew, both fishermen who were casting their fishing net into the shallow waters.

Jesus: 17*Come and* follow Me, and I'll send you to catch people *instead of fish.*

18Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus at once.

19When He had walked a little farther, He saw the sons of Zebedee, James and John, in their boat repairing their nets. 20Right away He called to them, and they dropped what they were doing and left their father Zebedee and the hired men aboard the boat to follow Him *as His disciples.*

21They came *at last* to the village of Capernaum *on the Sea of Galilee*; and on the Sabbath Day, Jesus went straight into a synagogue, *sat down,* and began to teach. 22The people *looked at each other,* amazed, because this strange teacher acted as One authorized *by God, and what He taught affected them* in ways their own scribes' teachings could not. 23Just then a man in the gathering who was overcome by an unclean spirit shouted.

Unclean Spirit: 24What are You doing here, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I can see who You are! You're the Holy One of God.

Jesus *(rebuking him)***:** 25Be quiet, and come out of him now!

26The man's body began to shake and shudder; and then, howling, the spirit flew out of the man. 27The people couldn't stop talking about what they had seen.

People: *Who is this Jesus?* This is a new teaching—and it has such authority! Even the unclean spirits obey His commands!

28It wasn't long before news of Jesus spread over the countryside of Galilee.

29Right after they left the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30They told Him about Simon's mother-in-law who was there in bed, sick and feverish. 31Jesus went to her side, took her hand, and lifted her up. As soon as He touched her, the fever left her *and she felt well again—strong enough to bustle around the house* taking care of her visitors.

32Just before night fell, others had gathered all the sick, *diseased,* and demon-infested people *they could find.* 33*It seemed as if* the whole town had gathered at Simon and Andrew's door. 34Jesus was kept busy healing people of every sort of ailment and casting out unclean spirits. He was very careful not to let the demons speak because they knew Him *and could reveal to the people who He really was.*

35Early in the morning, Jesus got up, left the house while it was still dark outside, and went to a deserted place to pray. 36Simon and the others traveling with Jesus looked for Him. 37They finally tracked Him down.

► Whenever possible, Jesus seeks out solitude so He can pray and meditate. Jesus reveals His humanity. In these silent and reflective moments, He seems to refuel mentally, physically, and spiritually because Jesus hears His Father speak during His time alone. Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, hearing from His Father seems to help Him focus on the mission at hand: redemption.

* 1:11 Psalm 2:7 * 1:15 Literally, repent

People: Everybody wants to know where You are!

Jesus: 38It's time we went somewhere else—the next village, maybe—so I can tell more people *the good news about the kingdom of God*. After all, that's the reason I'm here.

39So He traveled *to the next village and the one after that,* throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and casting out unclean spirits.

Jesus is confronted with a man who has leprosy—a skin disease that makes him ritually unclean according to Jewish law. This creates a problem with the authorities.

40A leper walked right up to Jesus, dropped to his knees, and begged Him for help.

Leper: If You want to, You can make me clean.

41Jesus was powerfully moved. He reached out and actually touched the leper.

Jesus: I do want to. Be clean.

42And at that very moment, the disease left him; the leper was cleansed *and made whole once again*. 43Jesus sent him away, but first He warned him strongly.

Jesus: 44Don't tell anybody how this happened. Just go and show yourself to the priest *so that he can certify you're clean*. Perform the ceremony prescribed by Moses as proof of your cleansing, *and then you may return home*.

45The man talked everywhere about how Jesus had healed him, until Jesus could no longer come into a town openly *without the risk of being mobbed*. So He remained on the outskirts. Even so, people still sought Him out from far and wide.

2 1-2Some days later when Jesus came back to Capernaum, people heard that Jesus was back in town and many gathered at the house where He was staying. Soon the crowd overflowed from the house into the streets, *and still more people pressed forward* to hear Jesus teaching the message *of God's kingdom*. 3Four men tried to bring a crippled friend to Him; 4but since the crowd prevented their carrying him close enough to get Jesus' attention, they climbed up onto the roof, opened a hole in it, and lowered the paralyzed man on his mat down to Jesus.

5Jesus recognized the faith of these men.

Jesus *(to the paralyzed man)***:** Son, your sins are forgiven.

6-7Some scribes were sitting in the crowd, *and they didn't like what they were hearing.*

Scribes *(reasoning to themselves)***:** What does this Jesus think He is doing? This kind of talk is blasphemy, *an offense against the Most High!* Only God can forgive sins.

8At once Jesus realized what they were thinking. He turned to them.

Jesus: Why do My words trouble you so? 9*Think about this:* is it easier to tell this paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to tell him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk"? 10Still, I want to show you that the Son of Man has been given the authority on earth to forgive sins. (to the paralytic) 11Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.

12The man rose to his feet, immediately rolled up his mat, and walked out *into the streets*. Everyone in the crowd was amazed. All they could do was *shake their heads,* thank God for this miracle, and say to each other, "We've never seen anything like that!"

► To some who believe wholeheartedly in God's laws, Jesus is a troublemaker, a mere man who has a bad habit of making statements that take away from the honor due to the one true God. The "scribes" who make these kinds of accusations against Jesus are usually connected to the Pharisees (a Jewish sect popular with the people, mostly middle class, and religiously strict when it comes to following God's laws) or the Sadducees (a smaller Jewish sect made up of priests and aristocrats from Jerusalem). While the

two groups often clash with each other politically and theologically, they do find common ground—and sometimes even work together—in opposing Jesus.

13Another time Jesus was out walking alongside the Sea *of Galilee* teaching the gathering crowd as He went. 14He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the booth where he collected taxes.

Jesus *(calling out to him)*: Follow Me.

Levi left the booth and went along with Him.

► Jesus' invitation to follow Him, like His invitations to all the disciples, involves a lot more than joining the caravan; Jesus' invitation is for sinners to change their ways of life. Jesus makes it clear, despite the criticisms of some observers, that this invitation is indeed open to all—especially to the sinners who need it most. Jesus grants to those who choose Him not just companionship and forgiveness but the ability to truly receive a new identity and live a new life.

15At Levi's house, many tax collectors and other sinners—*Jews who did not keep the strict purity laws of the Jewish holy texts*—were dining with Jesus and His disciples. Jesus had attracted such a large following that all kinds of people surrounded Him. 16When the Pharisees' scribes saw who shared the table with Jesus, they were quick to criticize:

Scribes *(to His disciples)*: *If your master is such a righteous person,* then why does He eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners*, the worst among us*?

17Jesus heard them.

Jesus *(to the scribes)*: People who have their health don't need to see a doctor. Only those who are sick do. I'm not here to call those already in good standing with God; I'm here to call sinners to turn back to Him.*

18The disciples of John *the Baptist* and the Pharisees made a practice of fasting.

Some Jews fast twice a week and pray three times daily, but Jesus has a different set of practices for His followers. Some of the pious are disturbed by this.

Some People *(to Jesus)*: Why is it that John's followers and the Pharisees' followers fast, but Your disciples are eating and drinking *like it was any other day*?

Jesus: 19Guests at the wedding can't fast when the bridegroom is with them. It would be wrong to do anything but feast. 20When the bridegroom is snatched away from them, then the time will come to fast *and mourn.*

21*These are new things I'm teaching, and they can't be reconciled with old habits.* Nobody would ever use a piece of new cloth to patch an old garment because when the patch shrinks, it pulls away and makes the tear even worse. 22And nobody puts new, *unfermented* wine into old wineskins because if he does, the wine will burst the skins; they would lose both the wineskins and the wine. No, the only appropriate thing is to put new wine into new wineskins.

23One Sabbath Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field of grain; as they walked, His disciples *grew hungry*. They began to pull from the stalks *and eat.*

24The Pharisees confronted Him.

Pharisees: Did You see that? Why are Your disciples doing what our law forbids on the Sabbath?

Jesus *(turning toward the Pharisees)*: 25Do you remember the story about what *King* David and his followers did when they were hungry and had nothing to eat?

They said nothing, so He continued.

Jesus: 26David went into the house of God, when Abiathar was the high priest, and ate the bread that was consecrated to God. Now our laws say no one but the priests can eat that holy bread; *but when*

* 2:17 Literally, repentance

David was hungry, he ate and also shared the bread with those who followed him.*
27The Sabbath was made for *the needs of* human beings, and not the other way around. 28So the Son of Man is Lord even over the Sabbath.

3 *On the Sabbath,* Jesus had come into a synagogue where He saw a man with a withered hand.
2The Pharisees held their breath: would Jesus cure this man on the Sabbath, *right there in front of everyone*? If so, they could charge Him *with breaking the Sabbath law.* 3*Jesus knew their hearts.* He called to the man with the withered hand.

Jesus: Come to Me.

4Then He turned to the Pharisees with a question.

Jesus: Do our laws tell us to do good or evil on the Sabbath? To save life, or to snuff it out?

They remained silent.
5Jesus was furious as He looked out over the crowd, and He was grieved by their hard hearts.

How can anyone care so much about the words of the law and so little about the spirit of it?

Jesus *(to the man with the withered hand)***:** *So be it.* Stretch out your hand.

The man stretched forth his hand; and as he did, it was completely healed. 6The Pharisees went directly from the synagogue to consult with the supporters of Herod, *the Romans' puppet ruler,* about how they could get rid of this dangerous dreamer.
7Meanwhile Jesus and His followers traveled to *the shore of* the Sea *of Galilee; as always,* a huge crowd from Galilee and Judea gathered. 8People had come *from miles* to see this man they were hearing so much about. They came from *the big cities, including* Jerusalem *of Judea,* Tyre and Sidon *of Phoenicia*, and from the region of Idumea, south of Judea. 9-10Since Jesus had healed so many, the sick and the infirm pushed forward constantly to touch Him, *to be healed, and to ask His blessing.* The crowd pressed so closely around Jesus that He asked His disciples to get a boat He could board if the crush became too great.
11*Most wanted to be near Him, except for those possessed by* unclean spirits. Those people fell down before Him.

Unclean Spirits: You are the Son of God.

12But He ordered them not to reveal His true identity.
13Jesus called together a select group *of His followers* and led them up onto a mountain. 14There He commissioned them the twelve. [*Later* He calls them His emissaries.]* He wanted them to be with Him. He sent them out to spread the good news 15and to cast out evil spirits [and heal diseases].* 16Here are the names of the original twelve: Simon (whom Jesus called Peter, *meaning "the rock"*), 17James and John (the sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus called "the Sons of Thunder"), 18Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew *(the tax collector, also called Levi),* Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon of Canaan (who was also called "the Zealot"), 19and Judas Iscariot (who one day would betray Jesus *to the authorities in Jerusalem so God's purpose could be fulfilled*).
20Jesus *and His disciples* went into a house to eat, but so many people pressed in to see Jesus that they could not be served. 21When Jesus' family heard *about this craziness*, they went to drag Him out of that place.

Jesus' Family *(to one another)***:** Jesus has lost His mind.

22The scribes, *for their part,* came down from Jerusalem *and spread the slander that Jesus was in league with the devil.*

Scribes: That's how He casts out demons. He's casting them out by the power of Beelzebul—*the ancient Philistine god*—the prince of demons.

23When Jesus heard this, He tried to reason with them using parables.

Jesus: *Listen.* How can Satan drive out Satan? 24A kingdom that makes war against itself will collapse. 25A household divided against itself cannot stand. 26If Satan opposes himself, he cannot stand and is finished.
27If you want to break into the house of a strong man and plunder it, you have to bind him first. Then you can do whatever you want with his possessions.

* 2:26 1 Samuel 21:3-6 * 3:14 Most manuscripts omit this portion. * 3:15 Most manuscripts omit this portion.

28Listen, the truth is that people can be
forgiven of almost anything. *God has
been known to forgive many things,* even
blasphemy. 29But speaking evil of the
Spirit of God is an unforgivable sin that
will follow you into eternity.

30He said this because the scribes were telling people that Jesus got His power from dark forces instead of from God.

► Popularity is often a dangerous thing, particularly in a land occupied by Roman soldiers. As Jesus' ministry grows, some of His friends and family start to get nervous: they wonder if He has "lost His mind" entirely. They just can't understand what is happening and why He is so important. It doesn't seem right—the boy next door from Nazareth receiving so much attention. In fact, they are so uncomfortable with it that they decide to intervene and take Him home.

But Jesus' family isn't the only group concerned about Him. The Pharisees are doing their best to spread doubt about His authority with the worst accusations possible: His power to heal comes from the devil himself. They are attacking Him publicly and questioning His identity as the Anointed One.

31When Jesus' mother and brothers arrived, *they couldn't break through the crowd,* so they sent word in to Jesus that He should come out to them. 32The crowd was pressed in tight around Him when He received the message, "Your mother and brothers [and sisters]* are waiting outside for You."

33*Jesus looked around.*

Jesus *(answering them)***:** Who are My mother and brothers?

He called into the silence. No one spoke.

34At last His gaze swept across those gathered close*, and Jesus smiled.*

Jesus: You, here, are My mother and My brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is My true family.

4 1-2Jesus went out again to teach by the Sea *of Galilee*. When the crowd became unmanageable, He climbed aboard a boat and sat down to teach the people listening on the shore by telling them parables. One of His teachings went like this:

Jesus: 3Listen! A farmer went out and sowed his seed. 4As he scattered it, one seed fell along the *hardened* path, and a bird flapped down and snapped it up. 5One seed fell onto rocky places where the soil was thin, so it sprang up quickly. 6But when the hot sun scorched *the fragile stems and leaves,* the seedling withered because its roots didn't go deep in the soil. 7One of the seeds fell among the *weeds and* thorns, which crowded the seedling out of producing a crop. 8And the rest of the seeds fell in good, rich soil. When they sprouted, the plants grew and produced a crop 30, 60, even 100 times larger *than expected* for every seed that the farmer had sown.

9All who have ears to hear, let them listen.

10When they were alone, the twelve and others close to Him asked why He always taught in parables *instead of explaining His teachings clearly*.

Jesus: 11God has let you in on the inside story regarding the workings of the Kingdom—the hidden meanings. But the crowds—I teach them in parables 12*as the prophet Isaiah predicted,*

So that when they look, they see and
yet do not understand.
When they hear, they listen and yet
do not comprehend.
Otherwise, they might really turn and
be forgiven.*

This makes the disciples scratch their heads. Why would He want to hide the truth from some people? His teachings are hard enough without putting them into parables.

13Do you mean to say that you didn't understand My parable of the sower? *That was the key parable. If you don't see what I was trying to teach there,* how will you be able to understand any of the others?

* 3:32 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 4:12 Isaiah 6:9-10

14The seed the farmer is sowing is *the good news,* God's word. 15Some people are the seed thrown onto the path, and the tempter snaps up the word *before it can even take root.* 16Others are the seed thrown among the rocks. Those people hear the word and receive it immediately with joy and enthusiasm; 17but without deep roots, *doubt,* trouble, or persecution instantly withers their faith. 18Still others are the seed tossed among *weeds and* brambles. The word has reached them, 19but the things of this life—the worries, the drive for more and more, the desire for other things—those things *cluster around close and* choke the life of God out of them until they cannot produce. 20But those last seeds—those sown into good soil? Those people hear the word, accept it, *meditate on it, act on it,* and bear fruit—a crop 30, 60, or 100 times larger *than the farmer dropped to earth.*

► Jesus' teaching often includes parables: stories that explain the truth about the Kingdom with examples from everyday life. Considering that most of His listeners know about farming, it's no wonder most of Jesus' parables are based on agricultural realities.

Parables like this force Jesus' listeners to think about the kingdom of God differently. He challenges their ideas, and He also knows they are unlikely to forget it. When they see farmers broadcasting their seeds, they will remember this parable and ponder the mysteries of the Kingdom. It never seems to bother Him that people are confused by His teaching. He doesn't expect them to understand everything; He wants them to wrestle with His teachings so His words will sit in their hearts and germinate—much like the seed sitting in good soil that eventually grows to bear fruit.

Jesus: 21When you bring a lamp *into the house,* do you put it under a box or *stuff it* under your bed? Or do you set it on top of a table *or chest*? 22Those things that are hidden are meant to be revealed, and what is concealed is meant to be brought out where its light can shine.

23All who have ears to hear, let them listen.

24So consider carefully the things you're hearing. If you put it to use, you'll be given more to wrestle with—much more. 25Those who have *listened* will receive more, but those who don't hear will forget even the little they've failed to understand.

26Here is what the kingdom of God is like: a man who throws seeds onto the earth. 27Day and night, as he works and as he sleeps, the seeds sprout and climb out into the light, even though he doesn't understand how it works. 28*It's as though* the soil itself produced the grain *somehow*—from a sprouted stalk to ripened fruit. 29But *however it happens,* when he sees that the grain has grown and ripened, he gets his sickle and begins to cut it because the harvest has come.

30What else is the kingdom of God like? What earthly thing can we compare it to? 31The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed you can sow. 32But after that seed is planted, it grows into the largest plant in the garden, a plant so big that birds can build their nests in the shade of its branches.

33Jesus spoke many parables like these to the people who followed Him. 34This was the only way He taught them, although when He was alone with His chosen few, He interpreted all the stories *so the disciples truly understood.*

35The same evening, Jesus suggested they cross over to the other side *of the lake.* 36With Jesus already in the boat, they left the crowd behind and set sail along with a few other boats that followed. 37*As they sailed,* a storm formed. *The winds whipped up* huge waves that broke over the bow, filling the boat *with so much water that even the experienced sailors among them were sure they were going to sink.*

38Jesus was back in the stern of the boat, sound asleep on a cushion, when the disciples shook Him awake.

Disciples *(shouting over the storm)***:** Jesus, Master, don't You care that we're going to die?

39He got up, shouted words into the wind, and commanded the waves.

Jesus: That's enough! Be still!

And immediately the wind died down to nothing, the waves stopped.

Jesus: 40How can you be so afraid? *After all you've seen,* where is your faith?

41The disciples were still afraid, *slowly coming to grips with what they had seen.*

Disciples *(to one another)***:** Who is this *Jesus*? How can it be that He has power over even the wind and the waves?

► For most of Jesus' miracles, the disciples are observers: they watch Him healing the sick, raising dead bodies, and casting demons out of strangers. This time, however, it is the disciples—and even Jesus Himself—who are in danger. Maybe that's why they are having such a hard time trusting that His power is greater than their situation.

They have seen Him cast out demons. They know He has powers that are not of natural origin. But they have never seen—or even heard of—anything like this. It's one thing to heal human sickness or even to order demons around. But to order the waves and the wind? To command the sea and the storm? That's a miracle of an entirely different order.

5 They traveled across the sea to the land of Gerasa* *in Galilee.* 2-3When Jesus came ashore there, He was immediately met by a man who was tortured by an evil spirit. This man lived in the cemeteries, and no one could control him—not even those who tried to tie him up or chain him. 4He had often been bound in chains, but his strength was so great that he could break the chains and tear the irons loose *from his feet and hands.* No one *and nothing* could subdue him. 5Day and night, he lurked among the tombs or *ran mad* in the hills, and *the darkness* made him scream or cut himself with *sharp-edged* stones. 6When this man saw Jesus coming in the distance, he ran to Him and fell to his knees in front of Him. 7-8Jesus started commanding the unclean spirit.

Jesus: Come out of that man, you wicked spirit!

Unclean Spirit *(shouting)***:** What's this all about, Jesus, Son of the Most High? In the name of God, I beg You—don't torture me!

Jesus: 9What is your name?

Unclean Spirit: They call me "Legion," for there are thousands of us *in this body.*

10And then Legion begged Jesus again *to leave them alone,* not to send them out of the country.

11*Since the Gerasenes were not Jews (who considered pigs to be unclean),* there happened to be a large herd of swine, *some 2,000 of them,* feeding on the hill nearby.

Unclean Spirit *(begging)***:** 12Send us into those pigs *if You have to,* so that we may enter into them.

13Jesus granted the request. The darkness swept up out of the man and into the herd of pigs. And then they thundered down the hill into the water; and there they drowned, all 2,000 of them.

14The swineherds ran away, telling everybody they met what had happened. Eventually a crowd of people came to see for themselves. 15When they reached Jesus, they found the man Legion had afflicted sitting quietly, sane and fully clothed; when they saw this, they were overwhelmed with fear *and wonder.*

16Those who had witnessed everything told the others what had happened: how Jesus had healed the man, how the pigs had rushed into the sea, and how they had destroyed themselves. 17*When they had heard the whole story,* the Gerasenes turned to Jesus and begged Him to go away.

18When Jesus climbed back into the boat, the cured demoniac asked if he could come and be with Him, but Jesus said no.

Jesus: 19Stay here; I want you to go back home to your own people and let them see what the Lord has done—how He has had mercy on you.

* 5:1 The earliest manuscripts read "Gerasenes"; others read "Gadarenes."

20So the man went away and began telling this news in the Ten Cities* region; wherever he went, people were amazed by what he told them.

► This is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus seems to listen to the pleading of a demon or a demon-possessed person. The demons immediately acknowledge Jesus as all-powerful; the possessed man's first reaction on seeing Jesus is to fall at His feet and call Him the "Son of the Most High." Although we can't know why Jesus listens to their pleading, the effect is clear: the people in that region see firsthand the power of evil and its ultimate destiny, namely, destruction.

Instead of being pleased that they are now free from the terror of the demon-possessed man, the people in the town ask Jesus to leave. After all, the local economy takes a pretty big hit when 2,000 of their choicest pigs rush into the sea.

21After Jesus returned across the sea, a large crowd quickly found Him, so He stayed by the sea. 22One of the leaders of the synagogue—a man named Jairus—came and fell at Jesus' feet, 23begging Him to heal his daughter.

Jairus: My daughter is dying, *and she's only 12 years old.* Please come to my house. Just place Your hands on her. I know that if You do, she will live.

24Jesus began traveling with Jairus toward his home.

In the crowd pressing around Jesus, 25there was a woman who had suffered continuous bleeding for 12 years, *bleeding that made her ritually unclean and an outcast according to the purity laws.* 26She had suffered greatly; and although she spent all her money on her medical care, she had only gotten worse. 27She had heard of this *Miracle-Man*, Jesus, so she snuck up behind Him in the crowd and reached out her hand to touch His cloak.

Woman *(to herself)***:** 28Even if all I touch are His clothes, I know I will be healed.

29*As soon as her fingers brushed His cloak,* the bleeding stopped. She could feel that she was whole again.

30Lots of people were pressed against Jesus at that moment, but He immediately felt her touch; He felt healing power flow out of Him.

He stopped. Everyone stopped. He looked around.

Jesus: Who just touched My robe?

31His disciples broke the uneasy silence.

Disciples: Jesus, the crowd is so thick that everyone is touching You. Why do You ask, "Who touched Me?"

32*But Jesus waited.* His gaze swept across the crowd to see who had done it. 33At last, the woman—knowing He was talking about her—pushed forward and dropped to her knees. She was shaking with fear *and amazement.*

Woman: *I touched You.*

Then she told Him the reason why. 34*Jesus listened to her story.*

Jesus: Daughter, you are well because you *dared to* believe. Go in peace, and stay well.

► Jesus occasionally instigates His own miracles: He goes up to someone, such as a paralyzed man, and offers to heal him. More often, as in the case of Jairus's daughter, people come to Jesus and ask for healings. But the woman in this story is unique because she receives her healing without asking for it—simply by touching Jesus in faith. He is surrounded by crowds pressing in on every side, but Jesus feels that one person's touch is different, in a way that only He can perceive: one woman is touching Him deliberately, in hope and faith, knowing He has the power to heal her.

35While He was speaking, some members of Jairus's household pushed through the crowd.

* 5:20 Literally, the Decapolis

Jairus's Servants *(to Jairus)*: Your daughter is dead. There's no need to drag the Teacher any farther.

36Jesus overheard their words. Then He turned to look at Jairus.

Jesus: *It's all right.* Don't be afraid; just believe.

37-38Jesus asked everyone but Peter, James, and John (James's brother) to remain outside when they reached Jairus's home. Inside the synagogue leader's house, the mourning had already begun; the weeping and wailing carried out into the street.
39Jesus *and His three disciples* went inside.

Jesus: Why are you making all this sorrowful noise? The child isn't dead. She's just sleeping.

40The mourners laughed *a horrible, bitter laugh and went back to their wailing.* Jesus cleared the house so that only His three disciples, Jairus, and Jairus's wife were left inside with Him. They all went to where the child lay. 41Then He took the child's hand.

Jesus: Little girl, it's time to wake up.

42Immediately the 12-year-old girl opened her eyes, arose, and began to walk. Her parents could not believe their eyes.

Jesus *(to the parents)*: 43Don't tell anybody what you've just seen. Why don't you give her something to eat? *I know she is hungry.*

► Jesus at last arrives at the miracle He was asked to perform: the healing of Jairus's daughter. But He is too late—the girl is already dead. Although Jesus later raises other dead people back to life, up to this point He has not yet performed such a powerful miracle. No one has an inkling of His power over the forces of life and death. He allows only His closest disciples to see this first miracle of resurrection, and He urges everyone who sees it to keep it quiet. Nevertheless, it is this miracle that first demonstrates to those who see it that He does indeed have power over death itself.

6 Jesus went back into His own hometown where He had grown up, and His disciples followed Him there.
2When the Sabbath came, He went into the synagogue *in Nazareth* and began to teach *as He had done elsewhere,* and many of those who heard Him were astonished.

Those in the Synagogue: Where did He gain this wisdom? And what are all these stories we've been hearing about the signs and healings He's performed? *Where did He get that kind of power?* 3Isn't this *Jesus, the little boy we used to see in Joseph's carpenter shop*? Didn't He grow up to be a carpenter *just like His father*? Isn't He the son of Mary *over there* and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, Simon, and their sisters? *Who does He think He is?*

And when they had thought about it that way, they became indignant and closed themselves to His message.

Jesus *(seeing this)*: 4A prophet can find honor anywhere except in his hometown, among his own people, and in his own household.

5He could not do any of His great works among them except with a few of the sick, whom He healed by laying His hands upon them. 6He was amazed by the stubbornness of their unbelief.

Jesus went out among the villages teaching, 7and He called the twelve to Him and began to send them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits 8and instructed them to take nothing with them but a staff: no money, no bread, no bag, 9nothing but the sandals on their feet and the coat* on their back.

Jesus: 10When you go into a house, stay there until it is time for you to leave that town. 11And if someone will not accept you and your message, when you leave, shake off the dust of that place from your feet as a judgment against it. [On the day of judgment, that city will wish for the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah.]*

12And so His disciples went out *into the countryside,* preaching the changed life*

* 6:9 Literally, "not to wear two tunics" * 6:11 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 6:12 Literally, repentance

as Jesus had taught them, 13casting out unclean spirits and anointing the sick with oil to heal them.

14Jesus had become so well known that King Herod received reports of all that Jesus was doing. Some were saying* that John the Baptist* had been raised from the dead and that these mighty works were the fruits of his resurrection.

Others *(disagreeing)*: 15No, this Jesus is Elijah*, returned to work on the earth.*

And still others said He was another of the prophets.

Herod *(to himself)*: 16No, it is John, the prophet I beheaded, risen from the dead.

For the blood of John was on his hands.
17-18Herod had imprisoned John *in the days before Jesus began His teaching.* John had preached to Herod that he should not have married his own brother's wife, Herodias, for *so it is written in the Hebrew Scriptures*: "It is not lawful for one to marry his brother's wife."*

19Herodias held a grudge against John and would have had him killed, but she couldn't. 20Herod feared John as a holy and righteous man and did what he could to protect him. John taught hard truths,* and yet Herod found he usually liked hearing them.

So Herod had put John in prison instead of executing him; 21-22*and there John sat until* Herod's birthday, when the governor held a great state dinner. That night, Herod's stepdaughter danced beautifully for the state officials; and the king proclaimed a solemn vow in the presence of *his honored guests,* military officers, and some of the leading men of Galilee.

Herod: Ask me whatever you wish, and I will grant it. 23Whatever you want, I will give you—up to half my province.

24She went out and consulted with her mother, *Herodias, who had only one great desire* and told her daughter what she must say.

Herod's Stepdaughter *(immediately, in response to Herod)*: 25I want the head of John the Baptist*—right now—delivered to me on a platter.

26Herod was horrified, but he had sworn an oath and could not break his word in front of his invited guests. 27So immediately he sent an executioner to the prison to behead John and bring them the head. 28It was brought to the girl upon a platter, and she took it to her mother.

29When John's disciples were told of this, they came for his body and gave it a proper burial.

30Now the twelve returned from their travels and told Him what they had done, *whom they had seen,* and how they had spread the news of God's kingdom.

Jesus *(to the disciples)*: 31Let us go out into the wilderness for a while and rest ourselves.

The crowds gathered as always, and Jesus and the twelve couldn't eat because so many people came and went. 32They could get no peace until they boarded a boat and sailed toward a deserted place.

33*But the people would not be put off so easily.* Those *along the shore* who recognized Jesus followed *along the coast.* People pushed out of all the cities and gathered ahead of Him 34so that when Jesus came ashore and saw this crowd of people waiting for Him *in a place that should have been relatively deserted,* He was moved with compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd.

He began to teach them many things 35as the day passed; at last the disciples came to Jesus.

Disciples: It is getting late, and there is nothing around for miles. 36Send these people to the surrounding villages so they can buy something to eat.

Jesus: 37Why don't you give them something to eat?

Disciples *(looking at Him)*: What? It would cost a fortune* to buy bread for these people!

Jesus: 38Does anyone have any bread? Go and see.

Disciples *(returning from the crowd)*: There are five *pieces of flatbread* and two fish, *if that makes any difference.*

* 6:14 Some of the earliest manuscripts read "He was saying." * 6:14 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 6:17-18 Leviticus 18:16; 20:21 * 6:20 Some early manuscripts read "he did many things." * 6:25 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance * 6:37 Literally, 200 denarii, Roman coins

Jesus: 39-40*Listen,* tell them to gather in smaller groups and sit on that green patch of grass.

And so the disciples gathered the people in groups of 100 or of 50, and they sat down.

41Jesus took the five pieces *of flat-bread* and the two fish, looked up to heaven, thanked God for the food, and broke it. He gave the pieces to the disciples to distribute, 42and all of the people ate until no one was hungry. 43Then they gathered twelve baskets full of leftovers.

44*That day,* 5,000 men ate their fill of the bread *when Jesus fed the hungry crowd.*

► The disciples pull Jesus aside to point out the obvious: everyone needs to go and eat something.

But Jesus, as usual, isn't about to be distracted by the obvious. His answer must irritate them even further: "Why don't you give them something to eat?" Jesus is seeing a much bigger reality. He is deliberately creating a turning point in His ministry: He wants to make them a part of His miracles. From recorders and observers, they will become participants. And so the disciples, not Jesus, tell the people to sit down, pass out the food, and collect the leftovers after everyone has eaten until they are stuffed. The disciples must feel pretty sheepish as they experience how Jesus is making them a part of the miracle—despite their mundane concerns and their frustrations with Him.

45Not long after, He sent His disciples out onto their boat to sail to Bethsaida on the other shore, and He sent the crowd away. 46After everyone had gone, He slipped away to pray on a mountain *overlooking the sea.*

47When evening came, the boat was out on the sea and He was alone on the land. 48He saw that the disciples were making little progress because they were rowing against a stiff wind. Before daylight He came near them, walking on the water, and would have passed by them. 49Some of them saw Him walking on the surface of the water, thought He was a ghost, and cried out. 50When they all saw Him, they were terrified.

Jesus *(immediately calling out)***:** Don't be frightened. Do you see? It is I.

51*He walked across the water to the boat;* and as soon as He stepped aboard, the contrary wind ceased its blowing. They were greatly astonished; 52although they had just witnessed the miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 with bread *and fish, and other signs besides,* they didn't understand *what it all meant* and their hearts remained hard.

► How can the disciples still be in doubt about Jesus after having been part of so many miracles? Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, the disciples are discovering the truth that miracles don't produce faith. As Jesus so often points out, the process works the other way around: it's faith that produces miracles. Miracles are only signs—evidence of truth that you have to know before the miracle. As long as the disciples are still in doubt about who Jesus is, they find their faith constantly challenged and frequently wavering. It will not be until after the resurrection, the greatest miracle of all, that they will come to recognize and believe in Jesus for who He is; and then their hearts will at last open.

53When they finished their journey, they landed the boat in Gennesaret. 54People at once recognized Jesus *as the Healer.* 55Immediately they hurried to collect the sick and infirm—bringing them to Him in beds if they had to—56laying them out in the markets of any village, city, or field where He might pass.

Gennesarites: Just let us touch the fringe of Your robe.

Even the people who touched only it were made whole again.

7 Then the Pharisees returned to talk with Jesus, and with them came some of the scribes *and scholars* from Jerusalem.

Scribes and Scholars *(seeing the disciples eating)*: 2Your disciples are eating bread with defiled, unwashed hands.

3Now *you need to know that* the Pharisees, and all Jews *for that matter,* held the tradition of their ancestors that hands must be washed before eating to avoid being ritually unclean. 4Likewise, they washed when they returned from the market and followed similar purity teachings as well, from the washing of their food to the washing of their bowls, cups, and kettles.

Scribes and Pharisees: 5Why don't Your disciples follow the traditions passed down to us? Why do they eat their bread with defiled hands?

Jesus: 6Isaiah prophesied wisely about your religious pretensions when he wrote,

> These people honor Me *with words* off their lips;
> meanwhile their hearts are far from Me.
> 7Their worship is empty, *void of true devotion.*
> They teach a human commandment, *memorized and practiced by rote*.*

8When you cling blindly to your own traditions [such as washing utensils and cups],* you completely miss God's command. 9Then, indeed, you have perfected setting aside God's commands for the sake of your tradition. 10Moses gave you God's commandment: "Honor your father and your mother."* And also, "If you curse your father or your mother, you will be put to death."* 11But you say to your *aged* parents, "I've decided that the support you were expecting from me will now be the holy offering set aside for God." 12After that he is not allowed to do anything for his parents. 13Do you think God wants you to honor your traditions that you have passed down? This is only one of many places where you are blind. 14(to the crowd that had gathered) Listen, all of you, to this teaching. I want you to understand. 15There is nothing outside someone that can corrupt him. Only the things that come out of a person can corrupt him. [16All who have ears to hear, let them listen.]*

17When they had come in from the road, His disciples asked Him what He meant by this teaching.

Jesus: 18Do you mean you don't understand this one either? Whatever goes into people from outside can't defile them 19because it doesn't go into their hearts. Outside things go through their guts and back out, thus making all foods pure.* 20No, it's what comes from within that corrupts. 21-22It's what grows out of the hearts of people that leads to corruption: evil thoughts, immoral sex, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wicked acts, treachery, sensuality, jealousy, slander, pride, and foolishness. 23All of these come from within, and these are the sins that truly corrupt a person.

► Although Mark specifically states that Jesus is overriding the Old Testament dietary laws and declaring all foods pure, it will be a long time before the disciples are willing to act on that message. One of the biggest controversies in the early church will be the question of dietary restrictions and how the Old Testament laws ought to be observed by Jewish and non-Jewish Christian believers. However, Jesus makes it clear in this passage that His main concern has nothing to do with what people eat. Instead, He is concerned about the hearts of His followers.

24From there Jesus and His followers traveled to the region of Tyre [and Sidon]* *on the Mediterranean coast.* He hoped to slip unnoticed into a house, but people discovered His presence. 25*Shortly after He arrived,* a woman whose daughter was filled with an unclean spirit heard that He was there, so she came directly to Him and prostrated herself at His feet.

26The woman was *not a Jew, but* a Syrophoenician (a Greek) by birth. *All the same,* she came to Jesus and begged Him to cast the unclean spirit out of her daughter.

* 7:6-7 Isaiah 29:13 * 7:8 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 7:10 Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 * 7:10 Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9 * 7:16 Some manuscripts omit verse 16. * 7:19 The earliest texts say "Jesus declared all foods pure." * 7:24 Some manuscripts omit this portion.

Jesus *(shaking His head)*: 27I must feed the children first. It would do no good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Syrophoenician Woman: 28Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table may eat of the children's crumbs.

Jesus *(smiling and nodding)*: 29This is a wise saying. Go back home. Your daughter is free of the spirit that troubled her.

30And when she returned to her house, *she discovered that it was as Jesus had told her.* Her daughter lay on her bed, in her right mind, *whole and healthy.*

► Although Jesus at first answers the Greek woman harshly, He ultimately responds to her request. By healing her daughter, He demonstrates that God's loving presence has come to all people and not just to Jews. It's one of the first glimpses in this Gospel of the truth that will become clearer later—the truth that, through Jesus, God is making all people, and not just one chosen nation, clean and whole.

31Jesus traveled on His way through Tyre and Sidon, eventually returning to the region of the Sea of Galilee. From there He pressed on to the area of the Ten Cities.* 32*Among the sick* who were brought to Him was a man who was deaf and could barely speak at all, and those who brought him begged Jesus to lay His hands on the man. 33Jesus took him aside from the crowd, alone, and touched his ears with His fingers. Then after spitting on His fingers, Jesus touched the man's tongue. 34Looking heavenward to God, Jesus sighed and commanded,

Jesus: Open up* *and let this man speak.*

35[Immediately]* the man could hear, his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. 36Jesus ordered those *who had witnessed this* to tell no one; but the more He insisted, the more zealously people spread the word.

People *(astonished)*: 37He does everything so well! He even returns sound to the deaf and mute.

8 Once again a huge crowd had followed them, and they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called His disciples together.

Jesus: 2These people have been with Me for three days without food. They're hungry, and I am concerned for them. 3If I try to send them home now, they'll faint along the way because many of them have come a long, long way *to hear and see Me.*

Disciples: 4Where can we find enough bread for these people in this desolate place?

Jesus: 5How much bread do we have left?

Disciples: Seven rounds of flatbread.

6*So, as before,* He commanded the people to sit down; and He took the rounds of flatbread, gave thanks for them, and broke them. His disciples took what He gave them and fed the people. 7They also had a few small fish, which, after He had spoken a blessing, He likewise gave His followers to pass to the people. 8When all had eaten their fill and they had gathered up the food that remained, seven baskets were full.

9*On this occasion,* there were about 4,000 people who had eaten the food *that Jesus provided.* Jesus sent the crowd home; 10then, immediately, He got into a boat with His disciples and sailed away. Upon their arrival in Dalmanutha *in the district of Magdala,* 11they were met by Pharisees—ready with their questions and tests—seeking some sign from heaven *that His teaching was from God.*

Jesus *(sighing with disappointment)*: 12Why does this generation ask for a sign *before they will believe*? Believe Me when I say that you will not see one.

13He left the Pharisees and sailed across to the other shore.

14The disciples had forgotten to buy provisions, so they had only one round of flatbread among them. 15Jesus took this moment to warn them.

Jesus: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

* 7:31 Literally, the Decapolis * 7:34 Aramaic, *Ephphatha* * 7:35 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit this word.

The disciples *didn't understand what Jesus was talking about and* discussed it among themselves.

Some Disciples: 16What?

Other Disciples: He's saying this because we have run out of bread.

Jesus *(overhearing them)*: 17-19Why are you focusing on bread? Don't you see yet? Don't you understand? You have eyes—why don't you see? You have ears—why don't you hear? Are you so hard-hearted?

Don't you remember when I broke the five rounds of flatbread among the 5,000? *Tell Me,* how many baskets of scraps were left over?

Disciples: Twelve.

Jesus: 20And how many were left when I fed the 4,000 with seven rounds?

Disciples: Seven.

Jesus: 21And still you don't understand?

22When they came into Bethsaida, a group brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged Him to touch the man *and heal him.* 23So Jesus guided the man out of the village, *away from the crowd;* and He spat on the man's eyes and touched them.

Jesus: What do you see?

Blind Man *(opening his eyes)*: 24I see people, but they look like trees—walking trees.

25Jesus touched his eyes again; and when the man looked up, he could see everything clearly.

26Jesus sent him away to his house.

Jesus *(to the healed man)*: Don't go into town yet. [And don't tell anybody in town what happened here.]*

► Bethsaida is the hometown of at least three of Jesus' emissaries—Peter, Andrew, and Philip—and possibly James and John as well. Jesus performs many miracles there, most notably the feeding of the 5,000. However, this miracle—the healing of the blind man—is the only miracle in all the Gospels that is done in stages instead of instantly.

Of course, there's no way to know for sure why Jesus chooses to heal this man partly before He heals him entirely. Jesus frequently links faith, or lack of faith, with the healings. Bethsaida is a town He criticizes for its lack of faith (Matthew 11:21-22). So it's likely He wants to demonstrate to His disciples that their inability to see His purpose can be healed, too, even if it takes time.

27As He traveled with His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, He posed an *important* question to them.

Jesus: Who do the people say that I am?

28They told Him *about the great speculation concerning His identity.*

Disciples: Some of them say *You are* John the Baptist,* others say Elijah, while others say one of the prophets *of old.*

Jesus *(pressing the question)*: 29And who do you say that I am?

Peter: You are God's Anointed, *the Liberating King.*

Jesus: 30Don't tell anyone. *It is not yet time.*

31And He went on to teach them many things *about Himself:* how the Son of Man would suffer; how He would be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes; how He would be killed; and how, after three days, *God would* raise Him from the dead.

32He said all these things in front of them all, but Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke Him.

► Peter represents the best and worst in humanity. One day, Peter drops everything to become a follower of Jesus; the next, he's busy putting his foot in his mouth. Peter is always responding to Jesus, frequently

* 8:26 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 8:28 Literally, John who immersed, to show repentance

making mistakes, but never drifting far from Jesus' side. In this passage, Peter verbalizes God's word and Satan's temptation—almost in the same breath. Peter thinks he understands who Jesus is, but he still has a lot to learn about what Jesus has come to do.

Jesus *(seeing His disciples surrounding them)*: 33Get behind Me, you tempter! You're thinking only of human things, not of the things God has planned.

34He gathered the crowd and His disciples alike.

Jesus: If any one of you wants to follow Me, you will have to give yourself up to God's plan, take up your cross, and do as I do. 35For any one of you who wants to be rescued will lose your life, but any one of you who loses your life for My sake and for the sake of this good news will be liberated. 36Really, what profit is there for you to gain the whole world and lose yourself *in the process*? 37What can you give in exchange for your life? 38If you are ashamed of Me and of what I came to teach to this adulterous and sinful generation, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He comes in the glory of His Father along with the holy messengers *at the final judgment.*

9 **Jesus:** Truly, some of you who are here now will not experience death before you see the kingdom of God coming in *glory and* power.

2Six days after saying this, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up onto a high mountaintop by themselves. There He was transformed 3so that His clothing became intensely white, brighter than any earthly cleaner could bleach them. 4Elijah and Moses appeared to them and talked with Jesus.

Peter *(to Jesus)*: 5Teacher, it's a great thing that we're here. We should build three shelters here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

6He *was babbling and* did not know what he was saying because they were terrified *by what they were witnessing.*

7Then a cloud surrounded them, and they heard a voice within that cloud.

Voice: This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him.

8All of a sudden, they looked about and all they had seen was gone. They stood alone on the mountain with Jesus.

9On their way back down, He urged them not to tell anyone what they had witnessed until the Son of Man had risen from the dead, 10so they kept it all to themselves.

► Mark doesn't usually record events with much attention to chronology; but in this case, he mentions that the transfiguration took place six days after Peter's confession of Jesus' identity. In a dramatic confirmation of the truth Peter has spoken, the three disciples see that Jesus is indeed the Anointed One of God. The veil of Jesus' human nature is pulled away, and the glory of His divinity shines through.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the answer to all the promises of the prophets. The disciples hear God's own voice commanding them to listen to Jesus as His beloved Son. What an incredible confirmation of the truth that Peter spoke in faith only six days before!

Disciples *(to one another)*: What does He mean, "Until the Son of Man is risen"? 11(to Jesus) Master, why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?

Jesus *(thinking of John the Baptist)*: 12Elijah does come first to restore all things. *They have it right.* But there is something else written in the Scriptures about the Son of Man: He will have to suffer and be rejected. 13*Here's the truth:* Elijah has come; *his enemies treated him with contempt* and did what they wanted to him, just as it was written.

14When they reached the rest of the disciples, Jesus saw that a large crowd had

gathered and that among them the scribes were asking questions. 15Right when the crowd saw Jesus, they were overcome with awe and surged forward immediately, *nearly running over the disciples.*

Jesus *(to the scribes)*: 16What are you debating with My disciples? *What would you like to know?*

Father *(in the crowd)*: 17Teacher, I have brought my son to You. He is filled with an unclean spirit. He cannot speak, 18and when the spirit takes control of him, he is thrown to the ground *to wail and moan*, to foam at the mouth, to grind his teeth, and to stiffen up. I brought him to Your followers, but they could do nothing with him. *Can You help us?*

Jesus: 19O faithless generation, how long must I be among you? How long do I have to put up with you? Bring the boy to Me.

20They brought the boy toward Jesus; but as soon as He drew near, the spirit took control of the boy and threw him on the ground, where he rolled, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus *(to the father)*: 21How long has he been like this?

Father: Since he was a baby. 22This spirit has thrown him often into the fire and sometimes into the water, trying to destroy him. *I have run out of options; I have tried everything.* But if there's anything You can do, please, have pity on us and help us.

Jesus: 23*What do you mean,* "If there's anything?" All things are possible, if you only believe.

Father *(crying in desperation)*: 24I believe, Lord. Help me to believe!

25Jesus noticed that a crowd had gathered around them now. He issued a command to the unclean spirit.

Jesus: Listen up, you no-talking, no-hearing demon. I Myself am ordering you to come out of him now. Come out, and don't ever come back!

26The spirit shrieked and caused the boy to thrash about; then it came out of the boy and left him lying as still as death. Many of those in the crowd whispered that he was dead. 27But Jesus took the boy by the hand and lifted him to his feet.

28Later He and His disciples gathered privately in a house.

Disciples *(to Jesus)*: Why couldn't we cast out that unclean spirit?

Jesus: 29That sort *of powerful spirit* can only be conquered with much prayer [and fasting].*

► The father has enough faith to bring his son to Jesus for healing, but he asks hesitantly whether there is anything Jesus can do. In his desperation, the father recognizes the limits of his faith. Perhaps that very desperation is enough because Jesus immediately heals his son.

Having successfully healed many demon-possessed people when Jesus sent them out earlier, the disciples are at a loss to know why they are completely unable to heal this little boy. Jesus' reply is cryptic and surprising: "That sort *of powerful spirit* is only conquered with much prayer [and fasting]." It seems that although the disciples have faith that they can heal the boy, they are spiritually unprepared for the depth of evil residing in the world. They need to be saturated in the presence of God to face the challenge.

30When they left that place, they passed secretly through Galilee.

Jesus *(to the disciples as they traveled)*: 31The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of the people, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise on the third day.

32But again they did not understand His meaning, and they were afraid to ask Him *for an explanation.*

33At last, they came to Capernaum where they gathered in a house.

Jesus: What was it I heard you arguing about along the way?

* 9:29 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

34They *looked down at the floor and* wouldn't answer, for they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest *of Jesus' disciples.*

► It is only natural for the disciples to wonder which of them will be His right-hand man. Even the three disciples who have just seen Jesus' glory revealed in the transfiguration cannot resist the attraction of honor. After all, who has a better claim than they do to being the greatest of Jesus' disciples?

Fortunately Jesus overhears what is said and is quick to respond in mercy to correct their mistake. Greatness in His eyes doesn't consist of seeing wonders or performing miracles or even fasting and praying. Instead, greatness is about humility and service. These are the heart of the kingdom of heaven.

35He sat down with the twelve to teach them.

Jesus: Whoever wants to be first must be last, and *whoever wants to be the greatest* must be the servant of all.

36He then called forward a child, set the child in the middle of them, and took the child in His arms.

Jesus: 37Whoever welcomes a child like this in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me is welcoming not Me, but the One who sent Me.

John *(to Jesus)***:** 38Master, we saw another man casting out unclean spirits in Your name, but he was not one of our group. So we told him to stop what he was doing.

Jesus: 39You shouldn't have said that. Anyone using My name to do a miracle cannot turn quickly to speak evil of Me. 40Anyone who isn't against us is for us. 41The truth of the matter is this: anyone who gives you a cup of *cool* water to drink because you carry the name of your Anointed One will be rewarded.

42But if anyone turns even the smallest of My followers away from Me, it would be better for him if someone had hung a millstone around his neck and flung him into the deepest part of the sea.

43If your hand turns you away from the things of God, then you should cut it off. It's better to come into *eternal* life maimed than to have two hands and be flung into hell—[44where the worm will not die and the fire will not be smothered.]*

45If your foot trips you on the path, you should cut it off. It's better to come into *eternal* life crawling than to have two feet and be flung into hell—[46where the worm will not die and the fire will not be smothered.]*

47And if your eye keeps you from seeing clearly, then you should pull it out. It's better to come into the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be flung into hell, 48where the worm will not die and the fire will not be smothered.* 49Everyone will be salted with fire[, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt].* 50Salt is a good thing; but if it has lost its zest, how can it be seasoned again? You should have salt within yourselves and peace with one another.

10 From there Jesus traveled to Judea and beyond the Jordan River; He taught the crowds who gathered as was His custom.

2Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him *on His adherence to the law of Moses.*

Pharisees: Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?

Jesus: 3What did Moses say to you?

Pharisees: 4Moses permitted us to write a certificate of dismissal and divorce her.*

Jesus: 5Moses gave you this law *as a concession* because of the hardness of your hearts. 6But truly, God created humans male and female in the beginning.* 7*As it is written in the Hebrew Scriptures,* "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother [to marry his wife],* 8and

* 9:44 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 44, a quote from Isaiah 66:24. * 9:46 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 46, a quote from Isaiah 66:24. * 9:48 Isaiah 66:24 * 9:49 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 10:4 Deuteronomy 24:1 * 10:6 Genesis 1:27; 5:2; the Hebrew name for the Book of Genesis is "In the beginning." * 10:7 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

the two of them will become one flesh *and blood.*"* So they are no longer two people, but one. 9What God has joined together in this way, no one may sever.

10In the privacy of their dwelling that evening, the disciples asked Him about this teaching, 11and He went even further.

Jesus: If any husband divorces his wife and then marries another woman, he commits adultery against her. 12And if a wife should divorce her husband and marry another, then she commits adultery *against him*.

The Pharisees hope to trip Jesus. Instead of taking a side, Jesus goes to the purpose and meaning of marriage: not just from a social but a spiritual perspective.

13*When the crowd gathered again*, the people brought their children to see Jesus, hoping that He might *grant them His blessing* through His touch.

His disciples turned them all away; 14but when Jesus saw this, He was incensed.

Jesus *(to the disciples)***:** Let the children come to Me, and don't ever stand in their way, for this is what the kingdom of God is all about. 15Truly anyone who doesn't accept the kingdom of God as a little child does can never enter it.

16Jesus gathered the children in His arms, and He laid His hands on them to bless them.

17When He had traveled on, a *young* man came and knelt *in the dust of the road* in front of Jesus.

Young Man: Good Teacher! What must I do to gain life in the world to come?

Jesus: 18You are calling Me good? *Don't you know that* God and God alone is good? 19*Anyway, why ask Me that question?* You know the Commandments *of Moses*: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not slander, do not defraud, and honor your father and mother."*

Young Man: 20Yes, Teacher, I have done all these since I was a child.

21Then Jesus, looking at the young man, *saw that he was sincere* and responded out of His love for him.

Jesus: *Son,* there is still one thing you have not done. Go now. Sell everything you have and give the proceeds to the poor so that you will have treasure in heaven. After that, come, follow Me.

22The young man went away sick at heart at these words because he was very wealthy, 23and Jesus looked around *to see if His disciples were understanding His teaching.*

Jesus *(to His disciples)***:** Oh, it is hard for people with wealth to find their way into God's kingdom!

Disciples *(amazed)***:** 24*What?*

Jesus: *You heard Me.* How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God [for those who trust in their wealth]!* 25I think you'll see camels squeezing through the eye of a needle before you'll see the rich *celebrating and dancing as they* enter into *the joy of* God's kingdom!

26The disciples looked around at each other, whispering.

Disciples *(aloud to Jesus)***:** Then who can be liberated?

Jesus *(smiling and shaking His head)***:** 27For human beings it is impossible, but not for God: God makes everything possible.

Peter: 28Master, we have left behind everything we had to follow You.

Jesus: 29That is true. And those who have left their houses, their lands, their parents, or their families for My sake, and for the sake of this good news 30will receive all of this 100 times greater than they have in this time—houses and farms and brothers, sisters, mothers, and children, along with persecutions—and in the world to come, they will receive eternal life. 31But many of those who are first *in this world* shall be last *in the world to come,* and the last, first.

► This young man, like many wealthy people, is confident in his own abilities. He wants to make sure he will live well in the coming world, but he is not

* 10:7-8 Genesis 2:24 * 10:19 Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20 * 10:24 Some manuscripts omit this portion.

convinced he will not fall short of the mark. And without humbly recognizing his own sinfulness and need in the face of God's goodness and perfection, it is indeed very hard for him to find the Kingdom.

This is the only person in the Gospels outside of the twelve whom Jesus personally invites to follow Him. He is also the only person in the Gospels to walk away from that invitation.

32 At length, they made their way toward
Jerusalem. Jesus was walking ahead of
them. As they neared the city, wonder and
amazement filled them. But soon those
who were following began to tremble.

Jesus *(taking the twelve aside)*: 33 Look, we
are going up to Jerusalem, and there the
Son of Man is going to be delivered to
the chief priests and the scribes. They
shall seek His death and deliver Him to
the outsiders *to carry out that sentence.*
34 Then people will mock Him, spit upon
Him, whip Him, and kill Him. But on the
third day, He will rise again.

35 Two of the twelve—the sons of Zebedee
as they were known—approached Jesus
and pulled Him aside.

James and John: Teacher, will You do
something for us if we ask it of You?

Jesus: 36 What is it that you want?

James and John: 37 *Master,* grant that we
might sit on either side of You, one at Your
right hand and one at Your left, when You
come into the glory *of Your kingdom.*

Jesus: 38 You don't know what it is you're
asking. Can you drink from the cup I
have to drink from or be ritually washed
in baptism with the baptism* that
awaits Me?

James and John: 39 We can.

Jesus: You will indeed drink from the cup
I drink from and be baptized with the
baptism* that awaits Me. 40 But to sit at
My right or at My left is an honor I cannot grant. That will be given to those for
whom it has been prepared.

41 When the other ten heard about this
request, they were angry with James and
John; 42 but Jesus stopped them.

Jesus: You know that among the nations
of the world the great ones lord it over
the little people and act like tyrants.
43 But that is not the way it will be
among you. Whoever would be great
among you must serve and minister.
44 Whoever wants to be great among you
must be slave of all. 45 Even the Son of
Man came not to be served but to be a
servant—to offer His life as a ransom for
others.

► None of the disciples understand what Jesus is telling them, and none of His predictions will become clear to them until after His resurrection. In the meantime, several of His disciples are not only failing to understand His warnings about the things to come but are missing His message on things right before their eyes. Jesus has already told them that to be great among His followers means to become humble like a child; but James and John still think that as two of His closest disciples, they can win worldly fame and power.

46 *By that time,* they had reached Jericho;
as they passed through the town, a crowd
of people followed along. They came to
a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, the son of
Timaeus, who sat beside the *main* road.
47 When he was told that Jesus of Nazareth
was passing in that throng, he called out
in a loud voice.

Bartimaeus: Jesus, Son of David, take pity
on me and help me!

Disgusted by the blind man's public display, others in the crowd tried to silence
him *until the Master passed.*

Some of the Crowd: 48 Be quiet. Shush.

Bartimaeus *(still louder)*: Jesus, Son of
David, have pity on me!

* 10:38 Literally, immersion * 10:39 Literally, be immersed with the immersion

[49]Jesus stopped where He stood. *The crowd stopped with Him.* He told those *near the front of the crowd* to call the blind man forward.

Some of the Crowd *(to Bartimaeus)*: Good news! *Jesus has heard you. Listen*—He calls for you. Get up *and go to Him.*

[50]Bartimaeus cast aside his *beggar's* robe and stepped forward, *feeling his way* toward Jesus.

Jesus: [51]What do you want from Me?

Bartimaeus: Teacher, I want to see.

Jesus: [52]Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace.

In that moment, Bartimaeus could see again; and from that time on, he followed Jesus.

► Few people in the Gospels show as much persistence and eagerness in their desire to be healed as blind Bartimaeus. He is not about to be swayed from his efforts to attract Jesus' attention. The discouragement from everyone around him only makes him shout louder, determined to get the attention of the healer he has heard about.

The blind man's actions demonstrate his faith. Beggars in first-century Palestine would spread a cloak on the ground in front of them to collect donations from compassionate passersby. It probably isn't much, but for Bartimaeus, his cloak is all he has. He throws it aside without a thought—probably along with the coins he collected that day—because he is certain that once he meets Jesus, he will not need to be a beggar anymore.

11 When they had gotten close to Jerusalem, near the two villages of Bethphage and Bethany and the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His followers *ahead of them.*

Jesus: [2]Go to that village over there. As soon as you get into the town, you'll see a young colt tied that nobody has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it back *to Me.* [3]If anybody *stops you and* asks what you're doing, just say, "The Lord needs it, and He will send it back right after He's done."

[4]*Everything happened just as Jesus had told them.* They found the colt in the street tied near a door, and they untied it.

Bystanders: [5]What are you doing?

[6]They answered as Jesus had instructed and were allowed to take it, [7]so they brought the colt back to Jesus, piled garments on its back *to make a comfortable seat*, and Jesus rode the animal *toward Jerusalem.* [8]*As they traveled,* people cast their cloaks onto the road and spread out leafy branches, which they had brought from the fields *along the way.* [9]People walked ahead of them, and others followed behind.

People *(shouting)*: Hosanna! *Rescue us now, Lord!* Hosanna!

Blessed be the One who comes in the name of the Eternal One!*
[10]And blessed is the kingdom of our father David, which draws closer *to us today*!
Hosanna in the highest heavens!

► Jesus enters Jerusalem, but this time He radically redefines the people's every expectation. His descriptions to His disciples of where they will find the colt He is to ride and how they shall get it has an air of prophecy and supernatural knowledge. He rides a donkey instead of being carried into town on the backs of servants (in a litter as a conquering king would do), fulfilling the prophecy that the King will come riding a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). After all, donkeys are a poor man's mount, and even in this triumphal entry, Jesus makes it clear He does not intend to conquer and rule in a worldly way. Now, for the first time, He

* 11:9 Psalm 118:26

allows the crowds to voice their excitement about who He is and all that He has been doing.

11 *To the sound of this chanting,* Jesus rode through the gates of Jerusalem and up to the temple. He looked around and saw that evening was coming, so He and the twelve went back to Bethany *to spend the night.*

12 The next morning, when they departed Bethany *and were traveling back to the city,* Jesus was hungry. 13 Off in the distance, He saw a fig tree fully leafed out, so He headed toward it to see if it might have any ripe fruit. But when He reached it, He found only leaves because the fig season had not yet come.

14 As the disciples listened, *Jesus pronounced a curse on the tree.*

Jesus: No one will ever eat fruit from your branches again.

► This is the only time recorded in the Gospels when Jesus uses His supernatural power to destroy. The tree is "fully leafed out"—a stage that usually comes after figs are ripe and not before. Because the tree looks as though it ought to have fruit but doesn't, it is a perfect illustration of people who believe they have the good fruit of righteousness even though their actions are void of true compassion and love, as empty and useless as leaves. And so Jesus curses the fig tree, not out of anger with the tree itself, but as a warning to hypocrites who think their appearance is more important than the fruit of their actions.

15 They continued into Jerusalem *and made their way up to the temple.*

Upon reaching the temple *that morning,* Jesus dealt with those who were selling and buying *animals for sacrifices* and drove them out of the area. He turned over the tables of those who exchanged money *for the temple pilgrims* and the seats of those selling birds, 16 and He *physically* prevented anyone from carrying anything through the temple.

Jesus *(to those who were listening)***:** 17 Didn't the prophets write, "My house will be called a house of prayer, for all the people"*? But you have made it into a "haven for thieves."*

► At the temple, Jesus responds in shock to the scene before Him. He acts decisively and with great emotion against those who have turned God's house into a place where pilgrims are exploited. He has a message and, like the prophets of old, this message is better seen than heard. Because the temple leadership has allowed profiteers and merchants to set up shop in the court of the Gentiles, they are making ridiculous profits. For the people who come long distances to worship, it is a normal practice to have merchants selling animals for the pilgrims to sacrifice. What is not normal and what is immoral is where and how they transact business. Jesus takes issue with robbers profiteering in His Father's house.

18 The chief priests and the scribes heard these words *and knew Jesus was referring to them,* so they plotted His destruction. They had grown afraid of Him because His teachings struck the crowds into astonishment.

19 When evening came, [Jesus and His followers]* left the city again. 20 The next morning *on the way back to Jerusalem,* they passed a tree that had withered down to its very roots.

Peter *(remembering)***:** 21 That's the fig tree, Teacher, the one You cursed *just yesterday morning.* It's withered away *to nothing*!

Jesus: 22 Trust in God. 23 *If you do,* honestly, you can say to this mountain, "Mountain, uproot yourself and throw yourself into the sea." If you don't doubt, but trust that what you say will take place, then it will happen. 24 So listen to what

* 11:17 Isaiah 56:7 * 11:17 Jeremiah 7:11 * 11:19 Some of the earliest manuscripts read "He."

I'm saying: Whatever you pray for or ask *from God,* believe that you'll receive it and you will. 25When you pray, if you remember anyone who has wronged you, forgive him so that God above can also forgive you. [26If you don't forgive others, don't expect God's forgiveness.]*

27As they arrived in Jerusalem and were walking in the temple, the chief priests, scribes, and elders came to Jesus 28and asked Him a question.

Leaders: Tell us, who has given You the authority to say and do the things You're saying and doing?

Jesus: 29I will answer your question, if you will answer one for Me. Only then will I tell you who gives Me authority to do these things. 30Tell Me, when John was ritually cleansing through baptism *for the forgiveness of sins*, was his authority from heaven or was it merely human?

31The priests, scribes, and elders huddled together to think through an answer.

Leaders *(to themselves)*: If we say, "It must have been from heaven," *then Jesus will have us.* He'll ask, "Then why didn't you listen to him and follow him?" 32But if we say, "John's cleansing was only human," the people will be up in arms because they think John was a prophet *sent by God.* 33(responding to Jesus) We don't know what to tell You.

Jesus: *All right*, then don't expect Me to tell you where I get the authority to say and do these things.

► The religious leaders ask Jesus where His authority comes from. What gives Him the right to heal people on the Sabbath, teach about God, do miracles, and cast out demons? Who exactly does He think He is—and where does His authority come from? This question is a trap: if He claims His authority is from God, then they can argue that God does not endorse someone who breaks His laws; but if He says His authority is His own, then He will be in trouble with the crowds and perhaps even with the Roman governor.

Jesus, however, issues a challenge: I'll tell you what you want to know if you'll answer My question first. But He asks them an impossible question—impossible not because they don't know the answer, but because they cannot say the answer.

12 Then He told a story.

Jesus: There was a man who established a vineyard. He put up a wall around it to fence it in; he dug a pit for a winepress; he built a watchtower. *When he had finished this work,* he leased the vineyard to some tenant farmers and went away to a distant land.

2When the grapes were in season, he sent a slave to the vineyard to collect *his rent*—his share of the fruit. 3But the farmers grabbed the slave, beat him, and sent him back to his master empty-handed. 4The owner sent another slave, and this slave the farmers beat over the head and sent away dishonored. 5A third slave, the farmers killed. This went on for some time, with the farmers beating some of the messengers and killing others *until the owner had lost all patience.* 6He had a son whom he loved above all things, and he said to himself, *"When these thugs see my son, they'll know he carries my authority.* They'll have to respect him."

7*But when the tenant farmers saw the owner's son coming,* they said among themselves, "Look at this! It's the son, the heir to this vineyard. If we kill him, then the land will be ours!" 8So they seized him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

9Now what do you suppose the owner will do *when he hears of this*? He'll come and destroy these farmers, and he'll give the land to others.

10Haven't you read the Scriptures? *As the psalmist says,*

> The stone that the builders rejected
> has become the very stone that
> holds together the entire
> foundation.
> 11This is the work of the Eternal One,
> and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

* 11:26 Some of the earliest manuscripts omit verse 26. * 12:10-11 Psalm 118:22-23

12The priests, scribes, temple leaders, and elders knew the story was directed against them. They couldn't figure out how to lay their hands on Jesus then because they were afraid the people *would rise up against them.* So they left Him alone, and they went away *furious.*

The leaders are stunned to learn they will face judgment themselves. It goes against everything they believe about themselves and about God.

13Then some Pharisees and some of Herod's supporters banded together to try to entrap Jesus. 14They came to Him and complimented Him.

Pharisees: Teacher, we know You are truthful *in what You say* and that You don't play favorites. You're not worried about what anyone thinks of You, so You teach with total honesty what God would have us do. *So tell us:* is it lawful that we Jews should pay taxes to the Roman emperor or not? 15Should we give or not?

Jesus *(seeing through their ruse)***:** Why do you test Me like this? Listen, bring Me a coin* so that I can take a look at it.

16When they had brought it to Him, He asked them another question.

Jesus: *Tell Me,* whose picture is on this coin? And of whom does this inscription speak?

Pharisees: Caesar, of course.

Jesus: 17Then give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor. And give to God what belongs to God.

They could not think of anything to say to His response.

Jesus turns the question back on them. It isn't about taxes. It is about knowing and being faithful to the one true God.

18Later a group of Sadducees, *Jewish religious leaders* who didn't believe the dead would be resurrected, came to test Jesus.

Sadducees: 19Teacher, the law of Moses tells us, "If a man's brother dies, leaving a widow without sons, then the man should marry his sister-in-law and *try to* have children with her in his brother's name."*

20Now here's the situation: there were seven brothers. The oldest took a wife and left her a widow with no children. 21So the next oldest married her, left her a widow, and again there were no children. So the next brother married her and died, and the next, *and the next.* 22Finally all seven brothers had married her, but none of them had conceived children with her, and at last she died also.

23Tell us then, in the resurrection [when humans rise from the dead],* whose wife will she be? For all seven of them married her.

Jesus: 24You can't see the truth because you don't know the Scriptures well and because you don't really believe that God is powerful. 25The answer is this: when the dead rise, they won't be married or given in marriage. They'll be like the messengers in heaven, *who are not united with one another in marriage.* 26But how can you fail to see the truth of resurrection? Don't you remember in the Book of Moses how God talked to Moses out of a burning bush and what God said to him then? "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* *"I am," God said. Not "I was."* 27So God is not the God of the dead but of the living. You are sadly mistaken.

28One of the scribes *who studied and copied the Hebrew Scriptures* overheard this conversation and was impressed by the way Jesus had answered.

Scribe: Tell me, Teacher. What is the most important thing that God commands *in the law*?

Jesus: 29The most important commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Eternal One is our God, and the Eternal One is the only God. 30You should love the Eternal, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."* 31The second *great commandment* is this: "Love others in the same way you love yourself."* There are no commandments more important than these.

* 12:15 Literally, denarius, a Roman coin * 12:19 Deuteronomy 25:5 * 12:23 Some manuscripts omit this portion.
* 12:26 Exodus 3:6, 15 * 12:30 Deuteronomy 6:4-5 * 12:31 Leviticus 19:18

► Although Jesus is asked for only the single most important commandment, He answers by naming two commands: love God and love others. He includes both because these two teachings can never be really separated from each other. Some people think they can love God and ignore the people around them, but Jesus frequently makes it clear that loving God apart from loving His people is impossible.

Scribe: 32Teacher, You have spoken the truth. For there is one God and only one God, 33and to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves are more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice *we could ever give.*

34Jesus heard that the man had spoken with wisdom.

Jesus: *Well said; if you understand that,* then the kingdom of God is closer than you think.

Nobody asked Jesus any more questions after that.

35Later Jesus was teaching in the temple.

Jesus: Why do the scribes say that the Anointed One is the son of David? 36*In the psalms,* David himself was led by the Holy Spirit to sing,

> The Master said to my master,
> "Sit at My right hand,
> *in the place of power and honor,*
> And I will gather Your enemies together,
> *lead them in on hands and knees,*
> and You will rest Your feet on their backs."*

37If David calls Him "Master," how can He be his son?

The crowd listened to Him with delight.

Jesus: 38Watch out for the scribes *who act so religious*—who like to be seen in pious clothes and to be spoken to respectfully in the marketplace, 39who take the best seats in the synagogues and the place of honor at every dinner, 40who spend widows' inheritances and pray long prayers to impress others. These are the kind of people who will be condemned above all others.

41Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, where people came to bring their offerings, and He watched as they came and went. Many rich people threw in large sums of money, 42but a poor widow came and put in only two small coins* worth only a fraction of a cent.*

Jesus *(calling His disciples together)***:** 43Truly this widow has given a greater gift than any other contribution. 44All the others gave a little out of their great abundance, but this poor woman has given God everything she has.

13 As Jesus left the temple *later that day,* one of the disciples noticed *the grandeur of Herod's temple.*

Disciple: Teacher, I can't believe the size of these stones! Look at these magnificent buildings!

Jesus: 2Look closely at these magnificent buildings. *Someday* there won't be one of these great stones left on another. Everything will be thrown down.

3They took a seat on the Mount of Olives, across *the valley* from the temple; and Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus to explain His statement to them privately.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew: 4Don't keep us in the dark. When will the temple be destroyed? What sign will let us know that it's about to happen?

Jesus: 5Take care that no one deceives you. 6Many will come claiming to be Mine, saying, "I am the One," and they will fool lots of people. 7You will hear of wars, or that war is coming, but don't lose heart. These things will have to happen, although it won't mean the end yet. 8Tribe will rise up against tribe, nation against nation, and there will

* 12:36 Psalm 110:1 * 12:42 Literally lepta, a Roman coin worth an insignificant amount * 12:42 Literally, kodrantes, a Roman penny

be earthquakes in place after place and famines. These are a prelude to "labor pains" *that precede the temple's fall.*

9Be careful, because you will be delivered to trial and beaten in the places of worship. Kings and governors will stand in judgment over you as you speak in My name. 10The good news *of the coming kingdom of God* must be delivered first in every land and every language. 11When people bring you up on charges and it is your time to defend yourself, don't worry about what message you'll deliver. Whatever comes to your mind, speak it, because the Holy Spirit will inspire it.

12*But it will get worse.* Brothers will betray each other to death, and fathers will betray their children. Children will turn against their parents and cause them to be executed. 13Everyone will hate you because of your allegiance to Me. But if you're faithful until the end, you will be rescued.

14You will see that which desecrates our most holy place* [described by Daniel the prophet]* out of place.

Let the one who reads *and hears* understand.

Jesus: On the day you see it, whoever is in Judea should flee for the mountains. 15The person on the rooftop shouldn't reenter the house to get anything, 16and the person working in the field shouldn't turn back to grab his coat. 17It will be horrible for women who are pregnant or who are nursing their children when those days come. 18And pray that you don't have to run for your lives in the winter. 19When those days come, there will be suffering like nobody has seen from the beginning of the world that God created until now, and it never will be like this again. 20And if the Lord didn't shorten those days for the sake of the ones He has chosen, then nobody would survive them.

21If anyone tells you in those days, "Look, there is the Anointed One!" or "Hey, that must be Him!" don't believe them. 22False liberators and prophets will pop up *like weeds,* and they will work signs and perform miracles that would entice even God's chosen people, if that were possible. 23So be alert, and remember how I have warned you.

24-25*As Isaiah said* in the days after that great suffering,

The sun will refuse to shine,
and the moon will hold back its light.
The stars in heaven will fall,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*

26Then you will see *(as Daniel predicted)* "the Son of Man coming in the clouds,"* *clothed* in power and majesty. 27And He will send out His heavenly messengers and gather together to Himself those He has chosen from the four corners of the world, from every direction and every land.

► The disciples can't help but notice that something is in the air during this week between His entry into Jerusalem and His crucifixion. Surely the moment when Jesus is to reveal Himself as the Anointed can't be far off. By repeatedly calling Himself the Son of Man, Jesus has told people His kingdom will be divinely instituted like the one described in Daniel 7. They are also thinking of promises about the coming Anointed One. But for Jesus, everything now is connected to His imminent death and resurrection. Even as He predicts the temple's fall—an event that will occur about 40 years later—and speaks of His second coming, He is still thinking about His death. After all, resurrection can't happen without death. And the old world must die before the world is made new.

Jesus: 28Learn this lesson from the fig tree: When its branch is new and tender and begins to put forth leaves, you know that summer must be near. 29In the same way, when you see *and hear* the things I've described to you taking place, you'll know the time is drawing near. 30It's true—this generation will not pass away before all these things have happened. 31Heaven and earth may pass

* 13:14 Literally abomination of desolation, Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 * 13:14 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.
* 13:24-25 Isaiah 13:10; 34:4 * 13:26 Daniel 7:13

away, but these words of Mine will never pass away.

32 *Take heed:* no one knows the day or hour when the end is coming. The messengers in heaven don't know, nor does the Son. Only the Father knows.

33 So be alert. Watch for it [and pray,]* for you never know when that time might approach.

34 This situation is like a man who went on a journey; when he departed, he left his servants in charge of the house. Each of them had his own job to do; and the man left the porter to stand at the door, watching. 35 So stay awake, because no one knows when the master of the house is coming back. It could be in the evening or at midnight or when the rooster crows or in the morning. 36 *Stay awake;* be alert so that when he suddenly returns, the master won't find you sleeping.

37 The teaching I am giving *the four of* you now is for everyone *who will follow Me*: stay awake, *and keep your eyes open.*

► Later Christians will try to use this chapter to predict exactly when Jesus will come and how the world will end. But to do that is to do exactly the opposite of what Jesus intends as He speaks these words. He makes it very clear that He doesn't want anyone to use this description of signs to predict an exact time and date for His coming; even He Himself doesn't know that time and date, and no one else needs to know either. Instead, the purpose is to warn them to stay ready and alert.

14 The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two days away. *The Jewish leaders*—the chief priests and the scribes—gathered to discuss how they might secretly arrest Jesus and kill Him.

Jewish Leaders: 2 We can't do it during the festivals. It might create an uproar.

3 While Jesus was eating dinner in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came into the house carrying an alabaster flask filled with a precious, sweet-smelling ointment made from spikenard. She came to Jesus, broke the jar, and gently poured out the perfume onto His head.

4 Some of those around the table were troubled by this and grumbled to each other.

Dinner Guests: Why did she waste this precious ointment? 5 We could have sold this ointment for almost a year's wages,* and the money could have gone to the poor!

Their *private concerns* turned to public criticism against her.

Jesus: 6 Leave her alone. Why are you attacking her? She has done a good thing. 7 The poor will always be with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you want. But I won't always be with you. 8 She has done what she could for Me—she has come to anoint My body and prepare it for burial. 9 Believe Me when I tell you that this act of hers will be told in her honor as long as there are people who tell the good news.

► The disciples can't see any value in pouring so much perfume on Jesus. It is obviously a waste. The woman is demonstrating her love for Him with an abandon and an emotional commitment that few people have ever shown, and He appreciates her love and her faith. To Him, it is more than a gesture; it is a practical preparation for His imminent death and burial. No one else there can see what use her action is; but to Jesus, it is incredibly precious—so much so that He promises to make sure her action is never forgotten.

10 It was after this that Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to meet the chief priests with the intention of betraying Jesus to them. 11 When they heard what he proposed, they were delighted and promised him money. So from that time on, Judas *thought and waited and* sought an opportunity to betray Jesus.

12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the customary day

* 13:33 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 14:5 Literally, more than 300 denarii, Roman coins

when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, His disciples wondered *where they would celebrate the feast.*

Disciples: Where do You want us to go and make preparations for You to eat the Passover meal?

13So *again* He sent two of His disciples ahead and told them to watch for a man carrying a jar of water.

Jesus: Follow that man; 14and wherever he goes in, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, 'Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with My disciples?'" 15He will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished and ready. Make our preparations there.

16So the two left and went into the city. All was as Jesus had told them, and they prepared the meal in the upper room. 17That evening Jesus and the twelve arrived *and went into the upper room*; 18and each reclined around the table, *leaning upon an elbow* as he ate.

Jesus: I tell you in absolute sincerity, one of you eating with Me tonight is going to betray Me.

19The twelve were upset. *They looked around at each other.*

Disciples *(one by one)*: Lord, it's not I, is it?

Jesus: 20It is one of you, the twelve—one of you who is dipping your bread in the same dish that I am.

21The Son of Man goes *to His fate.* That has already been predicted in the Scriptures. But still, it will be terrible for the one who betrays Him. It would have been better for him if he had never been born.

22As they ate, Jesus took bread, offered a blessing, and broke it. He handed the pieces to His disciples.

Jesus: Take this [and eat it].* This is My body.

23He took a cup *of wine*; and when He had given thanks *for it*, He passed it to them, and they all drank from it.

Jesus: 24This is My blood, a covenant* poured out on behalf of many. 25Truly I will never taste the fruit of the vine again until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

► This moment has been commemorated for two thousand years. Exactly what Jesus meant by calling the bread and wine His body and blood has been debated for centuries. By eating the bread and drinking the wine, believers participate not only in this supper but also in His death and resurrection because the bread is torn and the wine is poured, just as His body was torn and His blood poured out.

Just as Jesus' physical body housed the Spirit of God, the physicality of the bread and wine has a spiritual significance. Otherwise, we wouldn't need to eat the bread and drink the wine to celebrate this moment—it would be enough for us to read the story and remember what happened. But we, too, are physical as well as spiritual; and our physical actions can have spiritual importance.

26*After the meal,* they sang a psalm and went out *of the city* to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus: 27All of you will desert Me tonight. It was written *by Zechariah*,

> I will strike the shepherd,
> and the sheep will scatter.*

28But when I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Peter *(protesting)*: 29It doesn't matter who else turns his back on You. I will never desert You.

Jesus: 30Peter, mark My words. This very night before the cock crows twice, you will have denied Me three times.

Peter *(insisting)*: 31*No, Teacher.* Even if it means that I have to die with You, I'll never deny You.

All the other disciples said similar things.

32They came *at length* to a garden called Gethsemane.

* 14:22 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 14:24 Some manuscripts read "the new covenant." * 14:27 Zechariah 13:7

Jesus: Stay here. I'm going *a little farther* to pray *and to think.*

33He took Peter, James, and John with Him; *and as they left the larger group behind,* He became distressed and filled with sorrow.

Jesus: 34My heart is so heavy; I feel as if I could die. Wait here for Me, and *stay awake to* keep watch.

35He walked on a little farther. Then He threw Himself on the ground and prayed for deliverance from what was about to come.

Jesus: 36Abba, Father, I know that anything is possible for You. Please take this cup away so I don't have to drink from it. But whatever happens, let Your will be done—not Mine.

37He got up, went back *to the three,* and found them sleeping.

Jesus *(waking Peter)***:** Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn't you wait with Me for just an hour? 38Stay awake, and pray that you aren't led into a trial of your own. *It's true*—even when the spirit is willing, the body can betray it.

39He went away again, and prayed again the same prayer as before—*pleading with God but surrendering to His will.*

40He came back and found the three asleep; *and when He woke them,* they didn't know what to say to Him.

41After He had gone away and prayed for a third time, *He returned to find them slumbering.*

Jesus: Again? Still sleeping and getting a good rest? Well, that's enough sleep. The time has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42Get up now, and let's go. The one who is going to betray Me is close by.

► In the moments before Jesus' death, He really knows what it feels like to be human and afraid. Jesus knows exactly what is about to happen to Him and exactly how bad it will be. Now that the time has come, He feels all the natural human emotions.

Most amazing of all is the prayer Jesus says in that moment: "Please take this cup away so I don't have to drink from it." Even though He divinely knows what is going to happen—what must happen—He still asks for a reprieve. At the same time, He submits His human desires and will to the plan of His Father: in order to experience fully what it means to be human, He has to go through even this—denying Himself and what He wants—to face certain torture and death.

43Before He had finished talking, Judas (one of the twelve) approached with a large group of people—agents of the chief priests, scribes, and elders in Jerusalem armed with swords and clubs.

44The signal they had arranged *was a kiss.* "Watch to see whom I kiss; He's the One," Judas had told them. "Arrest Him, and take Him into secure custody."

45As soon as they arrived, Judas stepped forward.

Judas *(kissing Jesus)***:** My Teacher.*

46*Immediately* the soldiers grabbed Jesus and took Him into custody.

47Now one *of the disciples* standing close by drew his sword and swung, cutting off the ear of a slave of *Caiaphas,* the high priest.

Jesus *(calling out)***:** 48Am I a thief or a bandit that you have to come armed with swords and clubs to capture Me? 49I sat teaching in the temple every day with you. You could have taken Me at any time, but you never did. Let the Scriptures be fulfilled.

50*When they saw the armed crowd take Jesus into custody,* the disciples fled. 51One of those following Jesus was a young man who was wearing nothing but a linen cloth. When people from the mob grabbed for him, 52*he wriggled out of their grasp,* left them holding the cloth, and ran naked *into the night.*

53They led Jesus off to see the high priest, *who had gathered a council of religious and civic leaders,* scribes, chief priests, and elders *to hear the evidence and render some decision regarding Jesus.* 54Peter followed, at a safe distance, all the way into the courtyard of the high priest, and he sat

* 14:45 Literally, Rabbi

down with the guards to warm himself at their fire. *He hoped no one would notice.*

55The chief priests and other religious leaders called for witnesses against Jesus so they could execute Him, but things didn't turn out the way they had planned. 56There were plenty of people willing to get up and accuse Jesus falsely, *distorting what Jesus had said or done*; but their testimonies disagreed with each other, *and the leaders were left with nothing.* 57Some gave the following distorted testimony:

Witnesses: 58We heard Him say, "I will destroy this temple that has been made by human hands, and in three days, I will build another that is not made by human hands."

59But even here the witnesses could not agree on exactly what He had said.

60The high priest stood up and turned to Jesus.

High Priest: Do You have anything to say *in Your own defense*? What do You think of what all these people have said about You?

61But Jesus *held His peace and* didn't say a word.

► Jesus, God's Anointed, the Liberating King, has come not as a conquering king but as a sacrificial lamb who will die without defending Himself.

He is accused of setting Himself in the place of God, but He is innocent of that accusation because He is God. He does not defend Himself because His death protects from punishment the sinners who have made themselves like God ever since Adam ate the fruit in the garden.

High Priest: Are You God's Anointed, *the Liberating King,* the Son of the Blessed One?

Jesus: 62I am. *One day* you will see the Son of Man "sitting at His right hand, *in the place of honor and* power,"* and "coming in the clouds of heaven."*

63Then the high priest tore his clothes.

High Priest *(to the council)*: What else do we need to hear? 64You have heard the blasphemy from His own lips. What do you have to say about that?

The verdict was unanimous—Jesus was guilty of a capital crime.

65*So the people began to humiliate Him.* Some even spat upon Him. Then He was blindfolded, and they slapped and punched Him.

People: *Come on, Prophet,* prophesy for us! *Tell us who just hit You.*

Then the guards took Him, beating Him as they did so.

66-67While Peter was waiting by the fire outside, one of the servant girls of the high priest saw him.

Servant Girl: You were one of those men with Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter: 68Woman, I don't know what you're talking about.

He left the fire, and as he went out into the gateway, [a cock crowed.]*

69The servant girl saw him again.

Servant Girl: Hey, this is one of them—*one of those who followed Jesus.*

Peter: 70No, I'm not one of them.

A little later, some of the other bystanders turned to Peter.

Bystander: Surely you're one of them. You're a Galilean. [We can tell by your accent.]*

71And then he swore an oath that if he wasn't telling the truth that he would be cursed.

Peter: *Listen,* I don't even know the man you're talking about.

72And as he said this, a cock crowed [a second time];* and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: "Before the cock crows [twice],* you will have denied Me three times."

He began to weep.

15 When morning came, the chief priests met in council with all the Jewish leaders. They bound Jesus, led Him away, and turned Him over to *the Roman governor,* Pilate.

* 14:62 Psalm 110:1 * 14:62 Daniel 7:13 * 14:68 Some early manuscripts omit this portion. * 14:70 Some early manuscripts omit this portion. * 14:72 Some early manuscripts omit this portion. * 14:72 Some early manuscripts omit "twice."

Pilate *(after hearing them)*: [2]Are You the King of the Jews?

Jesus: You have said so.

[3]The chief priests went on to accuse Jesus of many things, but Jesus simply stood quietly.

Pilate: [4]Do You have anything to say? How do You respond to all these charges that have been made against You?

[5]But Jesus said nothing more, and Pilate was astonished.

[6]Now it was his custom at that feast that Pilate should release one prisoner from custody, whomever the people most desired. [7]There was one rebel from those imprisoned for insurrection *against the Roman occupation*. He had committed murder during an uprising. His name was Barabbas. [8]A crowd had gathered *in front of Pilate's judgment seat* to request that Pilate follow his usual custom.

[9]Pilate turned to them.

Pilate: Why don't I release to you the King of the Jews?

[10]He knew that the chief priests had delivered Jesus because they were threatened by Him*, not because Jesus was a criminal.*

[11]But priests moved among the crowd and persuaded them to call for Barabbas instead.

Pilate: [12]Then what do you want me to do with the King of the Jews?

Crowd: [13]Crucify Him, *crucify Him!*

[14]But now he called to them.

Pilate: Why? What has He done to deserve such a sentence?

Crowd *(crying all the louder)*: Crucify Him, *crucify Him*!

► Barabbas is an active and a militant Jewish leader. In one sense, the choice that the crowd is offered—to have either Jesus or Barabbas released—can be seen as a choice between two types of revolutions. Do they want a revolution of power, a revolution that is easily visible, a revolution that will conquer their enemies in a way they can understand? Or do they want a revolution of healing, a revolution of love, a revolution that will bring the kingdom of God to earth in a mystical, transcendental way? It's no wonder they make the choice they do. Who wants a gentle revolution in a time of war?

[15]When Pilate saw that he could not persuade the crowd to change its mind, he released Barabbas to them and had Jesus publicly whipped, *which was the normal prelude to crucifixion.* Then he had Jesus led away to be crucified. [16]The soldiers took Him into the headquarters of the governor; and the rest of the soldiers in the detachment gathered there*, hundreds of them.* [17]They put a purple robe on Him and made a crown of thorns that they forced onto His head, [18]and they began to cry out in mock salute.

Soldiers: Hail to the King of the Jews!

[19]For a long while they beat Him on the head with a reed, spat upon Him, and knelt down *as if to honor Him.* [20]When they had finished mocking Him, they stripped off His purple robe and put His own clothes back on Him. Then they took Him away to be executed.

[21]Along the way, they met a man from Cyrene, Simon (the father of Rufus and Alexander), who was coming in from the fields; and they ordered him to carry *the heavy crossbar of* the cross. [22]And so they came at last to *the execution site,* a hill called Golgotha, which means the "Place of a Skull."

[23]The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh *to dull His pain,* but He refused it. [24]And so they crucified Him, divided up His clothes, and cast lots *(an ancient equivalent of rolling dice)* to see who would keep the clothes *they had stripped from Him.*

[25]His crucifixion began about nine o'clock in the morning. [26]Over His head hung a sign that indicated the charge for which He was being crucified. It read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." [27]On either side of Him were two insurgents *who also had received the death penalty*. [[28]And the Hebrew Scripture was completed that

said, "He was considered *just another* criminal."]*

29Those passing by on their way into or out of Jerusalem insulted and ridiculed Him.

Some in the Crowd: So You're the One who was going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? 30*Well, if You're so powerful,* then why don't You rescue Yourself? Come on down from the cross!

Chief Priests and Scribes *(mocking Jesus among themselves)*: 31He rescued others, but He can't rescue Himself. 32Let the Anointed—the King of Israel—come down from the cross now, and we will see it and believe.

Even the insurgents who were being crucified next to Him taunted Him and reviled Him.

33At noon, the day suddenly darkened for three hours across the entire land. 34Sometime around three o'clock Jesus called out in a loud voice.

Jesus: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

Jesus was speaking, as in the psalms, "My God, My God, why have You turned Your back on Me?"*

35Some of those standing nearby misunderstood Him.

Bystanders: Hey, He's calling for Elijah.

36One of them filled a sponge with wine that had turned to vinegar and lifted it to Jesus' lips on a stick so He could drink.

Bystander: Let's see if Elijah will come to take Him down.

37Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and He took His last breath.

38*At that moment,* the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

► The tearing of the temple veil is a picture of what Jesus' death has accomplished. The temple sanctuary is divided into two sections: the holy place and the most holy place. The most holy place is a chamber so sanctified that only the high priest can enter—and then only once a year. There God's presence is manifest on earth.

A long curtain divides the two areas, and at the moment of Jesus' death it is torn in two. The veil that serves as a means to protect everyone but the high priest from the power of God's presence is no longer needed because Jesus, on account of His sacrificial death, gives everyone access to God. Only God Himself can rip the curtain in two "from top to bottom," opening the way for people to come into His presence.

39The Roman Centurion, *the soldier in charge of the executions,* stood in front of Jesus, [heard His words,]* and saw the manner of His death.

Centurion: Surely this man was the Son of God!

40Off in the distance, *away from the crowds,* stood some women *who knew and had followed Jesus,* including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of the younger James, Joses, and Salome. 41These were women who used to care for Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem joined them.

42Evening came. The crucifixion had taken place on preparation day, Friday, before the Jewish Sabbath began *at sundown.* 43Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling council who was also *a believer anxiously* waiting for the kingdom of God, went to Pilate and boldly asked for the body of Jesus.

44Pilate could not believe Jesus was already dead, so he sent for the Centurion, 45who confirmed it. Then Pilate gave Joseph permission to take the body.

46Joseph had the body wrapped in a linen burial cloth he had purchased and laid Him in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. Then he had a stone rolled over the opening *to seal it.* 47Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching as the body was interred.

* 15:28 Some manuscripts omit verse 28, a quote from Isaiah 53:12. * 15:34 Psalm 22:1 * 15:39 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

16 [1-2]At the rising of the sun, after the Sabbath on the first day of the week, the two Marys and Salome brought sweet-smelling spices they had purchased to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. [3]Along the way, they wondered to themselves how they would roll the heavy stone away from the opening. [4]But when they arrived, the stone was already rolled away in spite of its weight and size.

[5]Stepping through the opening, they were startled to see a young man in a white robe seated inside and to the right.

Man in White: [6]Don't be afraid. You came seeking Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was crucified. He is gone. He has risen. See the place where His body was laid. [7]Go back, and tell Peter and His disciples that He goes before you into Galilee, just as He said. You will see Him there *when you arrive.*

[8]The women went out quickly; and when they were outside the tomb, they ran away trembling and astonished. Along their way, they didn't stop to say anything to anyone because they were too afraid.

► Mark finishes his Gospel in the same way he begins it—quickly, without commentary or explanation. He also finishes it in a humble way: it is the lowly women who take center stage in this greatest miracle of Jesus. The heavenly messenger sends the women with a commission to tell the disciples what has happened, making them the first preachers of the resurrection.

[[9]After He rose from the dead early on Sunday,* Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, a woman out of whom He had cast seven demons. [10]She brought this news back to all those who had followed Him and were still mourning and weeping, [11]but they refused to believe she had seen Jesus alive.

[12]After that, Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them as they walked through the countryside, [13]and again the others did not believe it.

[14]The eleven did not believe until Jesus appeared to them all as they sat at dinner. He rebuked them for their hard hearts—for their lack of faith—because they had failed to believe those witnesses who had seen Him after He had risen.

Jesus: [15]Go out into the world and share the good news with all of creation. [16]Anyone who believes this good news and is ceremonially washed* will be rescued, but anyone who does not believe it will be condemned. [17]And these signs will follow those who believe: they will be able to cast out demons in My name, speak with new tongues, [18]take up serpents, drink poison without being harmed, and lay their hands on the sick to heal them.

[19]After the Lord Jesus had charged the disciples in this way, He was taken up into heaven and seated at the right hand of God. [20]The disciples went out proclaiming the good news; and the risen Lord continued working through them, confirming every word they spoke with the signs He performed through them.]*

[And the women did everything they had been told to do, speaking to Peter and the other disciples. Later Jesus Himself commissioned the disciples to take this sacred and eternal message of salvation far to the East and the West.]*

► The remaining eleven disciples take this command as their life's mission. According to tradition, all but one of them (John) will be killed for their refusals to stop proclaiming the truth that Jesus is the Anointed One who has been crucified and who has arisen from the dead. They dedicate their lives—and their deaths—to the proclamation of this reality. If they are not absolutely certain of the truth of Jesus' resurrection, then why dedicate their lives to announcing it to the world?

* 16:9 Literally, "the first day of the week." The new creation was underway. * 16:16 Literally, immersed, to show repentance
* 16:9-20 are not contained in the earliest manuscripts. However, many manuscripts do contain these verses. It is likely the original Gospel ended in 16:8 or that the original ending was lost. * 16:20 One manuscript concludes with these bracketed words.

LUKE

Carefully researched account of God's Anointed

By Luke, the physician

This Third Gospel account is the work of a physician named Luke. Unlike Matthew and John, Luke is not one of the twelve or an eyewitness to any of the life of Jesus. However, he is a close friend and traveling companion of the most influential missionary of the early church—Paul, the emissary.

Luke writes with a highly advanced literary style; his is the only Gospel that begins with a formal, literary introduction, a feature characteristic of many books written in his day. Luke clearly states the method and purpose for writing his Gospel. He has researched the life of Jesus thoroughly in order to correct the misinformation being spread about Him and to provide the most historically accurate report of Jesus' ministry possible. He wants to assure believers that the Christian faith is rooted in fact, not fiction.

Luke addresses his Gospel to Theophilus, a Roman official; but it's clear that he also writes with a broader audience in mind. In fact, the name "Theophilus" means "one who loves God," suggesting his account is for anyone who loves God. Luke himself may be an outsider to the Jewish faith. If so, he is the only Gentile author in the New Testament. Luke traces Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam (rather than starting with Abraham, as Matthew does) in order to emphasize that Jesus is the Savior of all humanity, not just the Jewish Messiah. Connecting Jesus with Adam also emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, which is repeatedly stressed in this Gospel. Luke, of course, does not deny Jesus' divinity; he just shows how Jesus exemplifies the perfect human being. Luke also focuses on the compassion of Jesus toward the disadvantaged members of society, including women, outcasts, and the poor. The Gospel according to Luke turns the world upside down and exalts the humble while humbling the exalted.

Luke's story of Jesus is the most comprehensive of the Gospels. It begins with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. It continues through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. But Luke's story does not end there. After showing his readers how Jesus welcomes all people to follow Him, Luke gives the next chapter in his account of this movement Jesus began—the book known as the Acts of the Apostles. There he describes how the followers of Jesus moved beyond Jerusalem and the Jews and took the message of Jesus to the outsider nations across the known world.

In the time of Jesus, Jewish life is centered in the temple in Jerusalem. Priests are responsible for the temple's activities—which include receiving religious pilgrims and their sacrifices (cattle, sheep, goats, and doves). Animal sacrifices may sound strange to a modern society, but in the ancient world, they are quite common. The slaughter of animals is a daily experience; it is part of any meal that includes meat. So this meal brings together the Jewish family from near and far, seeking to affirm their connections to the one true and living God. Their gift of animals is their contribution to the meal. (The priests, by the way, are authorized to use the meat for the sustenance of their families.)

The presentation of the blood and meat of these sacrifices is accompanied by a number of prescribed rituals, performed by priests wearing prescribed ornamental clothing, according to a prescribed schedule. As the story continues, these solemn rituals are interrupted in an unprecedented way.

► Luke travels widely with the Lord's emissary, Paul. Thus, he is a sort of cosmopolitan person, multicultural in his sensitivities, understanding both Jewish culture and the broader Greco-Roman culture of the Roman Empire. Moreover, as a physician he is more educated than the average person of his day and has an impressive ability to relate to common people. Luke is especially skilled as a storyteller, so he isn't presenting a theological treatise (as good and important as theological treatises may be); he's telling the story of Jesus, gathered from many eyewitnesses. Based on the name of the intended audience of his book (Theophilus—literally, "God-lover," translated here as "those who love God"), presumably he wants to help people who love God to love Him even more by knowing what He has done through Jesus.

1 1-3For those who love God, several other people have already written accounts of what God has been bringing to completion among us, using the reports of the original eyewitnesses, those who were there from the start to witness the fulfillment of prophecy. Like those other servants who have recorded the messages, I present to you my carefully researched, orderly account of these new teachings. 4I want you to know that you can fully rely on the things you have been taught *about Jesus, God's Anointed One.*

5*To understand the life of Jesus, I must first give you some background history, events that occurred when* Herod ruled Judea *for the Roman Empire.* Zacharias was serving as a priest *in the temple in Jerusalem* those days as his fathers had before him. He was a member of the priestly division of Abijah *(a grandson of Aaron who innovated temple practices),* and his wife, Elizabeth, was of the priestly lineage of Aaron, *Moses' brother.* 6They were good and just people in God's sight, walking with integrity in the Lord's ways and laws. 7Yet they had this sadness. Due to Elizabeth's infertility, they were childless, and at this time, they were both quite old—*well past normal childbearing years.*

8One day Zacharias was chosen to perform his priestly duties in God's presence, according to the temple's normal schedule and routine. 9He had been selected from all the priests by the customary procedure of casting lots *for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity* to enter the sacred precincts of the temple. There he burned sweet incense, 10while outside a large crowd of people prayed. 11*Suddenly Zacharias realized he was not alone:* a messenger of the Lord was there with him. The messenger stood just to the right of the altar of incense. 12Zacharias was shocked and afraid, 13but the messenger reassured him.

Messenger: Zacharias, calm down! Don't be afraid!

► Zacharias is a priest working in the temple, but priests don't normally hear from God. Those who hear from God are called prophets, not priests. One becomes a priest by being born in a

priestly family line. Prophets, on the other hand, arise unpredictably and have no special credentials except the message they carry. So Zacharias has no reason to believe his duties will be interrupted in this way. Often in the biblical story, when people receive a message from God—after getting over the initial shock—they start asking questions. They push back; they doubt.

Messenger: Zacharias, your prayers have been heard. Your wife is going to have a son, and you will name him John. 14He will bring you great joy and happiness—and many will share your joy at John's birth.

15This son of yours will be a great man in God's sight. He will not drink alcohol in any form;* *instead of alcoholic spirits*, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he is in his mother's womb. 16*Here is his mission:* he will turn many of the children of Israel around to follow the path to the Lord their God. 17Do you remember the prophecy about someone to come in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah; someone who will turn the hearts of the parents back to their children;* someone who will turn the hearts of the disobedient to the mind-set of the just and good? Your son is the one who will fulfill this prophecy: he will be the Lord's forerunner, the one who will prepare the people and make them ready for God.

Zacharias: 18How can I be sure of what you're telling me? I am an old man, and my wife is far past the normal age for women to bear children. *This is hard to believe!*

Messenger *(sternly)*: 19I am Gabriel, the messenger who inhabits God's presence. I was sent here to talk with you and bring you this good news. 20Because you didn't believe my message, you will not be able to talk—not another word—until you experience the fulfillment of my words.

21Meanwhile the crowd at the temple wondered why Zacharias hadn't come out of the sanctuary yet. It wasn't normal for the priest to be delayed so long. 22When at last he came out, *he* was making signs with his hands to give the blessing, but he couldn't speak. They realized he had seen some sort of vision. 23When his time on duty at the temple came to an end, he went back home to his wife. 24Shortly after his return, Elizabeth became pregnant. She avoided public contact for the next five months.

Elizabeth: 25I have lived with the disgrace of being barren for all these years. Now God has looked on me with favor. When I go out in public *with my baby*, I will not be disgraced any longer.

26Six months later in Nazareth, a city in *the rural province of* Galilee, the heavenly messenger Gabriel made another appearance. This time the messenger was sent by God 27to meet with a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David himself. 28The messenger entered her home.

Messenger: Greetings! You are favored, and the Lord is with you! [Among all women on the earth, you have been blessed.]*

29The heavenly messenger's words baffled Mary, and she wondered what type of greeting this was.

Messenger: 30Mary, don't be afraid. You have found favor with God. 31Listen, you are going to become pregnant. You will have a son, and you must name Him "Savior," *or* Jesus.* 32Jesus will become the greatest among men. He will be known as the Son of the Highest God. God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, 33and He will reign over the covenant family of Jacob forever.

Mary: 34But I have never been with a man. How can this be possible?

Messenger: 35The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Most High will overshadow you. That's why this holy child will be known, *as not just your son, but also* as the Son of God. 36*It sounds impossible,* but listen—you know your relative Elizabeth has been unable to bear children and is now far too old to be a mother. Yet she has become pregnant, *as*

* 1:15 Numbers 6:3; Leviticus 10:9 * 1:17 Malachi 4:5-6 * 1:28 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 1:31 Through the naming of Jesus, God is speaking prophetically about the role Jesus will play in our salvation.

God willed it. Yes, in three months, she will have a son. 37So the impossible is possible with God.

Mary *(deciding in her heart)*: 38Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be done to me.

Luke is very interested in the ways that disadvantaged people of his day respond to God. Already there is a fascinating interplay between Zacharias's response to God and Mary's.

And the heavenly messenger was gone. 39Mary immediately got up and hurried to the hill country, in the province of Judah, 40-41where her cousins Zacharias and Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered their home and greeted Elizabeth, who felt her baby leap in her womb, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth *(shouting)*: 42You are blessed, *Mary*, blessed among all women, and the child you bear is blessed! 43And blessed I am as well, that the mother of my Lord has come to me! 44As soon as I heard your voice greet me, my baby leaped for joy within me. 45How fortunate you are, Mary, for you believed that what the Lord told you would be fulfilled.

► Mary is deeply moved by these amazing encounters—first with the messenger and then with her cousin, Elizabeth. Mary's response can't be contained in normal prose; her noble soul overflows in poetry. And this poetry isn't simply religious; it has powerful social and political overtones. It speaks of a great reversal—what might be called a social, economic, and political revolution. To people in Mary's day, there is little question as to what she is talking about. The Jewish people are oppressed by the Roman Empire, and to speak of a King who will demote the powerful and rich and elevate the poor and humble means one thing: God is moving toward setting them free! Soon Zacharias will overflow in poetry of his own.

Mary: 46My soul lifts up the Lord!
47My spirit celebrates God, my Liberator!
48For though I'm God's humble servant,
God has noticed me.
Now and forever,
I will be considered blessed by all generations.
49For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
holy is God's name!
50From generation to generation,
God's lovingkindness endures
for those who revere Him.

51God's arm has accomplished mighty deeds.
The proud in mind and heart,
God has sent away in disarray.
52The rulers from their high positions of power,
God has brought down low.
And those who were humble and lowly,
God has elevated with dignity.
53The hungry—God has filled with fine food.
The rich—God has dismissed with nothing in their hands.
54To Israel, God's servant,
God has given help,
55As promised to our ancestors,
remembering Abraham and his descendants in mercy forever.

56Mary stayed with Elizabeth *in Judea* for the next three months and then returned to her home *in Galilee.*

57When the time was right, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. 58News about the Lord's special kindness to her had spread through her extended family and the community. Everyone shared her joy, *for after all these years of infertility, she had a son!* 59*As was customary,* eight days after the baby's birth the time came for his circumcision *and naming.* Everyone assumed he would be named Zacharias, like his father.

Elizabeth *(disagreeing)*: 60No. We will name him John.

Her Relatives *(protesting)*: 61That name is found nowhere in your family.

62They turned to Zacharias and asked him what he wanted the baby's name to be.

63He motioned for a tablet, and he wrote, "His name is John." Everyone was shocked *by this breach of family custom.* 64*They were even more surprised when,* at that moment, Zacharias was able to talk

again, and he shouted out praises to God.
65A sense of reverence spread through the whole community. In fact, this story was spread throughout the hilly countryside of Judea. 66People were certain that God's hand was on this child, and they wondered what sort of person John would turn out to be when he became a man.

67When Zacharias's voice was restored to him, he sang from the fullness of the Spirit a prophetic blessing.

Zacharias: 68May the Lord God of Israel be
blessed indeed!
For God's intervention has begun,
and He has moved to rescue us, the
people of God.
69And the Lord has raised up a powerful
sign of liberation for us
from among the descendants of
God's servant, *King* David.
70As was prophesied through the mouths
of His holy prophets in ancient
times:
71*God will* liberate us from our enemies
and from the hand of our
oppressors!*

72-74God will show mercy promised to our
ancestors,
upholding the abiding covenant He
made with them,
Remembering the original vow He
swore to Abraham,
from whom we are all descended.
God will rescue us from the grasp of
our enemies
so that we may serve Him without
fear all our days
75In holiness and justice, in the presence
of the Lord.

76And you, my son, will be called the
prophet of the Most High.
For you will be the one to prepare
the way for the Lord*
77So that the Lord's people will receive
knowledge of their freedom
through the forgiveness of their sins.

78All this will flow from the kind and
compassionate mercy of our God.
A new day is dawning:
the Sunrise from the heavens will
break through in our darkness,
79And those who huddle in night,
those who sit in the shadow of
death,
Will be able to rise and walk in the
light,*
guided in the pathway of peace.

80And John grew up and became strong in spirit. He lived in the wilderness, *outside the cities,* until the day came for him to step into the public eye in Israel.

2 Around the time *of Elizabeth's amazing pregnancy and John's birth, the emperor in Rome,* Caesar Augustus, required everyone in the Roman Empire to participate in a massive census—2the first census since Quirinius had become governor of Syria. 3Each person had to go to his or her ancestral city to be counted.

► This political background isn't incidental: it is crucial to the story. Conquering nations in the ancient world work in various ways. Some brutally destroy and plunder the nations they conquer. Some conquer people as slaves or servants. Other empires allow the people to remain in their land and work as before, but with one major change: the conquered people have to pay taxes to their rulers. The purpose of a census like the one Luke describes is to be sure that everyone is appropriately taxed and knows who is in charge.

4-5Mary's fiancé Joseph, from Nazareth in Galilee, had to participate in the census in the same way *everyone else did*. Because he was a descendant of *King* David, his ancestral city was Bethlehem, David's birthplace. Mary, who was now late in her pregnancy *that the messenger Gabriel had predicted*, 6accompanied Joseph. While in Bethlehem, she went into labor 7and gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped the baby in a blanket and laid Him in a feeding trough because the inn had no room for them.

8Nearby, in the fields outside of Bethlehem, a group of shepherds were guarding their flocks *from predators* in the darkness of night. 9Suddenly a messenger of the Lord stood in front of them, and the darkness was replaced by a glorious

* 1:71 Psalm 106:10 * 1:76 Isaiah 40:3 * 1:79 Isaiah 9:2

light—the shining light of God's glory. They were terrified!

Messenger: [10]Don't be afraid! Listen! I bring good news, news of great joy, news that will affect all people everywhere. [11]Today, in the city of David, a Liberator has been born for you! He is the promised Anointed One, the Supreme Authority! [12]You will know you have found Him when you see a baby, wrapped in a blanket, lying in a feeding trough.

[13]At that moment, the first heavenly messenger was joined by thousands of other messengers—a vast heavenly choir. They praised God.

Heavenly Choir: [14]To the highest heights
of the universe, glory to God!
And on earth, peace among all people
who bring pleasure to God!

[15]As soon as the heavenly messengers disappeared into heaven, the shepherds were buzzing with conversation.

Shepherds: Let's rush down to Bethlehem right now! Let's see what's happening! Let's experience what the Lord has told us about!

[16]So they ran into town, and *eventually* they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the feeding trough. After they saw the baby, [17]they spread the story of *what they had experienced and* what had been said to them about this child. [18]Everyone who heard their story couldn't stop thinking about its meaning. [19]Mary, too, pondered all of these events, treasuring each memory in her heart.

[20]The shepherds returned *to their flocks*, praising God for all they had seen and heard, and they glorified God for the way the experience had unfolded just as the heavenly messenger had predicted.

► Here again is Luke's fascination with disadvantaged people. Jesus' first visitors are not ambassadors, dignitaries, or wealthy landowners. The first to pay Him homage are simple shepherds, minimum-wage workers in the ancient agrarian economy. They have little to no status in the world. They are the humble and the poor whom God is now raising up to receive heavenly messages and an audience with the great King. This theme recurs as the story continues.

[21]Eight days after His birth, the baby was circumcised *in keeping with Jewish religious requirements,* and He was named Jesus, the name the messenger had given Him before His conception in Mary's womb. [22]After Mary had observed the ceremonial days of *postpartum* purification required by Mosaic law, she and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. [23]They were fulfilling the Lord's requirement that "every firstborn *Israelite* male will be dedicated to the Eternal One as holy."* [24]They also offered the sacrifice required by the law of the Lord, "two turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

[25]*While fulfilling these sacred obligations at the temple,* they encountered a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was a just and pious man, anticipating the liberation of Israel from her troubles. He was a man in touch with the Holy Spirit. [26]The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Anointed One. [27]The Spirit had led him to the temple that day, and there he saw the child Jesus in the arms of His parents, who were fulfilling their sacred obligations. [28]Simeon took Jesus into his arms and blessed God.

Simeon: [29]Now, Lord *and King,* You can let
me, Your humble servant, die in
peace.
[30]You promised me that I would see with
my own eyes
what I'm seeing now: Your freedom,
[31]Raised up in the presence of all peoples.
[32]He is the light who reveals Your
message to the other nations,
and He is the shining glory of Your
covenant people, Israel.

[33]His father and mother were stunned to hear Simeon say these things. [34]Simeon went on to bless them both, and to Mary in particular he gave predictions.

Simeon: Listen, this child will make many in Israel rise and fall. He will be a significant person whom many will oppose.

* 2:23 Exodus 13:2, 12, 15 * 2:24 Leviticus 5:11; 12:8

35 *In the end,* He will lay bare the secret
thoughts of many hearts. And a sword
will pierce even your own soul, Mary.

36 At that very moment, an elderly woman
named Anna stepped forward. Anna was
a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of
the tribe of Asher. She had been married
for seven years *before her husband died*
37 and a widow to her current age of 84
years. She was *deeply devoted to the Lord,*
constantly in the temple, fasting and pray-
ing. 38 When she approached *Mary, Joseph,*
and Jesus, she began speaking out thanks
to God, and she continued spreading the
word about Jesus to all those who shared
her hope for the rescue of Jerusalem.

39 After fulfilling their sacred duties
according to the law of the Lord, Mary
and Joseph returned *with Jesus* to their
own city of Nazareth in the province of
Galilee. 40 There Jesus grew up, maturing
in physical strength and increasing in wis-
dom, and the grace of God rested on Him.

41 Every year *during Jesus' childhood,*
His parents traveled to Jerusalem for
the Passover celebration. 42 When Jesus
was 12, He made the journey with them.
43 They spent several days there, partici-
pating in the whole celebration. When
His parents left for home, Jesus stayed in
Jerusalem, but Joseph and Mary were not
aware. 44 They assumed Jesus was else-
where in the caravan *that was traveling*
together. After they had already traveled a
full day's journey *toward home,* they began
searching for Him among their friends and
relatives. 45 When no one had seen the boy,
Mary and Joseph rushed back to Jerusa-
lem and searched for Him.

46 After three days of separation, they
finally found Him—sitting among a group
of religious teachers in the temple—asking
them questions, listening to their answers.
47 Everyone was surprised and impressed
that a 12-year-old boy could have such
deep understanding and could answer
questions *with such wisdom.*

48 His parents, of course, had a differ-
ent reaction.

Mary: Son, why have You treated us this
way? Listen, Your father and I have been
sick with worry *for the last three days,*
wondering where You were, looking every-
where for You.

Jesus: 49 Why did you need to look for
Me? Didn't you know that I must be
working for My Father?

► Little is recorded about Jesus' life between His birth and the age of 30. But this one episode tells so much. First, Jesus' family life is a lot like anyone's—full of mishaps and misunderstandings. Second, as Jesus enters young adulthood, He begins manifesting an extraordinary sense of identity. (Remember, a 12-year-old isn't "just a kid" in Israel—he is becoming a man.) He isn't just "Mary's boy" or "Joseph's stepson." He has a direct relationship with God as His Father, and He knows His life will follow a path of working for God.

50 Neither Mary nor Joseph really under-
stood what He meant by this. 51 Jesus went
back to Nazareth with them and was
obedient to them. His mother continued
to store these memories like treasures in
her heart. 52 And Jesus kept on growing—in
wisdom, in physical stature, in favor with
God, and in favor with others.

3 Our story continues 15 years after
Tiberius Caesar had begun his reign
over the empire. Pilate was governor
of Judea, Herod ruled Galilee, his brother
Philip ruled Ituraea and Trachonitis, and
Lysanias ruled Abilene.

► More than any other Gospel writer, Luke wants to situate the story of Jesus in secular history. In particular, he gives details of the emperor, governor, and other client rulers. With a toxic mixture of cruelty and might, these authorities lord their power over the common people. Yet these high and mighty are—as Mary's poem describes—destined to be brought down in the presence of a new kind of king and a new kind of kingdom. Jesus will exercise His authority in a radically different way—not through domination and violence, but through love, healing, compassion, and service.

John's father Zacharias is a priest who serves in Jerusalem at the temple. Among their other duties, priests perform ritual cleansings necessary for Jewish worshipers who become ceremonially unclean—perhaps through contact with outsiders (non-Jewish people), perhaps through contact with blood or a dead body, perhaps through a physical illness. But when John appears on the scene, he hasn't followed in his father's footsteps. He's not fulfilling the role of the priest, but rather of the prophet. He works far outside of Jerusalem, and he baptizes people in the Jordan River, not near the temple. It's as if John is performing a symbolic drama: If you want to be in tune with God, the temple and its normal routines can't help you anymore. Instead of being cleansed there, you should come out to this radical preacher and let him cleanse you in the river. And his message isn't a polite, tame message. It's fiery and intense! God isn't interested in just routine religion. He wants changed lives!

2*In Jerusalem* Annas and Caiaphas were high priests in the temple. And in those days, out in the wilderness, John (son of Zacharias) received a message from God.

3John brought this divine message to all those who came to the Jordan River. He preached that people should be ritually cleansed through baptism as an expression of changed lives for the forgiveness of sins. 4As Isaiah the prophet had said,

A solitary voice is calling:
"Go into the wilderness;
prepare the road for the Eternal One's journey.
In the desert, repair and straighten
every mile of our True God's highway.
5Every low place will be lifted
and every high mountain,
every hill will be humbled;
The crooked road will be straightened out
and rough places ironed out smooth;
6Then the radiant glory of the Eternal One will be revealed.
All flesh together will take it in."*

7In fulfillment of those words, crowds streamed out *from the villages and towns* to be baptized* by John *at the Jordan.*

John the Baptist: You bunch of venomous snakes! Who told you that you could escape God's coming wrath? 8Don't just talk of turning to God; you'd better bear the authentic fruit of a changed life. Don't take pride in your religious heritage, saying, "We have Abraham for our father!" Listen—God could turn these rocks into children of Abraham!

9*God wants you to bear fruit!* If you don't produce good fruit, then you'll be chopped down like a fruitless tree and made into firewood. God's ax is taking aim and ready to swing!

People: 10What shall we do *to perform works from changed lives*?

John the Baptist: 11The person who has two shirts must share with the person who has none. And the person with food must share with the one in need.

12Some tax collectors were among those in the crowd seeking baptism.*

Tax Collectors: Teacher, what kind of fruit is God looking for from us?

John the Baptist: 13Stop overcharging people. Only collect what you must turn over to the Romans.

Soldiers: 14What about us? What should we do *to show true change*?

John the Baptist: Don't extort money from people by throwing around your power or making false accusations, and be content with your pay.

15John's bold message seized public attention, and many began wondering if John might himself be the Anointed One *promised by God.*

John the Baptist: 16I baptize* you with water, but One is coming—One far more powerful than I, One whose sandals I am not worthy to untie—who will baptize*

* 3:4-6 Isaiah 40:3-5 * 3:7 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 3:12 Literally, immersion, an act to show repentance * 3:16 Literally, immerse, to show repentance

you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
17He is coming *like a farmer at harvest-time*, tools in hand to separate the wheat from the chaff. He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire, and He will gather the genuine wheat into His barn.

18He preached with many other provocative figures of speech and so conveyed God's message to the people—*the time had come to rethink everything.* 19*But John's public preaching ended when* he confronted Herod, the ruler of Galilee, for his many corrupt deeds, including *taking* Herodias, the ruler's sister-in-law, *as his own wife.* 20Herod responded by throwing John into prison.

21*But before John's imprisonment, when he was still preaching and* ritually cleansing through baptism* the people in the Jordan River, Jesus also came to him to be baptized. As Jesus prayed, the heavens opened, 22and the Holy Spirit came upon Him in a physical manifestation that resembled a dove. A voice echoed out from heaven.

Voice from Heaven: You are My Son,*
the Son I love, and in You I take great pleasure.

► What does it mean for Jesus to be baptized by John? If John's baptism symbolizes a rejection of the religious establishment centered in the temple in Jerusalem, then Jesus' baptism by John symbolizes that He is aligned with this radical preacher. Jesus isn't simply coming to strengthen or even renew the centers of power. Instead, He is joining John at the margins to be part of something wild and new that God is doing. And the vivid manifestation of God's pleasure—the dove-like appearance and the voice from heaven—suggests that even though Jesus is in a sense aligning Himself with John, John is simply the opening act and Jesus is the main attraction. The choreography between John's work and Jesus' work continues, but from this point on, Jesus is in the center of the story.

23At this, the launch of Jesus' ministry, Jesus was about 30 years old.

He was assumed to be the son of Joseph, the son of Eli, 24the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, 25the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Hesli, the son of Naggai, 26the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, 27the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, 29the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, 31the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, 33the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah, 36the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, 38the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

► While genealogies may seem tedious, for people in many cultures (including Luke's), genealogies are important and meaningful because they give a sense of identity and history. Luke places Jesus in the mainstream of biblical history, connected to King David, Abraham, Noah, and Adam. By connecting Jesus with Adam, and ultimately with God, Luke shows how Jesus is connected to and relevant for all people, and he may also be suggesting that in Jesus God is launching a new humanity, with Jesus as the new Adam. Unlike the first Adam, though, Jesus will be

* 3:21 Literally, immersing, to show repentance * 3:22 Psalm 2:7

Luke's audience doesn't divide the world into sacred vs. secular or religious vs. political. For them, life is integrated. And for them, these "religious" words from Isaiah have a powerful and "political" meaning: because they see themselves as oppressed by the Roman occupation, Jesus' words suggest that His "good news" describes a powerful change about to come—a change that will rescue the people from their oppression. His fellow Jews have long been waiting for a savior to free them from Roman oppression. Jesus tells them their hopes are about to be fulfilled. But then, just as people speak well of Jesus, He lets them know their expectations aren't in line with God's plans. He tells them not to expect God to fit into their boxes and suggests the unthinkable: that God cares for the Gentiles, the very people who are oppressing them! They aren't too pleased by this.

completely faithful to God, as the next episode makes clear. Perhaps echoing Adam and Eve being tempted by the serpent in the garden (Genesis 3:1-7), Luke moves from the stories of Jesus' beginnings to His temptation.

4 When Jesus returned from the Jordan River, He was full of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit led Him away *from the cities and towns* and out into the desert.

[2]For 40 days, the Spirit led Him from place to place in the desert, and while there, the devil tempted Jesus. Jesus was fasting, eating nothing during this time, and at the end, He was terribly hungry. [3]At that point, the devil came to Him.

Devil: Since You're the Son of God, You don't need to be hungry. Just tell this stone to transform itself into bread.

Jesus: [4]It is written *in the Hebrew Scriptures,* "People need more than bread to live."*

[5]Then the devil gave Jesus a vision. It was as if He traveled around the world in an instant and saw all the kingdoms of the world at once.

Devil: [6]All these kingdoms, all their glory, I'll give to You. They're mine to give because this whole world has been handed over to me. [7]If You just worship me, then everything You see will all be Yours. All Yours!

Jesus: [8][Get out of My face, Satan!]* The Hebrew Scriptures say, "Worship and serve the Eternal One your God—only Him—and nobody else."*

[9]Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem, and he transported Jesus to stand upon the pinnacle of the temple.

Devil: Since You're the Son of God, just jump. Just throw Yourself into the air. [10]*You keep quoting the Hebrew Scriptures.* They themselves say,

He will put His heavenly messengers in charge of You,
to keep You safe in every way.

[11]And,

They will hold You up in their hands
so that You do not smash Your foot
against a stone.*

Jesus: [12]*Yes, but* the *Hebrew* Scriptures also say, *"You will not presume on God;* you will not test the Lord, the one True God."*

[13]The devil had no more temptations to offer *that day*, so he left Jesus, preparing to return at some other opportune time.

[14]Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit, and soon people across the region had heard news of Him. [15]He would regularly go into their synagogues and teach. His teaching earned Him the respect and admiration of everyone who heard Him.

[16]He eventually came to His hometown, Nazareth, and did there what He had done elsewhere *in Galilee*—entered the synagogue and stood up to read *from the Hebrew Scriptures.*

[17]The *synagogue attendant* gave Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and Jesus

* 4:4 Deuteronomy 8:3 * 4:8 Many early manuscripts omit this portion. * 4:8 Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20
* 4:10-11 Psalm 91:11-12 * 4:12 Deuteronomy 6:16

The essential message of Jesus can be summed up this way: the kingdom of God is available to everyone, starting now. When Jesus refers to the kingdom of God, He doesn't mean something that happens after death, far off in heaven; He equates the kingdom of God with God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. So the kingdom of God is life as God intends it to be—life to the full, life in peace and justice, life in abundance and love. Individuals enter the Kingdom when they enter into a relationship with Jesus, when they trust Him enough to follow His ways. But make no mistake, the Kingdom is about more than individual lives; it is about the transformation and renewal of all God has created. It may start with individual responses, but it doesn't stop there.

Jesus describes His purpose as proclaiming this message. But Jesus not only expresses His message of the kingdom of God in words, He also dramatizes it in deeds. Luke calls these amazing deeds "signs and wonders," suggesting that these actions have symbolic meaning, which is *sign*ificant, and are *wonder*ful, which means they fill people with awe and *wonder*. In the coming chapters, the wonder that the original eyewitnesses feel is palpable, and Jesus' actions are significant signs of the kingdom of God.

unrolled it to the place where Isaiah had written these words:

18 The Spirit of the Lord the Eternal One
is on Me.
Why? Because the Eternal
designated Me
to be His representative to the poor,
to preach good news to them.
He sent Me to tell those who are held
captive that they can now be
set free,
and to tell the blind that they can
now see.
He sent Me to liberate those held down
by oppression.
19 *In short, the Spirit is upon Me* to
proclaim that now is the time;
this is the jubilee season of the
Eternal One's grace.*

20 Jesus rolled up the scroll and returned it to the synagogue attendant. Then He sat down, *as a teacher would do,* and all in the synagogue focused their attention on Jesus, *waiting for Him to speak.* 21 He told them that these words from the Hebrew Scriptures were being fulfilled then and there, in their hearing.

22 At first everyone was deeply impressed with the gracious words that poured from Jesus' lips. Everyone spoke well of Him and was amazed that He could say these things.

Everyone: Wait. This is only the son of Joseph, right?

Jesus: 23 You're about to quote the old proverb to Me, "Doctor, heal yourself!" Then you're going to ask Me to prove Myself to you by doing the same miracles I did in Capernaum. 24 But face the truth: hometowns always reject their homegrown prophets.

25 Think back to the prophet Elijah. There were many needy Jewish widows in *his homeland*, Israel, when a terrible famine persisted there for three and a half years. 26 Yet the only widow God sent Elijah to help was *an outsider* from Zarephath in Sidon.*

27 It was the same with the prophet Elisha. There were many Jewish lepers in his homeland, but the only one he healed—Naaman—*was an outsider* from Syria.*

28 The people in the synagogue became furious when He said these things. 29 They seized Jesus, took Him to the edge of town, and pushed Him right to the edge of the cliff on which the city was built. They would have pushed Him off and killed Him, 30 but He passed through the crowd and went on His way.

31-33 Next He went to Capernaum, another Galilean city. Again He was *in the synagogue* teaching on the Sabbath, and as before, the people were enthralled by His words. He had a way of saying things—a special authority, *a unique power*.

In attendance that day was a man with a demonic spirit.

* 4:18-19 Isaiah 61:1-2 * 4:26 1 Kings 17:8-16 * 4:27 2 Kings 5:1-14

Demon-Possessed Man *(screaming at Jesus)*: 34*Get out of here!* Leave us alone! What's Your agenda, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are: You're the Holy One, the One sent by God!

Jesus *(firmly rebuking the demon)*: 35Be quiet. Get out of that man!

Then the demonic spirit immediately threw the man into a fit, and he collapsed right there in the middle of the synagogue. It was clear the demon had come out, and the man was completely fine after that. 36Everyone was shocked to see this, and they couldn't help but talk about it.

Synagogue Members: What's this about? What's the meaning of this message? Jesus speaks with authority, and He has power to command demonic spirits to go away.

37The excitement about Jesus spread into every corner of the surrounding region.

38*Picture this:*

Jesus then leaves that synagogue and goes over to Simon's place. Simon's mother-in-law is there. She is sick with a high fever. Simon's family asks Jesus to help her.

39Jesus stands over her, *and just as He had rebuked the demon,* He rebukes the fever, and the woman's temperature returns to normal. She feels so much better that she gets right up and cooks them all a big meal.

40By this time, it's just before nightfall, and as the sun sets, *groups of families, friends, and bystanders come* until a huge crowd has gathered. Each group has brought along family members or friends who are sick with any number of diseases. One by one, Jesus lays His hands on them and heals them. 41On several occasions, demonic spirits are expelled from these people, after shouting at Jesus, "You are the Son of God!"

Jesus always rebukes them and tells them to be quiet. They know He is the Anointed One, *but He doesn't want to be acclaimed in this way.*

42The next morning, Jesus sneaks away. He finds a place away from the crowds, but soon they find Him. The crowd tries their best to keep Him from leaving.

Jesus: 43No, I cannot stay. I need to preach the kingdom of God to other cities too. This is the purpose I was sent to fulfill.

44So He proceeds from synagogue to synagogue across Judea,* preaching His message *of the kingdom of God.*

5 *Picture these events:*

On the banks of Gennesaret Lake, a huge crowd, Jesus in the center of it, presses in to hear His message from God. 2Off to the side, fishermen are washing their nets, leaving their boats unattended on the shore.

3Jesus gets into one of the boats and asks its owner, Simon, to push off *and anchor* a short distance from the beach. Jesus sits down and teaches the people standing on the beach.

4After speaking for a while, Jesus speaks to Simon.

Jesus: Move out into deeper water, and drop your nets to see what you'll catch.

Simon *(perplexed)*: 5Master, we've been fishing all night, and we haven't caught even a minnow. But . . . all right, I'll do it if You say so.

6Simon then gets his fellow fishermen to help him let down their nets, *and to their surprise,* the water is bubbling with thrashing fish—*a huge school.* The strands of their nets start snapping under the weight of the catch, 7so the crew shouts to the other boat to come out and give them a hand. They start scooping fish out of the nets and into their boats, and before long, their boats are so full of fish they almost sink!

8-10Simon's fishing partners, James and John (two of Zebedee's sons), along with the rest of the fishermen, see this incredible haul of fish. They're all stunned, especially Simon. He comes close to Jesus and kneels in front of His knees.

Simon: I can't take this, Lord. I'm a sinful man. You shouldn't be around the likes of me.

Jesus: Don't be afraid, Simon. From now on, I'll ask you to bring Me people instead of fish.

11The fishermen haul their fish-heavy boats to land, and they leave everything to follow Jesus.

* 4:44 Other early manuscripts read "Galilee."

The miracles Jesus performs come in all types: He heals the sick. He frees the oppressed. He shows His power over nature. He will even raise the dead. But as the story in verses 21-26 shows, one of the greatest miracles of all is forgiveness. To have sins forgiven—to start over again, to have God separate believers from their mistakes and moral failures, to lift the weight of shame and guilt—this may well be the weightiest evidence that God's Son is on the move. The kingdom of God doesn't throw all guilty people in jail; it doesn't execute everyone who has made mistakes or tell them they're just getting what they deserve. Instead, it brings forgiveness, reconciliation, a new start, a second chance. In this way, it mobilizes believers to have a new future.

Certainly Jesus has communicated the message of the Kingdom through words and through signs and wonders. Now Jesus embodies the message in the way He treats people, including outcasts like Levi. As a tax collector, Levi is a Jew who works for the Romans, the oppressors, the enemies. No wonder tax collectors are despised! But how does Jesus treat this compromiser? He doesn't leave him paralyzed in his compromised position; He invites him—like the paralyzed man—to get up and walk, and to walk in a new direction toward a new King and Kingdom.

12 Another time in a city nearby, a man covered with skin lesions comes along. As soon as he sees Jesus, he prostrates himself.

Leper: Lord, if You wish to, You can heal me of my disease.

13 Jesus reaches out His hand and touches the man, *something no one would normally do for fear of being infected or of becoming ritually unclean.*

Jesus: I want to heal you. Be cleansed!

Immediately the man is cured. 14 Jesus tells him firmly not to tell anyone about this.

Jesus: Go, show yourself to the priest, and do what Moses commanded by making an appropriate offering to celebrate your cleansing. This will prove to everyone what has happened.

15 Even though Jesus said not to talk about what happened, soon every conversation was consumed by these events. The crowds swelled even larger as people went to hear Jesus preach and to be healed of their many afflictions. 16 Jesus repeatedly left the crowds, though, stealing away into the wilderness to pray.

17 One day Jesus was teaching *in a house*, and the healing power of the Lord was with Him. Pharisees and religious scholars were sitting and listening, having come from villages all across the regions of Galilee and Judea and from *the holy city of* Jerusalem.

18 Some men came *to the house*, carrying a paralyzed man on his bed pallet. They wanted to bring him in and present him to Jesus, 19 but the house was so packed with people that they couldn't get in. So they climbed up on the roof and pulled off some roof tiles. Then they lowered the man *by ropes* so he came to rest right in front of Jesus.

20 In this way, their faith was visible to Jesus.

Jesus *(to the man on the pallet)***:** My friend, all your sins are forgiven.

21 The Pharisees and religious scholars were offended at this. They turned to one another and asked questions.

Pharisees and Religious Scholars: Who does He think He is? Wasn't that blasphemous? Who can pronounce that a person's sins are forgiven? Who but God alone?

Jesus *(responding with His own question)***:** 22 Why are your hearts full of questions? 23 Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or "Get up and walk"? 24 Just so you'll know that the Son of Man is fully authorized to forgive sins on earth (He turned to the paralyzed fellow *lying on the pallet*), I say, get up, take your mat, and go home.

25 Then, right in front of their eyes, the man stood up, picked up his bed, and left to go home—full of praises for God! 26 Everyone

was stunned. They couldn't help but feel awestruck, and they praised God too.

People: We've seen extraordinary things today.

27Some time later, Jesus walked along the street and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in his tax office.

Jesus: Follow Me.

28And Levi did. He got up from his desk, left everything *(just as the fishermen had)*, and followed Jesus.

29Shortly after this, Levi invited his many friends and associates, including many tax collectors, to his home for a *large* feast in Jesus' honor. Everyone sat at a table together.

► The Pharisees are back again, and they stay through the rest of the story. Pharisaism is a religious movement, consisting of lay people (not clergy) who share a deep commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures and traditions. They believe the Jewish people have not yet been freed from the Romans because of the Jews' tolerance of sin. There are too many drunks, prostitutes, and gluttons. "If we could just get these sinners to change their ways," they feel, "then God would send the One who will free us." How angry they are at Jesus not just for forgiving sins but also for eating with sinners! After all, to eat with people means to accept them. The kind of Rescuer they expect will judge and destroy sinners, not forgive them and enjoy their company!

30The Pharisees and their associates, the religious scholars, got the attention of some of Jesus' disciples.

Pharisees *(in low voices)*: *What's wrong with you?* Why are you eating and drinking with tax collectors and other immoral people?

Jesus *(answering for the disciples)*: 31Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. 32I haven't come for the pure and upstanding; I've come to call *notorious* sinners to rethink their lives and turn to God.

Pharisees: 33Explain to us why You and Your disciples are so commonly found partying like this, when our disciples—and even the disciples of John—are known for fasting rather than feasting, and for saying prayers rather than drinking *wine*.

Jesus: 34Imagine there's a wedding going on. Is that the time to tell the guests to ignore the bridegroom and fast? 35Sure, there's a time for fasting—when the bridegroom has been taken away. 36Look, nobody tears up a new garment to make a patch for an old garment. If he did, the new patch would shrink and rip the old, and the old garment would be worse off than before. 37And nobody takes freshly squeezed juice and puts it into old, stiff wineskins. If he did, the fresh wine would make the old skins burst open, and both the wine and the wineskins would be ruined. 38New demands new—new wine for new wineskins. 39Anyway, those who've never tasted the new wine won't know what they're missing; they'll always say, "The old wine is good enough for me!"

6 1-2One Sabbath Day,* some Pharisees confronted Jesus again. This time, they saw the disciples picking some grain as they walked through the fields. The disciples would dehusk the grain by rubbing the kernels in their hands, and then they would eat it raw.

Pharisees: *Don't You know the sacred law says You can't harvest and mill grain* on the Sabbath Day—the day on which all work is forbidden? Why do You think You can ignore the sacred law?

► The Pharisees think they have God all figured out. They claim to be experts in the sacred writings—the Hebrew Scriptures. But Jesus doesn't fit in with their assumptions and expectations, and He doesn't submit to their presumed expertise. So they are constantly criticizing Him and trying to trap Him in some obvious

* 6:1 Other manuscripts read "On the second Sabbath after the first."

Jesus certainly has His detractors. They watch Him closely and voice their opposition to His words and actions. Sometimes they even try to stump Him with questions or publicly humiliate Him. But Jesus refuses to be intimidated. For every charge they level, He has an answer. To the charge of blasphemy, He responds, "I have the authority to forgive sins." To the charge that He befriends sinners and parties too much, He answers, "These are My people; I've come for them." To the accusation that He breaks Sabbath law, He quips, "The Sabbath is a great servant, but it's not your master. I am Lord of the Sabbath." The crowds are amazed at the tense give-and-take between Jesus and His opponents. They seem to respect the Pharisees for their strict observance of God's law, or perhaps they fear them because they don't want to become targets of Pharisaic criticism. Yet the people are attracted to Jesus because of the peculiar moral authority He exhibits. As time goes on, Jesus crosses more and more lines drawn in the sand. The tension between Jesus and the Pharisees now becomes a major plotline of Luke's story.

wrongdoing or unorthodoxy. But Jesus responds with questions instead of answers. He seems to decide that the best way to help them is by challenging them to think, to question their assumptions, to see things from a higher or deeper perspective. For example, they argue about what is permissible on the Sabbath Day (the seventh day, the day of rest); this is how Jesus gets them thinking about the deeper purpose of the Sabbath Day.

Jesus: 3*Speaking of the sacred law,* haven't
you ever read about the time when
David and his companions were hungry?
4Don't you remember how he went into
the house of God and took the sacred
bread of the presence—which, you may
recall, only the priests were lawfully permitted to eat? Remember that he not
only ate it, but he also gave it to his companions?* 5Likewise, the Son of Man has
authority over the Sabbath.

6On another Sabbath, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught there. In the congregation was a man who had a deformed right hand. 7The religious scholars and Pharisees watched Jesus; they suspected that He might try to perform a healing on that day, which they would use as evidence to convict Him of Sabbath-breaking.

8Jesus knew about their plan, and He told the man with the deformed hand to come and stand in front of everyone. The man did so. 9Then Jesus spoke directly to the religious scholars and Pharisees.

Jesus: Here's a question for you: On the
Sabbath Day, is it lawful to do good or
to do harm? Is it lawful to save life or to
destroy it?

10He turned His gaze to each of them, *one at a time.* Then He spoke to the man.

Jesus: Stretch your hand out.

As the man did, his deformed hand was made normal again. 11This made the Pharisees and religious scholars furious. They began discussing together what they would do to Jesus.

12Around this time, Jesus went outside the city to a nearby mountain, *along with a large crowd of His disciples.* He prayed through the night to God. 13The next morning, He chose 12 of them and gave each a new title of "emissary."

They are no longer simply disciples, which means "learners"; now they are also apostles, which means "emissaries."

14They included Simon (Jesus called him Peter) and Andrew (Simon's brother); James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; 15Matthew and Thomas; James (son of Alphaeus) and Simon (known as the Zealot); 16Judas (son of James) and the other Judas (Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed *Jesus*).

17The whole crowd of disciples *(including the 12 now designated as His*

* 6:4 1 Samuel 21:2-6

emissaries) came down together, and they stood on a level area nearby. They were joined by an even greater crowd of people who had come from across the whole region—from all of Judea, from Jerusalem, from the coastal areas of Tyre and Sidon. 18These people came to hear Jesus teach and to be healed by Jesus of their diseases. Those who were troubled by demonic spirits were liberated.

19Everyone wanted to touch Jesus because when they did, power emanated from Him and they were healed. 20He looked across the faces of His disciples.

Jesus: All you who are poor, you are blessed
for the kingdom of God belongs to you.
21All you who are hungry now, you are blessed
for your hunger will be satisfied.
All you who weep now, you are blessed
for you shall laugh!
22When people hate you,
when they exclude you
and insult you
and write you off as evil
on account of the Son of Man, you are blessed.
23When these things happen, rejoice! Jump for joy!
Then you have a great reward in heaven
For at that moment, you are experiencing what the ancient prophets did when they were similarly treated by the ancestors of your detractors.
24All you who are rich now, you are in danger
for you have received your comfort in full.
25All you who are full now, you are in danger
for you shall be hungry.
All you who laugh now, you are in danger
for you shall grieve and cry.
26And when everyone speaks well of you, you are in danger
for their ancestors spoke well of the false prophets too.

Here is Luke's most concentrated summary of Jesus' teachings for His followers. Here He describes what life in the kingdom of God looks like.

27If you're listening, here's My message: Keep loving your enemies no matter what they do. Keep doing good to those who hate you. 28Keep speaking blessings on those who curse you. Keep praying for those who mistreat you. 29If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other cheek too. If someone steals your coat, offer him your shirt too. 30If someone begs from you, give to him. If someone robs you of your valuables, don't demand them back. 31Think of the kindness you wish others would show you; do the same for them.

32Listen, what's the big deal if you love people who already love you? Even scoundrels do that much! 33So what if you do good to those who do good to you? Even scoundrels do that much! 34So what if you lend to people who are likely to repay you? Even scoundrels lend to scoundrels if they think they'll be fully repaid.

35If you want to be extraordinary—love your enemies! Do good *without restraint*! Lend *with abandon*! Don't expect anything in return! Then you'll receive the truly great reward—you will be children of the Most High—for God is kind to the ungrateful and those who are wicked. 36So imitate God and be truly compassionate, the way your Father is.

37If you don't want to be judged, don't judge. If you don't want to be condemned, don't condemn. If you want to be forgiven, forgive. 38Don't hold back—give freely, and you'll have plenty poured back into your lap—a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, brimming over. You'll receive in the same measure you give.

39Jesus told them this parable:

Jesus: What happens if a blind man leads a blind man? Won't both of them fall into a pit? 40You can't turn out better than your teacher; when you're fully taught, you will resemble your teacher.

41Speaking of blindness: Why do you focus on the speck in your brother's eye? Why don't you see the log in your own? 42How can you say to your brother, "Oh, brother, let me help you take that little speck out of your eye," when you don't even see the big log in your own eye? What a hypocrite! First, take the log out of your own eye. Then you'll be able to see clearly enough to help your brother with the speck in his eye.

43*Count on this:* no good tree bears bad fruit, and no bad tree bears good

fruit. 44You can know a tree by the fruit
it bears. You don't find figs on a thorn
bush, and you can't pick grapes from a
briar bush. 45*It's the same with people.*
A person full of goodness in his heart
produces good things; a person with an
evil reservoir in his heart pours out evil
things. The heart overflows in the words
a person speaks; your words reveal
what's within your heart.

46What good is it to mouth the
words, "Lord! Lord!" if you don't live by
My teachings? 47What matters is that
you come to Me, hear My words, and
actually live by them. 48If you do that,
you'll be like the man who wanted to
build a sturdy house. He dug down deep
and anchored his foundation to solid
rock. During a violent storm, the flood-
waters slammed against the house, but
they couldn't shake it because of solid
craftsmanship. [It was built upon rock.]*

49On the other hand, if you hear *My
teachings* but don't put them into prac-
tice, you'll be like the careless builder
who didn't bother to build a foundation
under his house. The floodwaters barely
touched that pathetic house, and it
crashed in ruins in the mud.

► In addition to teaching and healing, Jesus also gathers disciples, who are simply students or apprentices. Their classroom is the world—hillsides and beaches, homes and country roads, fields and city streets. Their subject is life—life in the kingdom of God. Jesus has many students, both men and women, but He forms a special inner circle known as "the twelve." The number "twelve" is highly symbolic because the Jewish people were originally composed of twelve tribes. However, over the centuries, some of the tribes were decimated. By calling together a new twelve, Jesus seems to be dramatizing a new beginning for the people of God. The original twelve tribes found their identity in the law of Moses, but now Jesus is giving a new way of life for His twelve to learn and follow.

7 Jesus shared all these sayings with
the crowd that day on the plain.
When He was finished, He went into
the town of Capernaum. 2There, a Centu-
rion had a slave he loved dearly. The slave
was sick—about to die—3so when the
Centurion heard about Jesus, he contacted
some Jewish elders. He sent them to ask
Jesus to come and heal his dear slave.
4With great emotion and respect, the
elders presented their request to Jesus.

Jewish Elders: This man is worthy of
Your help. *It's true that he's a Centurion,*
5but he loves our nation. In fact, he paid
for our synagogue to be built.

6So Jesus accompanied them. When they
approached the Centurion's home, the
Centurion sent out some friends to bring a
message to Jesus.

Message of the Centurion: Lord, don't
go to the trouble of coming inside. I am
not worthy to have You come under
my roof. 7That's why I sent others with
my request. Just say the word, and that
will be enough to heal my servant. 8I
understand how authority works, being
under authority myself and having sol-
diers under my authority. I command to
one, "Go," and he goes. I say to another,
"Come," and he comes. I say to my slave,
"Do this," and he obeys me.

9Jesus was deeply impressed when He
heard this. He turned to the crowd that
followed Him.

Jesus: Listen, everyone. *This outsider, this
Roman,* has more faith than I have found
even among our own Jewish people.

10The friends of the Centurion returned
home, and they found the slave was com-
pletely healed.

11It wasn't long after this when Jesus
entered a city called Nain. Again all of His
disciples accompanied Him, along with
a huge crowd. 12He was coming near the
gate of the city as a corpse was being car-
ried out. This man was the only child *and
support* of his widowed mother, and she
was accompanied by a large funeral crowd.

13As soon as the Lord saw her, He felt
compassion for her.

Jesus: Don't weep.

* 6:48 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

John, it seems, is having second thoughts. Is Jesus really the One we have expected? Is He the Anointed One? But who can blame John for these doubts? After all, John is in prison, unjustly held by a corrupt, immoral ruler. Ultimately the desert prophet will have his head severed from his body when the drunken, lusty king makes a silly promise in front of dinner guests. So who can blame John for seeking assurance from the Lord? Jesus, realizing fully the kinds of expectations others have, gently reminds John and his disciples of the Scriptures: "the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead live, and the poor receive the good news." Luke doesn't say how John responds to the report as he nears his own end. What is clear is that Jesus has the utmost respect for His colleague and cousin. He doesn't reject him for his doubts but tries to send him reassurance.

14Then He came to the stretcher, and
those carrying it stood still.

Jesus: Young man, listen! Get up!

15The dead man immediately sat up and
began talking. Jesus presented him to his
mother, 16and everyone was both shocked
and jubilant. They praised God.

Funeral Crowd: A tremendous prophet
has arisen in our midst! God has visited
His people!

17News of Jesus spread across the whole
province of Judea and beyond to the sur-
rounding regions. 18When these reports
reached John's disciples, they brought
news to John himself, *who was known for
his preaching and ritual cleansing.** 19John
sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord,
"Are You the Promised One, or shall we
keep looking for someone else?"

20They came to Jesus and asked their
question exactly as directed by John the
Baptist.

21Before He answered John's mes-
sengers, Jesus cured many from various
diseases, health conditions, and evil spir-
its. He even caused many blind people to
regain their sight.

Jesus *(to John's disciples)***:** 22Go and tell
John what you've witnessed with your
own eyes and ears: the blind are seeing
again, the lame are walking again, the
lepers are clean again, the deaf hear
again, the dead live again, and good news
is preached to the poor.* 23Whoever is
not offended by Me is blessed indeed.

24When John's messengers left, Jesus
talked to the crowds about John.

Jesus: When you went out into the
wilderness to see John, what were you
expecting? A reed shaking in the wind?
25What were you looking for? A man in
expensive clothing? Look, if you were
looking for fancy clothes and luxurious
living, you went to the wrong place—you
should have gone to the kings' courts,
not to the wilderness! 26What were you
seeking? A prophet? Ah yes, that's what
John is, and even more than a prophet.
27*The prophet Malachi* was talking about
John when he wrote,

I will send My messenger *before You,*
to clear Your path in front of
You.*

28Listen, there is no human being greater
than this man, John the Baptist. Yet even
the least significant person in the com-
ing kingdom of God is greater than John.

29The common people and tax collectors
heard God's own wisdom in Jesus' assess-
ment of John because they had been ritu-
ally cleansed through baptism by John.
30But the Pharisees and religious scholars
hardened their hearts and turned their
backs on God's purposes for them because
they had refused John's baptism.*

Jesus: 31The people of this generation—
what are they like? To what can they
be compared? 32*I'll tell you:* they're like
spoiled kids sitting in the marketplace
playing games, calling out,

We played the pipes for you,
but you didn't dance to our tune!
We cried like mourners,
but you didn't cry with us!

* 7:18 Literally, immersing, to show repentance * 7:22 Isaiah 29:18; 35:5-6 * 7:27 Malachi 3:1 * 7:30 Literally, immersed, to show repentance

33*You can't win with this generation.*
John the Baptist comes along, fasting and
abstaining from wine, and you say, "This
guy is demon-possessed!" 34The Son of
Man comes along, feasting and drinking
wine, and you say, "This guy is a glutton
and a drunk, a friend of scoundrels and
tax collectors!" 35Well, wisdom's true chil-
dren know wisdom when they hear it.

36-40Once a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to be a guest for a meal.

Picture this:

Just as Jesus enters the man's home and takes His place at the table, a woman from the city—notorious as a woman of ill repute—follows Him in. She has heard that Jesus will be at the Pharisee's home, so she comes in and approaches Him, carrying an alabaster flask of perfumed oil. Then she begins to cry, she kneels down so her tears fall on Jesus' feet, and she starts wiping His feet with her own hair. Then she actually kisses His feet, and she pours the perfumed oil on them.

Simon *(thinking)***:** *Now I know this guy is a fraud.* If He were a real prophet, He would have known this woman is a sinner and He would never let her get near Him, much less touch Him . . . *or kiss Him*!

Jesus *(knowing what the Pharisee is thinking)***:** Simon, I want to tell you a story.

Simon: Tell me, Teacher.

Jesus: 41Two men owed a certain lender a lot of money. One owed 100 weeks' wages, and the other owed 10 weeks' wages. 42Both men defaulted on their loans, but the lender forgave them both. Here's a question for you: which man will love the lender more?

Simon: 43Well, I guess it would be the one who was forgiven more.

Jesus: Good answer.

44-46Now Jesus turns around so He's facing the woman, although He's still speaking to Simon.

Jesus: Do you see this woman here? *It's kind of funny.* I entered your home, and you didn't provide a basin of water so I could wash the road dust from My feet. You didn't give Me a customary kiss of greeting and welcome. You didn't offer Me the common courtesy of providing oil to brighten My face. But this woman has wet My feet with her own tears and washed them with her own hair. She hasn't stopped kissing My feet since I came in. And she has applied perfumed oil to My feet. 47This woman has been forgiven much, and she is showing much love. But the person who has shown little love shows how little forgiveness he has received.

48(to the woman) Your sins are forgiven.

Simon and Friends *(muttering among themselves)***:** 49Who does this guy think He is? He has the audacity to claim the authority to forgive sins?

Jesus *(to the woman)***:** 50Your faith has liberated you. Go in peace.

8 Soon after this incident, Jesus preached from city to city, village to village, carrying the good news of the kingdom of God. He was accompanied by a group called "the twelve," 2and also by a larger group including some women who had been rescued from evil spirits and healed of diseases. There was Mary, called Magdalene, who had been released from seven demons. 3There were others like Susanna and Joanna, who was married to Chuza, a steward of King Herod. And there were many others too. *These women played an important role in Jesus' ministry,* using their wealth to provide for Him and His other companions.

4While a huge crowd gathered with people from many surrounding towns streaming to hear Jesus, He told them a parable.

► Parables are works of art, specifically, works of short fiction. They are intricately constructed and complex in their intent. In some ways, they are intended to hide the truth; they don't reduce truth to simple statements or formulae. Instead, they force the reader to take things to a deeper level, to engage the imagination, to think and think again. In this way, they invite people to ask questions; they stir curiosity; they create intrigue.

Jesus: 5Once a farmer went out to scatter seed *in his fields*. Some seeds fell along a trail where they were crushed underfoot by people walking by. Birds flew in and ate those seeds. 6Other seeds fell on gravel. Those seeds sprouted but soon withered, depleted of moisture *under the scorching sun*. 7Still other seeds landed among thorns where they grew for a while, but eventually the thorns stunted them so they couldn't thrive or bear fruit. 8But some seeds fell into good soil—*soft, moist, free from thorns.* These seeds not only grew, but they also produced *more seeds,* a hundred times what the farmer originally planted. If you have ears, hear My meaning!

9His disciples heard the words, but the deeper meaning eluded them.

Disciples: What were You trying to say?

Jesus: 10The kingdom of God contains
many secrets.
They keep listening, but do not
comprehend;
keep observing, but do not
understand.*

I want you to understand, so 11here's the interpretation: The voice of God falls on human hearts like seeds scattered across a field. 12Some people hear that message, but the devil opposes the liberation that would come to them by believing. So he swoops in and steals the message from their hard hearts like birds stealing the seeds from the footpath. 13Others receive the message enthusiastically, but their vitality is short-lived because the message cannot be deeply rooted in their shallow hearts. In the heat of temptation, their faith withers, like the seeds that sprouted in gravelly soil. 14A third group hears the message, but as time passes, the daily anxieties, the pursuit of wealth, and life's addicting delights outpace the growth of the message in their hearts. Even if the message blossoms and fruit begins to form, the fruit never fully matures because the thorns choke out the plants' vitality.

15But some people hear the message and let it take root deeply in receptive hearts made fertile by honesty and goodness. With patient dependability, they bear good fruit.

16You wouldn't light a lamp and cover it with a clay pot. You're not going to hide it under your bed. No, when you light it, you're going to put it out in the open so your guests *can feel welcome and* see where they're going.

17Hidden things will always come out into the open. Secret things will come to light and be exposed. 18*I hope you're still listening.* And I hope you're listening carefully. If you get what I'm saying, you'll get more. If you miss My meaning, even the understanding you think you have will be taken from you.

19Around this time, Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people gathered in a house. His mother and brothers arrived to see Him, but the crowd around Him was so huge that they couldn't even get through the door. 20Word spread through the crowd.

Someone from the Crowd: Jesus, Your mother and brothers are outside the house hoping to see You.

Jesus: 21Do you want to know who My mother and brothers are? They're the ones who truly understand God's message and obey it.

22*Picture this:*

One day Jesus and His disciples get into a boat.

Jesus: Let's cross the lake.

So they push off from shore and begin sailing to the far side. 23As they progress across the lake, Jesus falls sound asleep. Soon a raging storm blows in. The waves wash over the sides of the boat, and the boat starts filling up with water. Every second the situation becomes more dangerous.

24The disciples *shake Jesus and* wake Him.

Disciples *(shouting)*: Master! Master! We're all going to die!

Jesus wakes up and tells the wind to stop whipping them around, and He tells the furious waves to calm down. They do just that. 25Then Jesus turns to the disciples.

Jesus: What happened to your faith?

The disciples had been terrified during the storm, but now they're afraid in another

* 8:10 Isaiah 6:9

way. They turn to each other and start whispering, chattering, and wondering.

Disciples: Who is this man? How can He command wind and water so they do what He says?

26When they get to the other side of the lake, in the Gerasene country opposite Galilee, 27a man from the city is waiting for Jesus when He steps out of the boat. The man is full of demonic spirits. He's been running around for a long time stark naked, and he's homeless, sleeping among the dead in a cemetery. 28-29This man has on many occasions been tied up and chained and kept under guard, but each time he has broken free and the demonic power has driven him back into remote places *away from human contact*. Jesus commands the demonic force to leave him. The man looks at Jesus and starts screaming. He falls down in front of Jesus.

Possessed Man *(shouting)*: Don't torment me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God! Why are You here?

Jesus *(calmly and simply)*: 30What's your name?

Possessed Man: Battalion.

He says this because an army of demons is inside of him. 31The demons start begging Jesus not to send them into the bottomless pit. 32They plead instead to enter into a herd of pigs feeding on a steep hillside near the shore. Jesus gives them permission to do so. 33Suddenly the man is liberated from the demons, but the pigs—they stampede, squealing down the hill and into the lake where they drown themselves.

34The pig owners see all this. They run back to their town and tell everyone in the region about it. 35Soon a crowd rushes from the town to see what's going on out by the lake. There they find Jesus seated *to teach* with the newly liberated man sitting at His feet *learning in the posture of a disciple*. This former madman is now properly dressed and completely sane. This frightens the people. 36The pig owners tell them the whole story—the healing, *the pigs' mass suicide, everything.*

37The people are scared to death, and they don't want this scary abnormality happening in their territory. They ask Jesus to leave immediately. *Jesus doesn't argue.* He prepares to leave, 38but before they embark, the newly liberated man begs to come along and join the band of disciples.

Jesus: 39No. Go home. Tell your people this amazing story about how much God has done for you.

The man does so. In fact, he tells everyone in the whole city how much Jesus did for him that day *on the shore*.

40When Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake, another crowd was waiting to welcome Him. 41A man made his way through the crowd. His name was Jairus, and he was a synagogue official. *Like the man on the other side of the lake,* this dignified man also fell at Jesus' feet, begging Jesus to visit his home 42where his only daughter, a girl of 12, lay dying. Jesus set out with Jairus. The crowd came along, too, pressing hard against Him.

43In the crowd was a woman. She had suffered from an incurable menstrual disorder for 12 years [and had spent her livelihood on doctors with no effect].* *It had kept her miserable and ritually unclean, unable to participate fully in Jewish life.* 44*She followed Jesus,* until she could reach Him. She touched the fringe of the robe Jesus wore, and at that moment the bleeding stopped.

Jesus *(stopping and looking about)*: 45Who touched Me?

Some in the Crowd *(everyone speaking at once)*: Not me.

Another in the Crowd: It wasn't me either.

Peter [and those with him]* *(intervening)*: Master, what kind of question is that, with this huge crowd all around You and many people touching You on all sides?

Jesus: 46*I felt something.* I felt power going out from Me. I know that somebody touched Me.

47The woman now realized her secret was going to come out sooner or later, so she stepped out of the crowd, shaking with fear, and she fell down in front of

* 8:43 This portion is omitted in some early manuscripts. * 8:45 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

Jesus. Then she told her story in front of everyone—why she touched Him, what happened as a result.

Jesus: [48]Your faith has made you well again, daughter. Go in peace.

[49]Right at that instant, one of *Jairus's* household servants arrived.

Servant: Sir, your daughter is dead. It's no use bothering the Teacher with this anymore.

Jesus *(interrupting Jairus before he could speak)***:** [50]Don't be afraid. Just believe. She'll be well again.

[51-52]As they approached the house, the whole neighborhood was full of the sound of mourning—weeping, wailing, loud crying. Jesus told everyone to stay outside—everyone except Peter, John, James, and, of course, the girl's father and mother.

Jesus *(to the mourners)***:** Please stop weeping. The girl isn't dead. She's only asleep.

[53]They knew for certain that she was dead, *so their bitter tears now mixed* with mocking laughter.

[54]Meanwhile, inside, Jesus took the girl's hand.

Jesus: Child, get up!

[55]She started breathing again, and she sat right up.

Jesus: Get her something to eat.

[56]Her parents were amazed, but Jesus sternly told them to keep what had happened a secret.

► So concludes an almost breathtaking succession of encounters between Jesus and people in need. Each story is unique; Jesus responds to each person as an individual, and there is no detectable formula to His way of treating people—except that in every case, His interactions are characterized by love and compassion.

Now Jesus takes His ministry of teaching the kingdom of God in word and deed to a new level: He sends out His disciples to do what they have seen Him do. Jesus commissions the twelve to multiply His ministry. They will go out from and then return to Jesus with reports of what they've experienced and learned. But it's hard for them to get any time alone to talk. There are so many people who want time with Jesus!

9 Jesus convened a gathering of the twelve. He gave them power and authority to free people from all demonic spirits and to heal them of diseases. [2]He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. [3-5]These were His instructions:

1. Travel light on your journey: don't take a staff, backpack, bread, money, or even an extra change of clothes.
2. When you enter a house, stay there until you leave that city.
3. If a town rejects you, shake the dust from your feet as you leave as a witness against them.

[6]The disciples left on their journeys from village to village. They preached the good news, and they healed the sick everywhere they went.

[7-8]*Their mission didn't go unnoticed.* The local official installed by Rome, Herod, was especially anxious about the news because rumors were flying. Some people said that Elijah or one of the other ancient prophets had been resurrected, while others said that John, *famous for his ritual cleansing,* was alive *and preaching again.*

Herod: [9]I am the one who beheaded John. So who is this man who is causing such a stir?

Herod *was curious about Jesus and* wanted to see Him.

[10]The emissaries* whom Jesus had sent out returned, and Jesus took them away from the crowds for a time of retreat in a city called Bethsaida. They gave Jesus a full report of their accomplishments and experiences. [11]But soon the crowds discovered where they were and pursued Him. Jesus didn't turn them away; He

* 9:10 Literally, apostles

welcomed them, spoke of the kingdom of God to them, and brought health to those who needed healing.

12*Picture what happened* while in Bethsaida, where Jesus and His disciples were spending time with the crowds:

The sun is low in the sky, and soon it will be dusk. The twelve come to Jesus with advice.

Disciples: Send the crowd away so they can find lodging and food in the nearby villages and countryside. We're out here in the middle of nowhere.

Jesus: 13-14No. You give them something to eat.

Disciples: *Are You kidding?* There are at least 5,000 men here, *not to mention women and children.* All we have are five loaves and two fish. The only way we could provide for them would be to go to a nearby city and buy cartloads of food. *That would cost a small fortune.*

Jesus: Just do this: organize them in little communities of about 50 people each and have them sit down.

15They do what Jesus says, and soon groups of 50 are scattered across the landscape.

16Then Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, and He looks up to heaven. He praises God for the food, takes each item, and breaks it into fragments. Then He gives fragments to the twelve disciples and tells them to distribute the food to the crowd.

17Everyone eats. Everyone is satisfied. Nobody goes away hungry. In fact, when the disciples recover the leftovers, they have 12 baskets full of broken pieces.

18Once Jesus was praying in solitude. The disciples were nearby, and He came to them with a question.

Jesus: What are the people saying about Me?

Disciples: 19Some people think You're John the Baptist. Others say You're the prophet Elijah, or else one of the other ancient prophets who has come back from the dead.

Jesus: 20Ah, but what about you? Who do you say that I am?

Peter: God's Anointed, *the Liberating King.*

Jesus *(sternly)***:** 21Don't tell anyone this. 22The Son of Man must suffer intensely. He must be rejected by the religious establishment—the elders, the chief priests, the religious scholars. Then He will be killed. And then, on the third day He will be raised.

23If any of you want to walk My path, you're going to have to deny yourself. You'll have to take up your cross every day and follow Me. 24If you try to avoid danger and risk, then you'll lose everything. If you let go of your life and risk all for My sake, then your life will be rescued, *healed, made whole and full.* 25Listen, what good does it do you if you gain everything—if the whole world is in your pocket—but then your own life slips through your fingers and is lost to you?

26If you're ashamed of who I am and what I teach, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He comes in all His glory, the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy messengers. 27*Are you ready for this?* I'm telling you the truth: some of you will not taste death until your eyes see the kingdom of God.

► In this section of Luke, Jesus is working hard with the disciples. They have a lot to learn and not much time left to learn it. But their "not-getting-it factor" is quite amazing. Luke's tone betrays him shaking his head and chuckling as he writes, thinking about how foolish the disciples can be at times. And, of course, he's probably thinking of himself too . . . just as he hopes his readers will when they read about the stupid things the disciples say and do—one moment seeing and hearing glorious things, the next moment missing the point entirely.

28Those words had about eight days *to settle in with the disciples.* Then, once again, Jesus went away to pray. This time He took along only Peter, John, and James. They climbed a mountainside *and came to a place of solitude.*

29-32Jesus began to pray and the disciples tried to stay awake, but their eyes

grew heavier and heavier and finally they all fell asleep. When they awakened, they looked over at Jesus and saw something inexplicable happening. Jesus was changing before their eyes, beginning with His face. It seemed to glow. The glow spread, and even His clothing took on a blinding whiteness. Then, two figures appeared in the glorious radiance emanating from Jesus. The three disciples somehow knew that these figures were Moses and Elijah. Peter, James, and John overheard the conversation that took place among Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—a conversation that centered on Jesus' "departure"* and how He would accomplish this departure from the capital city, Jerusalem.

33 *The glow began to fade, and* it was clear that Moses and Elijah were about to disappear.

Peter *(to Jesus)***:** Please, Master, it is good for us to be here *and see this*. Can we make three structures—one to honor You, one to honor Moses, and one to honor Elijah, *to try to capture what's happening here*?

Peter had no idea what he was saying.

34 While he spoke a cloud descended, and they were enveloped in it, and fear fell on them. 35 Then a voice came out of everywhere and nowhere at once.

Voice from Heaven: This is My Son!* This is the One I have chosen! Listen to Him!*

36 Then the voice was silent, *the cloud disappeared,* and Moses and Elijah were gone. Peter, James, and John were left speechless, *stunned*, *staring at* Jesus who now stood before them alone. For a long time, they did not say a word about this whole experience.

37 They came down the mountain, and the next day yet another huge crowd gathered around Jesus. There was a man in the crowd who shouted out.

Man in Crowd: 38 Teacher! Please come and look at my son here, my only child. 39 From time to time, a demonic spirit seizes him. It makes him scream and go into convulsions. He foams at the mouth. It nearly destroys him and only leaves after causing him great distress. 40 *While You were up on the mountain,* I begged Your disciples to liberate him from this spirit, but they were incapable of helping us.

Jesus: 41 O generation faithless, twisted, and crooked, how long can I be with you? How much can I bear? Bring your boy here.

42 The boy had taken a few steps toward Jesus when suddenly the demon seemed to rip into the boy, throwing him into convulsions. Jesus spoke sternly to the demonic spirit, and the boy was healed. Jesus presented the boy to his father.

43 *The crowd began cheering and* discussing this amazing healing and the power of God, but Jesus turned to His disciples.

Jesus: 44 Listen. Listen hard. Let these words get down deep: the Son of Man is going to be turned over to the authorities and arrested.

45 They had no idea what He meant by this; they heard the words but missed the meaning, and they felt too afraid to ask Him to explain further.

46 Later the close followers of Jesus began to argue over the *stupid and vain* question, "Which one of us is the greatest disciple?"

47 Jesus saw what was going on—*not just the argument, but* the deeper heart issues—so He found a child and had the child stand beside Him.

Jesus: 48 *See this little one?* Whoever welcomes a little child in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me. The smallest one among you is therefore the greatest.

John: 49 Master, we found this fellow casting out demons. He said he was doing it in Your name, but he's not one of our group. So we told him to stop.

Jesus: 50 *What?* No! Don't think like that! Whoever is not working against you is working with you.

51 The time approached for Him to be taken back up *to the Father*; so strong with resolve, Jesus made Jerusalem His destination.

52 He sent some people ahead of Him into the territory of the Samaritans,

* 9:32 Literally, His exodus * 9:35 Psalm 2:7; Luke 3:22 * 9:35 Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 42:1

a minority group at odds with the Jewish majority. He wanted His messengers to find a place for them to stay in a village *along the road to Jerusalem.* 53But because the Samaritans realized Jesus was going to Jerusalem, they refused to welcome them.

James and John *(outraged)*: 54Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy these people who have rejected You?* [Just as Elijah did.]*

Jesus *(turning toward them and shaking His head)*: 55You just don't get it. [56The Son of Man didn't come to ruin the lives of people, but He came to liberate them.]*

He led them on toward another village. 57Farther along on the road, a man volunteered to become a disciple.

Volunteer: I'll follow You to any destination.

Jesus: 58Foxes are at home in their burrows. Birds are at home in their nests. But the Son of Man has no home. 59You (to another person)—I want you to follow Me!

Another Volunteer: *I'd be glad to,* Teacher, but let me first attend to my father's funeral.

Jesus: 60Let the dead bury their dead. I'm giving you a different calling—to go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

A Third Volunteer: 61I'll come, Jesus. I'll follow You. But just let me first run home to say good-bye to my family.

Jesus: 62Listen, if your hand is on the plow but your eyes are looking backward, then you're not fit for the kingdom of God.

10 The Lord then recruited and deployed 70* more disciples. He sent them ahead, in teams of two, to visit all the towns and settlements between them and Jerusalem. 2This is what He ordered.

Jesus: There's a great harvest waiting in the fields, but there aren't many good workers to harvest it. Pray that the Harvest Master will send out good workers to the fields.

3It's time for you *70* to go. I'm sending you out *armed with vulnerability,* like lambs walking into a pack of wolves. 4Don't bring a wallet. Don't carry a backpack. I don't even want you to wear sandals. Walk along *barefoot, quietly,* without stopping for small talk. 5When you enter a house seeking lodging, say, "Peace on this house!" 6If a child of peace—one who welcomes God's message of peace—is there, your peace will rest on him. If not, don't worry; nothing is wasted. 7Stay where you're welcomed. *Become part of the family,* eating and drinking whatever they give you. You're My workers, and you deserve to be cared for. Again, don't go from house to house, 8but settle down in a town and eat whatever they serve you. 9Heal the sick and say to the townspeople, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

10Of course, not every town will welcome you. If you're rejected, walk through the streets and say, 11"*We're leaving this town.* We'll wipe off the dust that clings to our feet in protest against you. But even so, know this: the kingdom of God has come near." 12I tell you the truth, on *judgment* day, Sodom will have an easier time of it than the town *that rejects My messengers.*

13It's going to be bad for you, Chorazin! It's going to be bad for you, Bethsaida! If the mighty works done in your streets had been done in the cities of Tyre and Sidon, they would have been moved to turn to God and cry out in sackcloth and ashes. 14On judgment day, Tyre and Sidon will have an easier time of it than you. 15It's going to be bad for you, too, Capernaum! Will you be celebrated to heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead.

16*Listen, disciples:* if people give you a hearing, they're giving Me a hearing. If they reject you, they're rejecting Me. And if they reject Me, they're rejecting the One who sent Me. *So—go now!*

17When the 70* *completed their mission and* returned *to report on their experiences,* they were elated.

Seventy: It's amazing, Lord! When we use Your name, the demons do what we say!

Jesus: 18*I know.* I saw Satan falling from above like a lightning bolt. 19I've given

* 9:54 2 Kings 1:10, 12 * 9:54 Most early manuscripts omit this portion. * 9:56 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 10:1 Other early manuscripts read "72." * 10:17 Other early manuscripts read "72."

you true authority. You can smash vipers and scorpions under your feet.* You can walk all over the power of the enemy. You can't be harmed. 20But listen—that's not the point. Don't be elated that evil spirits leave when you say to leave. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

21Then Jesus Himself became elated. The Holy Spirit was on Him, and He began to pray with joy.

Jesus: Thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. Thank You for hiding Your mysteries from the wise and intellectual, instead revealing them to little children. Your ways are truly gracious. 22My Father has given Me everything. No one knows the full identity of the Son except the Father, and nobody knows the full identity of the Father except the Son, and the Son fully reveals the Father to whomever He wishes. 23(then almost in a whisper to the disciples) How blessed are your eyes to see what you see! 24Many prophets and kings dreamed of seeing what you see, but they never got a glimpse. They dreamed of hearing what you hear, but they never heard it.

25Just then a scholar *of the Hebrew Scriptures* tried to trap Jesus.

Scholar: Teacher, what must I do to experience the eternal life?

Jesus *(answering with a question)*: 26What is written in the *Hebrew* Scriptures? How do you interpret their answer to your question?

Scholar: 27You shall love—"love the Eternal One your God with everything you have: all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind"*—and "love your neighbor as yourself."*

Jesus: 28*Perfect.* Your answer is correct. Follow these commands and you will live.

29The scholar *was frustrated by this response because he* was hoping to make himself appear smarter than Jesus.

Scholar: Ah, but who is my neighbor?

Jesus: 30This fellow was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho when some robbers mugged him. They took his clothes, beat him to a pulp, and left him naked and bleeding and in critical condition. 31By chance, a priest was going down that same road, and when he saw the wounded man, he crossed over to the other side and passed by. 32Then a Levite *who was on his way to assist in the temple* also came and saw the victim lying there, and he too kept his distance. 33Then a *despised* Samaritan journeyed by. When he saw the fellow, he felt compassion for him. 34The Samaritan went over to him, stopped the bleeding, applied some first aid, and put the poor fellow on his donkey. He brought the man to an inn and cared for him through the night.

35The next day, the Samaritan took out *some money*—two days' wages* to be exact—and paid the innkeeper, saying, "Please take care of this fellow, and if this isn't enough, I'll repay you next time I pass through."

36Which of these three proved himself a neighbor to the man who had been mugged by the robbers?

Scholar: 37The one who showed mercy to him.

Jesus: Well then, go and behave like that Samaritan.

► This story brings together many themes from Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom. Samaritans are seen as "half-breeds" by Jesus' fellow Jews—racially mixed and also religiously compromised. By making a Samaritan the hero of the story, Jesus is once again tweaking assumptions and breaking out of conventional boxes: "In the kingdom of God," Jesus is saying, "the outcasts and last can move to the front of the line." The focus for Jesus is not on the kinds of sophisticated arguments preferred by the religious scholar; for Jesus the kingdom of God is about living life, and in particular, living a life of love for God and for neighbor—whoever that neighbor may be.

* 10:19 Psalm 91:13 * 10:27 Deuteronomy 6:5 * 10:27 Leviticus 19:18 * 10:35 Literally, denarii, Roman coins

38Jesus continued from there *toward Jerusalem* and came to another village. Martha, a resident of that village, welcomed Jesus into her home. 39Her sister, Mary, went and sat at Jesus' feet, listening to Him teach. 40Meanwhile Martha was anxious about all the hospitality arrangements.

Martha *(interrupting Jesus)*: Lord, why don't You care that my sister is leaving me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to get over here and help me.

Jesus: 41Oh Martha, Martha, you are so anxious and concerned about a million details, 42but really, only one thing matters. Mary has chosen that one thing, and I won't take it away from her.

11 Another time Jesus was praying, and when He finished, one of His disciples approached Him.

Disciple: Teacher, would You teach us Your way of prayer? John taught his disciples his way of prayer, *and we're hoping You'll do the same.*

Jesus: 2Here's how to pray:

Father [in heaven], may Your name be revered.
May Your kingdom come.
[May Your will be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven.]
3Give us the food we need for tomorrow,
4And forgive us for our wrongs,
for we forgive those who wrong us.
And lead us away from temptation.
[And save us from the evil one.]*

5Imagine that one of your friends comes over at midnight. He bangs on the door and shouts, "Friend, will you lend me three loaves of bread? 6A friend of mine just showed up unexpectedly from a journey, and I don't have anything to feed him." 7Would you shout out from your bed, "I'm already in bed, and so are the kids. I already locked the door. I can't be bothered"? 8You know this as well as I do: even if you didn't care that this fellow was your friend, if he keeps knocking long enough, you'll get up and give him whatever he needs simply because of his brash persistence!

9So listen: Keep on asking, and you will receive. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened for you. 10All who keep asking will receive, all who keep seeking will find, and doors will open to those who keep knocking.

11Some of you are fathers, so ask yourselves this: if your son comes up to you and asks for a fish for dinner, will you give him a snake instead? 12If your boy wants an egg to eat, will you give him a scorpion? 13Look, all of you are flawed in so many ways, yet in spite of all your faults, you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to all who ask!

14*Picture this:*

Jesus is exorcising a demon that has long kept a man from speaking. When the demon is expelled, the man starts talking and the people are amazed. 15*But then controversy erupts.*

Some People: Do you know why He can cast out demons? It's because He's in league with the demon prince, Beelzebul.

16Other people want to see more, so they challenge Jesus to give them another miraculous sign. 17Jesus knows what they're thinking.

Jesus: *People, be logical.* If a kingdom is divided against itself, it will collapse. If a ruling family is divided against itself, it will fall apart.

18So if Satan's kingdom is divided against itself, won't his whole enterprise collapse? Does it make any sense to say I'm casting out demons by Beelzebul? 19Besides, if you're saying it takes satanic power to cast out Satan, by whose power do your own exorcists work? If you condemn Me for an exorcism, you'll have to condemn them. 20But if I by the power of God cast out demonic spirits, then *face this fact*: the kingdom of God is here, *just as I've been saying.*

21When a man of power with his full array of weapons guards his own palace, everything inside is secure. 22But when a new man who is stronger *and better armed* attacks the palace, the old ruler will be overcome, his weapons and trusted defenses will be removed, and his treasures will be plundered. 23Can

* 11:2-4 The earliest manuscripts omit the bracketed text.

you see that I'm asking you to choose whose side you're on—working with Me or fighting against Me?

These people think they are experts on demonic spirits, but Jesus instructs them in how these things actually work.

24When a demonic spirit is expelled from someone, he wanders through waterless wastelands seeking rest. But there is no rest for him anywhere, so he says, "I'm going back to my old house." 25He returns and finds the old house has been swept clean and fixed up again. 26So he goes and finds seven other spirits even worse than he is, and they make themselves at home in the man's life so that he's worse off now than he was before.

27As He is speaking, a woman shouts out from the crowd and interrupts Him.

Woman: How blessed is Your mother's womb for bearing You! How blessed are her 28breasts for nursing You!

Jesus: No, how blessed are those who hear God's voice and make God's message their way of life.

29*Jesus was becoming more and more popular,* and the crowds swelled wherever He went. *He wasn't impressed.*

Jesus: This generation is evil. These people are seeking signs *and spectacles, but I'm not going to play their game.* The only sign they will be given is the sign of Jonah. 30Just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

31The queen of Ethiopia will stand to condemn the people of this generation on the day of judgment. She, *an outsider,* came from so far away to hear the wisdom given to Solomon, but now, something greater than Solomon is here: *how are the people of this generation responding?*

32Similarly, the people of Nineveh will stand to condemn the people of this generation on the day of judgment. They, *outsiders,* responded and changed because of the preaching of Jonah, but now, something greater than Jonah is here: *how are the people of this generation responding?*

33*You need a light to see.* Only an idiot would light a lamp and then put it beneath the floor or under a bucket. No, any intelligent person would put the lamp on a table so everyone who comes in the house can see. 34Listen, your eye, *your outlook, the way you see* is your lamp. If your way of seeing is functioning well, then your whole life will be enlightened. But if your way of seeing is darkened, then your life will be a dark, dark place. 35So be careful, people, because your light may be malfunctioning. 36If your outlook is good, then your whole life will be bright, with no shadowy corners, as when a radiant lamp brightens your home.

Jesus is fearless with Pharisees and scholars. To get through to them He agrees to eat in the home of a Pharisee where a religious scholar has also been invited.

37A Pharisee interrupted His speech with an invitation to dinner. Jesus accepted the invitation and took His place at his table. 38The Pharisee was offended that Jesus didn't perform the ceremonial handwashing before eating—*something Pharisees were fastidious about doing.*

Jesus: 39You Pharisees *are a walking contradiction.* You are so concerned about external things—like someone who washes the outside of a cup and bowl but never cleans the inside, *which is what counts!* Beneath your fastidious exterior is a mess of extortion and filth.

40You guys don't get it. Did the potter make the outside but not the inside too? 41*If you were full of goodness within,* you could overflow with generosity from within, and if you did that, everything would be clean for you.

42Woe to you, Pharisees! *Judgment will come on you!* You are fastidious about tithing—keeping account of every little leaf of mint and herb—but you neglect what really matters: justice and the love of God! If you'd get straight on what really matters, then your fastidiousness about little things would be worth something.

43Woe to you, Pharisees! *Judgment will come on you!* What you really love is having people fawn over you when you take the seat of honor in the synagogue or when you are greeted in the public market.

44*Wake up! See what you've become!*
Woe to you; you're like a field full of
unmarked graves. People walk on the
field and have no idea of the corruption
that's a few inches beneath their feet.

Scholar *(sitting at Jesus' table)*: 45Rabbi, if
You insult the Pharisees, then You insult
us too.

Jesus: 46Well, *now that you mention it,*
watch out, all you religious scholars!
Judgment will come on you too! You load
other people down with unbearable
burdens *of rules and regulations,* but you
don't lift a finger to help others. 47-48Woe
to you; *you don't fool anybody! You seem
very religious*—honoring the prophets
by building them elaborate memorial
tombs. Come to think of it, that's very fit-
ting, since you're so much like the people
who killed the prophets! They killed the
prophets; you build their tombs—*you're
all in the same family business!*

49This is why the Wisdom of God
said, "I will send these people My proph-
ets and emissaries,* and these people
will kill and persecute many of them."
50As a result, this generation will be
held accountable for the blood of all the
prophets shed from the very beginning
of time, 51from Abel's blood to Zechari-
ah's blood, who was killed in the temple
itself between the altar and the holy
place. I'm serious: this generation will be
held accountable.

52So, religious scholars, judgment
will come on you! *You're supposed to be
teachers, unlocking the door of knowledge
and guiding people through it.* But the
fact is, you've never even passed through
the doorway yourselves. You've taken the
key, left the door locked tight, and stood
in the way of everyone who sought entry.

53After that dinner, things were never the
same. The religious scholars and Pharisees
put constant pressure on Jesus, 54trying to
trap Him and trick Him into saying things
they could use to bring Him down.

12 The crowds at this time were
packed in so tightly that thou-
sands of people were stepping
on each other. Jesus spoke to His disciples,
knowing that the crowds could overhear.

Jesus: Guard yourselves from the yeast
that puffs up the Pharisees—hypocrisy,
*false appearance, trying to look better
than you really are.*

2Nothing is covered up that won't be
discovered; nothing is hidden that won't
be exposed. 3Whatever a person says in
the dark will be published in the light of
day, and whatever a person whispers in
private rooms will be broadcast from the
housetops.

4Listen, My friends, if people are try-
ing to kill you, why be afraid? After you're
dead, what more can they do? 5-6Here's
whose opinion you should be concerned
about: the One who can take your life and
then throw you into hell! He's the only
One you should fear! *But don't misunder-
stand: you don't really need to be afraid of
God,* because God cares for every little
sparrow. How much is a sparrow worth—
don't five of them sell for a few cents?*
7Since you are so much more precious to
God than a thousand flocks of sparrows,
and since God knows you in every detail—
down to the number of hairs on your
head *at this moment—you can be secure
and unafraid of any person, and* you have
nothing to fear from God *either.*

8*That's why I keep telling you not to
be intimidated.* If you identify unasham-
edly with Me before others, I, the Son
of Man, will affirm you before God and
all the heavenly messengers. 9But if
you deny Me before others, you will be
denied before God and all the heavenly
messengers. 10People can speak a word
against Me, the Son of Man, and the sin
is forgivable. *But they can go too far,* slan-
dering the testimony of the Holy Spirit
by rejecting His message about Me, and
they won't be forgiven for that.

11So you can anticipate that you will
be put on trial before the synagogues
and religious officials. Don't worry how
you'll respond, and don't worry what
you should say. 12The Holy Spirit will
give you the words to say at the moment
when you need them.

In the kingdom of God, money is valued in a very different way. In fact, concern for money can easily turn the spiritual life into a lukewarm, halfhearted affair.

13A person in the crowd got Jesus' attention.

Person in the Crowd: Teacher, intervene
and tell my brother to share the family
inheritance with me.

* 11:49 Literally, apostles * 12:5-6 Literally, two assaria

Jesus: 14Since when am I your judge or arbitrator?

15Then He used that opportunity to speak to the crowd.

Jesus: You'd better be on your guard against any type of greed, for a person's life is not about having a lot of possessions.

16(then, beginning another parable) A wealthy man owned some land that produced a huge harvest. 17He often thought to himself, "I have a problem here. I don't have anywhere to store all my crops. What should I do? 18I know! I'll tear down my small barns and build even bigger ones, and then I'll have plenty of storage space for my grain and all my other goods. 19Then I'll be able to say to myself, 'I have it made! I can relax and take it easy for years! So I'll just sit back, eat, drink, and have a good time!'"

20Then God interrupted the man's conversation with himself. "Excuse Me, Mr. Brilliant, but your time has come. Tonight you will die. Now who will enjoy everything you've earned and saved?"

21This is how it will be for people who accumulate huge assets for themselves but have no assets in relation to God.

22(then, to His disciples) This is why I keep telling you not to worry about anything in life—about what you'll eat, about how you'll clothe your body. 23Life is more than food, and the body is more than fancy clothes. 24Think about those crows flying over there: do they plant and harvest crops? Do they own silos or barns? *Look at them fly.* It looks like God is taking pretty good care of them, doesn't it? Remember that you are more precious to God than birds! 25Which one of you can add a single hour to your life or 18 inches* to your height by worrying really hard? 26If worry can't change anything, why do you do it so much?

27Think about those beautiful wild lilies growing over there. They don't work up a sweat toiling for needs or wants—they don't worry about clothing. Yet the great King Solomon never had an outfit that was half as glorious as theirs!

28Look at the grass growing over there. One day it's thriving in the fields. The next day it's being used as fuel. *If God takes such good care of such transient things,* how much more you can depend on God to care for you, weak in faith as you are. 29Don't reduce your life to the pursuit of food and drink; don't let your mind be filled with anxiety. 30People of the world who don't know God pursue these things, *but you have a Father caring for you,* a Father who knows all your needs.

31*Since you don't need to worry—about security and safety, about food and clothing*—then pursue God's kingdom *first and foremost*, and these other things will come to you as well.

32My little flock, don't be afraid. *God is your Father, and* your Father's great joy is to give you His kingdom.

33That means you can sell your possessions and give generously to the poor. You can have a different kind of savings plan: one that never depreciates, one that never defaults, one that can't be plundered by crooks or destroyed by natural calamities. 34*Your treasure will be stored in the heavens,* and since your treasure is there, your heart will be lodged there as well.

35-36*I'm not just talking theory. There is urgency in all this.* If you're apathetic and complacent, then you'll miss the moment of opportunity. You should be wide awake and on your toes like servants who are waiting for their master to return from a big wedding reception. They'll have their shoes on and their lamps lit so they can open the door for him as soon as he arrives home. 37How fortunate those servants will be when the master knocks and they open the door immediately! You know what the master will do? He'll put on an apron, sit them down at the kitchen table, and he'll serve them a midnight snack. 38The later he comes home—whether it's at midnight or even later, just before dawn—the more fortunate the alert servants will be.

39*In contrast, imagine a complacent, apathetic household manager whose house gets robbed.* If he had been aware that thieves *were waiting in the bushes* and what hour they were coming, [he would have watched and]* he never would have left the house! 40I'm trying to tell you that these are times for alertness, times requiring a sense of urgency and intensity, because *like the master in the first story or the thief in the second,* the Son of Man shows up by surprise.

* 12:25 Literally, one cubit * 12:39 The earliest manuscripts omit the bracketed portion.

Peter: 41Lord, I'm not sure if this parable is intended only for us disciples or if this is for everyone else too.

Jesus: 42Imagine the stories of two household managers, and decide for yourself which one is faithful and smart. Each household manager is told by his master *to take good care of all his possessions and* to oversee the other employees—*the butlers, cooks, gardeners, and so on.* 43One servant immediately busies himself in doing just what he was told. His master eventually comes to check on him 44and rewards him with a major promotion and with more responsibility and trust. 45The other household manager thinks, "Look, my boss is going to be gone for a long time. *I can be complacent; there's no urgency here."* So he beats the other employees—the women as well as the men. He sits around *like a slob,* eating and getting drunk. 46Then the boss comes home unexpectedly and catches him by surprise. One household manager will be fortunate indeed, and the other will be cut into pieces and thrown out.

47Now if a servant who is given clear instructions by his master doesn't follow those instructions but instead is complacent and apathetic, then he will be punished severely. 48But if a servant doesn't know what his master expects and behaves badly, then he will receive a lighter punishment. If you are given much, much will be required of you. If much is entrusted to you, much will be expected of you.

49*This is serious business we're involved in.* My mission is to send a purging fire on the earth! In fact, I can hardly wait to see the smoke rising. 50I have a kind of baptism to go through, and I can't relax until My mission is accomplished! 51Do you think I've come with a nice little message of peace? No way. Believe Me, My message will divide. 52It will divide a household of five into three against two or two against three. 53It will divide father against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*

54(speaking to the crowd) You see a cloud arise *from the sea* in the west, and you can say, "Here comes a shower!" And you're right. 55Or you feel the hot wind blowing in from *the desert in* the south and you say, "It's going to be really hot!" And you're right. 56Listen, hypocrites! You can predict the weather by paying attention to the sky and the earth, but why can't you interpret the urgency of this present moment? 57Why don't you see it for yourselves?

58Imagine you're being sued. You and your accuser are on your way to court. Wouldn't you do everything in your power to settle out of court before you stand before the magistrate? After all, he might drag you to stand before the judge, and the judge might hand you over to the police, and they might throw you in jail. 59Once you're in jail, it's too late: you're not going anywhere until you've paid in full.

13 As He said this, some people told Him the latest news about a group of Galilean pilgrims *in Jerusalem—a group not unlike Jesus' own entourage.* Pilate butchered them *while they were at worship,* their own blood mingling with the blood of their sacrifices.

Jesus: 2Do you think these Galileans *were somehow being singled out for their sins,* that they were worse than any other Galileans, because they suffered this terrible death? 3Of course not. But listen, if you do not consider God's ways and truly change, then friends, you should prepare to face His judgment and eternal death.

4*Speaking of current events,* you've all heard about the 18 people killed *in that building accident* when the tower in Siloam fell. Were they extraordinarily bad people, worse than anyone else in Jerusalem, *so that they would deserve such an untimely death*? 5Of course not. *But all the buildings of Jerusalem will come crashing down on you* if you don't wake up and change direction now.

6(following up with this parable) A man has a fig tree planted in his vineyard. One day he comes out looking for fruit on it, but there are no figs. 7He says to the vineyard keeper, "Look at this tree. For three years, I've come hoping to find some fresh figs, but what do I find? Nothing. So just go ahead and cut it down. Why waste the space with a fruitless tree?"

* 12:53 Micah 7:6

[8]The vineyard keeper replies, "Give it another chance, sir. Give me one more year working with it. I'll cultivate the soil and heap on some manure to fertilize it. [9]If it surprises us and bears fruit next year, that will be great, but if not, then we'll cut it down."

[10]Around this time, He was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, *the Jewish day of rest*. [11]A woman there had been sick for 18 years; she was weak, hunched over, and unable to stand up straight.

Jesus *(noticing and speaking to her)*: [12-13]Woman, you are free from your sickness.

Jesus placed His hands on her and suddenly she could stand straight again. She started praising God, [14]but the synagogue official was indignant because Jesus had not kept their Sabbath regulations by performing this healing.

Synagogue Official: Look, there are six other days when it's appropriate to get work done. Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath!

Jesus: [15]You *religious leaders* are such hypocrites! Every single one of you unties his ox or donkey from its manger every single Sabbath Day, and then you lead it out to get a drink of water, right? [16]Do you care more about your farm animals than you care about this woman, one of Abraham's daughters, oppressed by Satan for 18 years? Can't we untie her from her oppression on the Sabbath?

[17]As the impact of His words settled in, His critics were humiliated, but everyone else loved what Jesus said and celebrated everything He was doing.

Jesus *(explaining)*: [18]Do you want to understand the kingdom of God? Do you want Me to tell you what it's like? [19]It's like a single mustard seed that someone took and planted in his garden. That tiny seed grew and became a tree so large that the birds could fly in and make their nests in its branches.

[20]Do you want Me to tell you what the kingdom of God is like? [21]It's like some yeast which a woman hid within a huge quantity of flour; soon the whole batch of dough was rising.

[22]He was pressing toward Jerusalem, His journey taking Him through various towns and villages. In each one, He taught the people. [23]Once a person asked this question:

Inquiring Individual: Lord, will only a few people be rescued?

Jesus: [24]Strive to enter through the narrow door now, because many people—hear Me on this—will try to enter *later on* and will not be able to. [25]Imagine you want to enter someone's home, but you wait until after the homeowner has shut the door. Then you stand outside and bang on the door, and you say, "Sir, please open the door for us!" But he will answer, "I don't know where you're from."

[26]Then you'll say, "Just a minute. We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." [27]But he'll say, "Sorry, I have no idea where you're from. Leave me, all of you evildoers." [28]Then you'll see something that will make you cry and grind your teeth together—you'll see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves will be on the outside looking in.

[29]And then you'll see people streaming in from east and west, from north and south, gathering around the table in the kingdom of God, *but you'll be on the outside looking in*. [30]That's how it will be; some are last now who will be first then, and some are first now who will be last then.

► Jesus' response shows that the Jewish people will be surprised by who enters the kingdom of God. It will not be just the Jews but people from all around the world—east and west, north and south. And they will also be surprised by who does not enter the kingdom, since some Jews will be on the outside looking in.

[31]Right then some Pharisees came and warned Him.

Pharisees: You'd better get out of here because Herod is plotting Your murder.

Jesus: 32You can give that sly fox this message: "Watch as I cast out demons and perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I'll reach My destination. 33But for today and tomorrow and the next day, I have to continue My journey, for no prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem."

34O Jerusalem! O Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and you stone the messengers who are sent to you. How often I wanted to gather in your children as a hen gathers in her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing to come to Me. 35Look now, your house is abandoned and empty. You won't see Me until you welcome Me with the words *of the psalms,* "Anyone who comes in the name of the Eternal One will be blessed!"*

14 Another Sabbath Day came and Jesus was invited to an official's home for a meal. This fellow was a leader of the Pharisees, and Jesus was still under close surveillance by them. 2Jesus noticed a man suffering from a swelling disorder. 3He questioned the religious scholars and Pharisees.

Jesus: Is it permitted by traditions and the Hebrew Scriptures to heal people on the Sabbath, or is it forbidden?

4They didn't reply. Then Jesus healed the man and sent him on his way.

Jesus: 5Would any single one of you leave his son* or even his ox in a well on the Sabbath if he had fallen into it, or would you pull him out immediately?

6They still didn't reply.

7Then He noticed how the guests were jockeying for places of honor at the dinner, so He gave them advice.

Jesus: 8Whenever someone invites you to a wedding dinner, don't sit at the head table. Someone more important than you might also have been invited, 9and your host will have to humiliate you publicly by telling you to give your seat to the other guest and to go find an open seat in the back of the room. 10Instead, go and sit in the back of the room. Then your host may find you and say, "My friend! Why are you sitting back here? Come up to this table near the front!" Then you will be publicly honored in front of everyone. 11Listen, if you lift yourself up, you'll be put down, but if you humble yourself, you'll be honored.

12Jesus still wasn't finished. Now He turned to the host who had invited Him to this gathering.

Jesus: When you host a dinner or banquet, don't invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do, they might invite you to a party of their own, and you'll be repaid for your kindness. 13Instead, invite the poor, the amputees, the cripples, the blind. 14Then you'll be blessed because they can never repay you. Your reward will come from God at the resurrection of the just and good.

Guest: 15Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!

Jesus: 16A man once hosted a huge banquet and invited many guests. 17When the time came, he sent his servant to tell the guests who had agreed to come, "We're ready! Come now!" 18But then every single guest began to make excuses. One said, "*Oh, I'm sorry.* I just bought some land, and I need to go see it. Please excuse me." 19Another said, "*So sorry.* I just bought five pairs of oxen. I need to go check them out. Please excuse me." 20Another said, "I just got married, so I can't come."

21The servant returned and reported their responses to his master. His master was angry and told the servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and alleys around town and bring the poor, the amputees, the blind, and the cripples."

22The servant came back again: "Sir, I've done as you said, but there is still more room." 23And the host said, "Well then, go out to the highways and hedges and bring in the complete strangers you find there, until my house is completely full. 24One thing is for sure, not one single person on the original guest list shall enjoy this banquet."

► Jesus continues to challenge Jewish ideas about who will be in the kingdom of God and how the Kingdom

* 13:35 Psalm 118:26 * 14:5 Some manuscripts read "donkey."

will work. Those who have been dishonored on earth will be honored in the Kingdom, and those in positions of economic and religious honor here will be dishonored there. He also challenges individuals to reconsider their personal value systems. They should not honor their own lives and family above Christ, but rather give them up for Him.

[25]Great crowds joined Him on His journey, and He turned to them.

Jesus: [26]If any of you come to Me without hating your own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and yes, even your own life, you can't be My disciple. [27]If you don't carry your own cross *as if to your own execution* as you follow Me, you can't be part of My movement. [28]Just imagine that you want to build a tower. Wouldn't you first sit down and estimate the cost to be sure you have enough to finish what you start? [29]If you lay the foundation but then can't afford to finish the tower, everyone will mock you: [30]"Look at that guy who started something that he couldn't finish!"

[31]Or imagine a king gearing up to go to war. Wouldn't he begin by sitting down *with his advisors* to determine whether his 10,000 troops could defeat the opponent's 20,000 troops? [32]If not, he'll send a peace delegation quickly and negotiate a peace treaty. [33]In the same way, if you want to be My disciple, it will cost you everything. *Don't underestimate that cost!*

[34]Don't be like salt that has lost its taste. How can its saltiness be restored? *Flavorless salt is absolutely worthless.* [35]You can't even use it as fertilizer, so it's worth less than manure! Don't just listen to My words here. Get the deeper meaning.

15 Jesus became increasingly popular among *notorious* sinners—tax collectors and other social outcasts. [2]The Pharisees and religious scholars noticed this.

Pharisees and Religious Scholars: This man welcomes immoral people and enjoys their company over a meal!

Jesus *(with another parable)***:** [3-4]Wouldn't every single one of you, if you have 100 sheep and lose one, leave the 99 in their grazing lands and go out searching for the lost sheep until you find it? [5]When you find the lost sheep, wouldn't you hoist it up on your shoulders, feeling wonderful? [6]And when you go home, wouldn't you call together your friends and neighbors? Wouldn't you say, "Come over and celebrate with me, because I've found my lost sheep"? [7]This is how it is in heaven. They're happier over one sinner who changes his way of life than they are over 99 good and just people who don't need to change their ways of life.

[8]Or imagine a woman who has 10 silver coins. She loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the whole house, and search diligently until that coin is found? [9]And when she finds it, doesn't she invite her friends and neighbors and say, "Celebrate with me! I've found that silver coin that I lost"? [10]Can't you understand? There is joy in the presence of all God's messengers over even one sinner who changes his way of life.

[11]Once there was this man who had two sons. [12]One day the younger son came to his father and said, "Father, eventually I'm going to inherit my share of your estate. Rather than waiting until you die, I want you to give me my share now." And so the father *liquidated assets and* divided them. [13]A few days passed and this younger son gathered all his wealth and set off on a journey to a distant land. Once there he wasted everything he owned on wild living. [14]He was broke, a terrible famine struck that land, and he felt desperately hungry and in need. [15]He got a job with one of the locals, who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. [16]The young man felt so miserably hungry that he wished he could eat the slop the pigs were eating. Nobody gave him anything.

[17]So he had this moment of self-reflection: "*What am I doing here?* Back home, my father's hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death? [18]I'll get up and return to my father, and I'll say, 'Father, I have done wrong—wrong against God and against you. [19]I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I'm wondering if you'd treat me as one of your hired servants?'" [20]So he got up and returned to his father. The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son

and ran out to him, enfolded him in an embrace, and kissed him.

21The son said, "Father, I have done a terrible wrong in God's sight and in your sight too. I have forfeited any right to be treated as your son."

22But the father turned to his servants and said, "Quick! Bring the best robe we have and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. 23Go get the fattest calf and butcher it. Let's have a feast and celebrate 24because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found." So they had this huge party.

25Now the man's older son was still out in the fields working. He came home at the end of the day and heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27The servant said, "Your brother has returned, and your father has butchered the fattest calf to celebrate his safe return."

28The older brother got really angry and refused to come inside, so his father came out and pleaded with him to join the celebration. 29But he argued back, "Listen, all these years I've worked hard for you. I've never disobeyed one of your orders. But how many times have you even given me a little goat to roast for a party with my friends? Not once! *This is not fair!* 30So this son of yours comes, this wasteful delinquent who has spent your hard-earned wealth on loose women, and what do you do? You butcher the fattest calf from our herd!"

31The father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours. 32Isn't it right to join in the celebration and be happy? This is your brother we're talking about. He was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found again!"

► The parable ends. Jesus never reveals how it came out. Did the older brother join the party and reconcile with his younger, wayward brother? Or did he stay outside, fuming over the seeming injustice of his father's extravagant love? The story remains unresolved because it is, in fact, an invitation—an invitation to the Pharisees and other opponents of Jesus to join Him in welcoming sinners and other outsiders into the joyful party of the Kingdom.

16 Here's a parable He told the disciples:

Jesus: Once there was a rich *and powerful* man who had an asset manager. One day, the man received word that his asset manager was squandering his assets.

2The rich man brought in the asset manager and said, "You've been accused of wrongdoing. I want a full and accurate accounting of all your financial transactions because you are really close to being fired."

3The manager said to himself, "*Oh, no!* Now what am I going to do? I'm going to lose my job here, and I'm too weak to dig ditches and too proud to beg. 4I have an idea. This plan will mean that I have a lot of hospitable friends when I get fired."

5So the asset manager set up appointments with each person who owed his master money. He said to the first debtor, "How much do you owe my boss?" 6The debtor replied, "A hundred barrels* of oil." The manager said, "I'm discounting your bill by half. Just write 50 on this contract." 7Then he said to the second debtor, "How much do you owe?" This fellow said, "A hundred bales* of wheat." The manager said, "I'm discounting your debt by 20 percent. Just write down 80 bales on this contract."

8When the manager's boss realized what he had done, he congratulated him for at least being clever. That's how it is: those attuned to this evil age are more clever in dealing with their affairs than the enlightened are in dealing with their affairs!

9*Learn some lessons from this crooked but clever asset manager*. Realize that the purpose of money is to strengthen friendships, to provide opportunities for being generous and kind. Eventually money will be useless to you—but if you use it generously to serve others, you will be welcomed joyfully into your eternal destination.

10If you're faithful in small-scale matters, you'll be faithful with far bigger

* 16:6 About 600-800 gallons * 16:7 About 700 bushels

responsibilities. If you're crooked in small responsibilities, you'll be no different in bigger things. 11If you can't even handle a small thing like money, who's going to entrust you with spiritual riches that really matter? 12If you don't manage well someone else's assets that are entrusted to you, who's going to give over to you important spiritual and personal relationships to manage?

13Imagine you're a servant and you have two masters giving you orders. *What are you going to do when they have conflicting demands?* You can't serve both, so you'll either hate the first and love the second, or you'll faithfully serve the first and despise the second. One master is God and the other is money. You can't serve them both.

14The Pharisees overheard all this, and they started mocking Jesus because they really loved money.

Jesus *(to the Pharisees)*: 15*You've made your choice.* Your ambition is to look good in front of other people, not God. But God sees through to your hearts. He values things differently from you. The goals you and your peers are reaching for God detests.

16The law and the prophets had their role until the coming of John *the Baptist.* Since John's arrival, the good news of the kingdom of God has been taught while people are clamoring to enter it. 17*That's not to say that God's rules for living are useless.* The stars in the sky and the earth beneath your feet will pass away before one letter of God's rules for living become worthless.

18*Take God's rules regarding marriage for example.* If a man divorces his wife and marries somebody else, then it's still adultery *because that man has broken his vow to God.* And if a man marries a woman divorced from her husband, he's committing adultery *for the same reason.*

19There was this rich man who had everything—purple clothing of fine quality and high fashion, gourmet meals every day, and a large house. 20Just outside his front gate lay this poor *homeless* fellow named Lazarus. Lazarus was covered in ugly skin lesions. 21He was so hungry he wished he could scavenge scraps from the rich man's trash. Dogs would come and lick the sores on his skin. 22The poor fellow died and was carried on the arms of the heavenly messengers to the embrace of Abraham. Then the rich fellow died and was buried 23and found himself in the place of the dead. In his torment, he looked up, and off in the distance he saw Abraham, with Lazarus in his embrace.

24He shouted out, "Father Abraham! Please show me mercy! Would you send *that beggar* Lazarus to dip his fingertip in water and cool my tongue? These flames are hot, and I'm in agony!"

25But Abraham said, "Son, you seem to be forgetting something: your life was full to overflowing with comforts and pleasures, and the life of Lazarus was just as full with suffering and pain. So now is his time of comfort, and now is your time of agony. 26Besides, a great canyon separates you and us. Nobody can cross over from our side to yours, or from your side to ours."

27"Please, Father *Abraham,* I beg you," the formerly rich man continued, "send Lazarus to my father's house. 28I have five brothers there, *and they're on the same path I was on.* If Lazarus warns them, they'll choose another path and won't end up here in torment."

29But Abraham said, "*Why send Lazarus?* They already have the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets to instruct them. Let your brothers hear them."

30"No, Father Abraham," he said, "*they're already ignoring the law and the prophets.* But if someone came back from the dead, then they'd listen for sure; then they'd change their way of life."

31Abraham answered, "If they're not listening to Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone comes back from the dead."

► The theme of money and wealth has come up again and again. It's what really motivates the Pharisees, it turns out. Money might be God's top competitor. In the previous parable, Jesus turns the tables. The rich man, who represents what most people wish they could become, turns out to be the one who is hopeless in God's judgment; he is rich in possessions but poor in compassion, and compassion is what God measures, not wealth. The kingdom of God, Jesus is making

clear, calls rich people to stop working to increase their personal wealth portfolio; instead, it challenges them to join God by using their wealth and power on behalf of the poor.

17 **Jesus** *(to His disciples)*: You can't stop temptations to do wrong from coming. But how tragic it will be for the person who becomes the source of the temptation! 2It would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3So each of you needs to be careful. If your brother sins [against you],* confront him about it, and if he has a change of mind and heart, then forgive him. 4Even if he wrongs you seven times in a single day, if he turns back to you each time and says he's sorry and will change, you must forgive him.

The Lord's Emissaries: 5*We don't have enough faith for this!* Help our faith to grow!

Jesus *(pointing to a nearby mulberry tree)*: 6*It's not like you need a huge amount of faith.* If you just had faith the size of a single, tiny mustard seed, you could say to this huge tree, "Pull up your roots and replant yourself in the sea," and it would *fly through the sky and* do what you said. *So even a little faith can accomplish the seemingly impossible.*

7*Imagine this scenario.* You have a servant—say he's been out plowing a field or taking care of the sheep—and he comes in hot and sweaty from his work. Are you going to say, "*You poor thing!* Come in and sit down right away"? Of course not! 8Wouldn't you be more likely to say, "First, cook my supper and set the table, and then after I've eaten, you can get something to eat and drink for yourself"? 9And after your servant has done everything you told him to do, are you going to make a big deal about it and thank him? [I don't think so!]* 10Now apply this situation to yourselves. When you've done everything I'm telling you to do, just say, "We're servants, unworthy of extra consideration or thanks; we're just doing our duty."

11Jesus was still pressing toward Jerusalem, taking a road that went along the border between Samaria *(considered undesirable territory)* and Galilee. 12On the outskirts of a border town along this road, He was greeted from a distance by a group of 10 people who were under quarantine because of an ugly and disgusting skin disease known as leprosy.

Lepers *(shouting across the distance)*: 13Jesus, Master, show mercy to us!

Jesus: 14Go now and present yourselves to the priests *for inspection of your disease.*

They went, and before they reached the priests, their skin disease was healed, *leaving no trace of the disease that scarred them and separated them from the community.*

15One of them, the instant he realized he had been healed, turned and ran back to Jesus, shouting praises to God. 16He prostrated himself facedown at Jesus' feet.

Leper: Thank You! Thank You!

Now this fellow happened to be, *not a Jew,* but a Samaritan.

Jesus: 17Didn't all ten receive the same healing this fellow did? Where are the other nine? 18Was the only one who came back to give God praise an outsider? 19(to the Samaritan man) Get up, and go your way. Your faith has made you healthy again.

20Some Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come.

Jesus: The kingdom of God comes—but not with signs that you can observe. 21People are not going to say, "Look! Here it is!" They're not going to say, "Look! It's over there!" You want to see the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is already here among you.

22(to His disciples) Days are coming when you will wish you could see just one of the days of the Son of Man, but you won't see it. 23People will say, "Look, it's there!" or "Look! It's here!" Don't even bother looking. Don't follow their lead. 24You know how lightning flashes across the sky, bringing light from one horizon to the other. That's how the Son of Man will be when His time comes.

* 17:3 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 17:9 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

25But first, He must face many sufferings. He must be rejected by this generation. 26The days of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah. 27People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage. *Everything seemed completely normal* until the day Noah entered the ark. Then it started raining, and soon they were all destroyed by the flood.

28It was just the same in the days of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building, *and carrying on business as usual.* 29But then came the day when Lot left Sodom—a different kind of rain began to fall, and they were all destroyed by fire and sulfur falling from the sky.* 30That's how it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Since people are easily distracted, Jesus says that they shouldn't get so caught up in the routines of daily life that they forget to remain faithful to Him.

31When that day comes, if you're on the housetop, don't run inside to try to save any of your belongings. If you're in the field, don't bother running back *to the house.* 32Remember Lot's wife. *Turning back is fatal for those who do so.* 33If you try to hold on to your life, it will slip through your fingers; if you let go of your life, you'll keep it. 34Listen, on the day of the Son of Man, two people will be asleep in bed; destruction will take one and the other will be left to survive. 35Two women will be grinding grain together; destruction will take one and the other will survive. [36Two men will be working out in the field; destruction will overtake one and the other will survive.]*

Disciples: 37Where, Lord?

Jesus: Where vultures circle over rotting corpses.

18 He told them a parable, urging them to keep praying and never grow discouraged. The parable went like this:

Jesus: 2There was a judge living in a certain city. He showed no respect for God or humanity. 3In that same city there was a widow. Again and again she kept coming to him seeking justice: "Clear my name from my adversary's false accusations!" 4He paid no attention to her request for a while, but then he said to himself, "I don't care about what God thinks of me, much less what any mere human thinks. 5But this widow is driving me crazy. She's never going to quit coming to see me unless I hear her case and provide her legal protection."

6Did you catch what this self-assured judge said? 7*If he can be moved to act justly,* won't God bring justice for His chosen people when they cry to Him day and night? Will He be slow to bring them justice? 8Mark My words: God will intervene fast with vindication. But here's the question: when the Son of Man comes, will He find anyone who still has faith?

Jesus emphasizes that the kingdom of God will not come through valiant efforts but as people pray, "may Your kingdom come," with persistence and with humility.

9He told another parable—this one addressed to people who were confident in their self-righteousness and looked down on other people with disgust.

Jesus: 10Imagine two men *walking up a road,* going to the temple to pray. One of them is a Pharisee and the other is a *despised* tax collector. 11Once inside the temple, the Pharisee stands up and prays this prayer in honor of himself: "God, how I thank You that I am not on the same level as other people—crooks, cheaters, the sexually immoral—like this tax collector over here. 12*Just look at me!* I fast *not once but* twice a week, and I faithfully pay my tithes on every penny of income." 13Over in the corner, the tax collector begins to pray, but he won't even lift his eyes to heaven. He pounds on his chest *in sorrow* and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

14*Now imagine these two men walking back down the road to their homes.* Listen, it's the tax collector who walks home clean before God, and not the Pharisee, because whoever lifts himself up will be put down and whoever takes a humble place will be lifted up.

15Some people brought infants to Jesus, hoping He would touch them *in blessing.* The disciples rebuked them for doing so, 16but Jesus called to the people.

* 17:29 Genesis 19:24 * 17:36 Most manuscripts omit verse 36.

Jesus: Let the little children come to Me. Never hinder them! Don't you realize—the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children? 17You can depend on this: if you don't receive the Kingdom as a child would, you won't enter it at all.

Public Official: 18Good Teacher, what do I need to do to inherit the life of the age to come?

Jesus: 19Why did you just call Me good? No one is good but God—only God. 20You know what the *Hebrew* Scriptures command: "Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and mother."*

Public Official: 21I've already been doing these things—since I came of age.

Jesus: 22One thing you still lack—one thing; sell all your possessions and distribute the proceeds to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. Then you can come and follow Me.

23The man heard these words and sadness came over his face, for his wealth was considerable.

Jesus: 24What a hard thing it is for those with much wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25In fact, it would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than it would be for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God!

Listeners: 26Then who can be liberated?

Jesus: 27Remember, what is humanly impossible is possible with God.

Peter: 28We have left our homes and followed You.

Jesus: 29I'm telling you the truth: there is nobody who leaves his house or wife or siblings or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30who will not receive more than he has given up—much more—in this age and in the age to come. He will receive eternal life.

31He took the twelve aside and spoke privately to them.

Jesus: Look, *my friends,* we are going up to Jerusalem. Everything the prophets have written about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32He will be handed over to the outsiders. They will mock Him, disgrace Him, and spit on Him; 33they will scourge Him, and they will kill Him. And on the third day, He will rise from death.

34But they had no comprehension of what He was talking about. The meaning was hidden from them, and they couldn't grasp it.

35*Picture this:*

Jesus is nearing the city of Jericho. A blind man is sitting there, begging by the roadside. 36He can hear the sounds of the crowd *accompanying Jesus*, and he asks what's going on.

Crowd: 37Jesus of Nazareth is passing this way.

38Then the man starts shouting.

Blind Man: Jesus, Son of *King* David, show mercy to me!

39The people in the front of the crowd reprimand him and tell him to be quiet, but he just shouts louder.

Blind Man: Son of *King* David, show mercy to me!

40Jesus stops and tells the people to bring the man over to Him. The man stands in front of Jesus.

Jesus: 41What do you want Me to do for you?

Blind Man: Lord, let me receive my sight.

Jesus: 42Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.

43At that very instant, the man is able to see. He begins following Jesus, shouting praises to God; and everyone in the crowd, when they see what has happened, starts praising God too.

19 Jesus enters Jericho and seems only to be passing through. 2Living in Jericho is a man named Zaccheus. He's the head tax collector and is very rich. 3He is also very short. He wants to see Jesus as He passes through the center of town, but he can't get a glimpse because the crowd blocks his view. 4So he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs

* 18:20 Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20

It is common to speculate about when the kingdom of God will fully arrive. But Jesus, through the previous parable, makes it clear that such speculation is a waste of time. Instead, people should be busy investing their lives in the kingdom of God. Earlier, in His encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus invited the man to stop collaborating with the Roman Empire for his own benefit and to switch sides—so he could start working with the kingdom of God for the sake of the poor. The man refused; but soon after, a man named Zaccheus volunteered to do that very thing: to stop working for his own wealth by collaborating with Caesar's kingdom and to start working for justice for the poor by collaborating with God's kingdom. Speculation about the dates and times of the coming of the Kingdom can obscure the point—believers should live, starting now, in the way of the Kingdom.

up into a sycamore tree so he can see Jesus when He passes beneath him.

5Jesus comes along and looks up into the tree[, and there He sees Zaccheus].*

Jesus: Zaccheus, hurry down from that tree because I need to stay at your house *tonight*.

6Zaccheus scrambles down and joyfully brings Jesus back to his house. 7Now the crowd sees this, and they're upset.

Crowd *(grumbling)*: Jesus has become the houseguest of this fellow who is a notorious sinner.

Zaccheus: 8Lord, I am giving half of my goods to the poor, and whomever I have cheated I will pay back four times what I took.

Jesus: 9Today liberation has come to this house, since even Zaccheus is living as a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek and to liberate the lost.

11The crowd has been listening to all this, and everyone assumes that the kingdom of God is going to appear at any moment, since He's nearing Jerusalem. So He tells them this parable:

Jesus: 12A ruler once planned a journey to a distant country to take the throne of that country and then return home. 13Before his departure, he called 10 of his servants and gave them each about three months of wages.* "Use this money to buy and sell until I return." 14After he departed, the people under his rule despised him and sent messengers with a clear message: "We do not want this man to rule over us."

15He successfully assumed kingship *of the distant country* and returned home. He called his 10 servants together and told them to give an account of their success in doing business with the money he had entrusted to them.

16The first came before him and said, "Lord, I have made 10 times the amount you entrusted to me." 17The ruler replied, "Well done! You're a good servant indeed! Since you have been faithful in handling a small amount of money, I'll entrust you with authority over 10 cities *in my new kingdom*."

18The second came and said, "Lord, I've made five times the original amount." 19The ruler replied, "I'll entrust you with authority over five cities."

20A third came and said, "Lord, I have successfully preserved the money you gave me. I wrapped it up in a napkin and hid it away 21because I was afraid of you. After all, you're a tough man. You have a way of taking a profit without making an investment and harvesting when you didn't plant any seed."

22The ruler replied, "I will condemn you using your very own words, you worthless servant! So I'm a severe man, am I? So I take a profit without making an investment and harvest without planting seed? 23Then why didn't you invest my money in the bank so I could have at least gained some interest on it?" 24The ruler told the onlookers, "Take the money I gave him, and give it to the one who multiplied my investment by 10."

25Then the onlookers replied, "Lord, he already has 10 times the original amount!"

26The ruler responded, "Listen, whoever has some will be given more, and whoever doesn't have anything will lose what he thinks he has. 27And these

* 19:5 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 19:13 Literally, mina, Roman coins

enemies of mine who didn't want me to rule over them—bring them here and execute them in my presence."

28When He finished the parable, He pushed onward, climbing the steep hills toward Jerusalem.

29He approached the towns of Bethphage and Bethany, which are near Mount Olivet. He sent two of the disciples ahead.

Jesus: 30Go to the next village. When you enter, you will find a colt tied—a colt that has never been ridden before. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you why you're untying it, just say, "The Lord needs it."

32So the two disciples found things just as He had told them. 33When its owners did indeed ask why they were untying the colt, 34the disciples answered *as they had been instructed*.

Disciples: The Lord needs it.

35They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their coats on the colt's back, and then sat Jesus on it. 36As Jesus rode along, some people began to spread their garments on the road *as a carpet*. 37When they passed the crest of Mount Olivet and began descending toward Jerusalem, a huge crowd of disciples began to celebrate and praise God with loud shouts, glorifying God for the mighty works they had witnessed.

Crowd of Disciples: 38The King who comes in the name of the Eternal One is blessed!*

Peace in heaven! Glory in the highest!

Pharisees *(who were in the crowd)*: 39Teacher, tell these people to stop making these wild claims and acting this way!

Jesus: 40Listen—if they were silent, the very rocks would start to shout!

41When Jerusalem came into view, He looked intently at the city and began to weep.

Jesus: 42How I wish you knew today what would bring peace! But you can't see. 43Days will come when your enemies will build up a siege ramp, and you will be surrounded and contained on every side.* 44Your enemies will smash you into rubble and not leave one stone standing on another, and they will cut your children down too, because you did not recognize the day when God's Anointed One visited you.

► In this powerful scene as Jesus comes into the city, echoing the words of Zechariah 9:9, Jesus shows how His kingdom is upside down compared to the kingdoms of this world. Caesar enters a town riding a white stallion, accompanied by dignitaries and soldiers with weapons. Jesus comes on a little donkey, cheered by common people tossing their coats in the donkey's path. The contrast between the two ways, He suggests through tears, is the difference between violent destruction and peace.

45He entered *Jerusalem* and went into the temple. He began driving out the temple merchants.

Jesus: 46The *Hebrew* Scriptures say, "My house shall be a house of prayer,"* but you have turned it into a shelter for thieves.*

47He came back day after day to teach in the temple. The chief priests, the religious scholars, and the leading men of the city wanted to kill Him, 48but because He was so popular among the people—who hung upon each word He spoke—they were unable to do anything.

20 One day when He was teaching the people in the temple and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests, religious scholars, and elders came up and questioned Him.

Elders: 2Tell us by what authority You march into the temple and disrupt our worship. Who gave You this authority?

Jesus: 3Let Me ask you a question first. Tell Me this: 4was the ritual cleansing

* 19:38 Psalm 118:26 * 19:43 Ezekiel 4:2; 26:8 * 19:46 Isaiah 56:7 * 19:46 Jeremiah 7:11

In addition to the Pharisees, there is a religious sect in Roman-occupied Israel called the Sadducees. They are religious conservatives holding to an ancient tradition in Judaism that doesn't believe in an afterlife. Their disbelief in an afterlife seems to make them conclude, "There's only one life, and this is it, so you'd better play it safe." That means they are very happy to collaborate with the Romans—and make a healthy profit—rather than risk any kind of rebellion or revolt. For this reason, they are closely allied with another group called the Herodians, allies of Caesar's puppet king Herod. Their contemporaries, the Pharisees, who believe in an afterlife, are more prone to risk their lives in a rebellion since they hope martyrs will be rewarded with resurrection. For this reason, the Pharisees are closely allied with the Zealots, who are more overtly revolutionary. Each group tries to trap Jesus, but He turns the tables on them, using each encounter to shed more light on the message of the kingdom of God. In case after case, Jesus brings His hearers to the heart of the matter; and again and again, the bottom-line issue is money.

of baptism John did from God, or was it merely a human thing?

Chief Priests, Religious Scholars, and Elders *(conferring together)***:** 5If we say it was from God, then He'll ask us why we didn't believe John. 6If we say it was merely human, all the people will stone us because they are convinced that John was a true prophet.

7So they said they didn't know where John's ritual washing came from.

Jesus: 8Well then, if you won't answer My question, I won't tell you by what authority I have acted.

9He told the people another parable:

Jesus: A man planted a vineyard. He rented it to tenants and went for a long trip to another country. 10At the harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants so he could be paid his share of the vineyard's fruit, but the tenants beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. 11The man sent another servant, and they beat him and treated him disgracefully and sent him away empty-handed too. 12He sent a third servant who was injured and thrown out. 13Then the vineyard owner said, "Now what am I going to do? I'll send my much-loved son. They should treat him with respect."

14But when the tenants recognized the owner's son, they said, "*Here's our chance to actually own this vineyard!* Let's kill the owner's heir so we can claim this place as our own!" 15So they threw him out of the vineyard and murdered him. What do you think the owner will do to these scoundrels?

16*I'll tell you what he'll do;* he'll come and wipe those tenants out, and he'll give the vineyard to others.

Crowd: No! God forbid that this should happen!

Jesus: 17Why then do the *Hebrew* Scriptures contain these words:

> The stone that the builders rejected
> has become the very stone
> that holds together the entire
> foundation?*

18Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to fragments, and if that stone falls on anyone, he will be ground to dust.

19*That was the last straw for* the religious scholars and the chief priests; they were ready to attack Him right then and there. But they couldn't for fear of public opinion, and they realized that Jesus, through this parable, had exposed their violent intentions.

Since they can't use overt violence against Him, they develop a covert plan.

20They would keep Him under constant surveillance. They would send spies, pretending to ask sincere questions, listening for something they could seize upon that would justify His arrest and condemnation under the governor's authority.

* 20:17 Psalm 118:22

Chief Priests, Religious Scholars, and Elders: 21Teacher, we respect You because You speak and teach only what is right, You show no partiality to anyone, and You truly teach the way of God. 22So—is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar's *occupying regime*, or should we refuse?

23He saw through their transparent trick.

Jesus: [Why are you trying to trick Me?]* 24Show Me a coin. Whose image and name are on this coin?

Chief Priests, Religious Scholars, and Elders: Caesar's.

Jesus: 25Well then, you should give to Caesar whatever is Caesar's, and you should give to God whatever is God's.

26Once again they failed to humiliate Him in public or catch Him in a punishable offense. They were confounded by His reply and couldn't say anything in response.

27Another group came to test Him—this time from the Sadducees, a *rival party of the Pharisees*, who believe that there is no resurrection.

Sadducees: 28Teacher, Moses wrote *in the Hebrew Scriptures* that a man must marry his brother's wife and the new couple should bear children for his brother if his brother dies without heirs.* 29Well, once there were seven brothers, and the first took a wife and then died without fathering children. 30The second [took her as his wife and then he died childless,]* 31and then the third, and so on through the seven. They all died leaving no children. 32Finally the woman died too. 33*Here's our question:* in the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since all seven had her for a while? *Will she be the wife of seven men at once?*

Jesus: 34The children of this era marry and are given in marriage, 35but those who are considered worthy to attain the resurrection of the dead in the coming era do not marry and are not given in marriage. 36They are beyond mortality; they are on the level of heavenly messengers; they are children of God and children of the resurrection. 37*Since you brought up the issue of resurrection,* even Moses made clear in the passage about the burning bush that the dead are, in fact, raised. After all, he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* 38*By Moses' time, they were all dead,* but God isn't God of the dead, but of the living. So all live to God.

Religious Scholars: 39Teacher, that was a good answer.

40After this no one had the courage to ask Him any more questions. 41But He asked them a question.

Jesus: How is it that people say the Anointed One is David's descendant? 42Don't you remember how David himself wrote in the psalms,

> The Master said to my master:
> "Sit here at My right hand,
> *in the place of honor and power.*
> 43And I will gather Your enemies
> together,
> *lead them in on hands and knees,*
> and You will rest Your feet on their
> backs."*

> 44Did you hear that? David calls his son "Lord." *Elders don't defer to those who are younger in that way.* How is David's son also "Lord"?

45Jesus turned to His disciples, speaking loudly enough for the others to hear.

Jesus: 46Beware of the religious scholars. They like to parade around in long robes. They love being greeted in the marketplaces. They love taking the best seats in the synagogues. They adore being seated around the head table at banquets. 47But *in their greed* they rob widows of their houses and *cover up their greed* with long pretentious prayers. Their condemnation will be all the worse *because of their hypocrisy*.

21 And then He turned His attention from the religious scholars to some wealthy people who were depositing their donations in the offering boxes. 2A widow, obviously poor, came up and dropped two copper coins in one of the boxes.

Jesus: 3I'm telling you the truth, this poor widow has made a bigger contribution

* 20:23 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 20:28 Deuteronomy 25:5 * 20:30 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 20:37 Exodus 3:6, 15 * 20:42-43 Psalm 110:1

than all of those rich fellows. 4They're just giving from their surplus, but she is giving from her poverty—she's giving all she has to give.

5Some people were impressed with the temple's opulence—the precious stones and expensive decorations—but Jesus countered their observations.

Jesus: 6Go ahead, look around, and be impressed; but days are coming when one stone will not be left standing on another. Everything here will be demolished.

Crowd: 7When will this happen, Teacher? What signs will tell us this is about to occur?

Jesus: 8Be careful. It's easy to be deceived. Many people will come claiming to have My authority. They'll shout, "I'm the One!" or "The time is now!" Don't take a step in their direction. 9You'll hear about wars and conflicts, but don't be frightened at all because these things must surely come, although they don't signify the immediate coming of the end. 10*You can count on this:* nation will attack nation, and kingdom will make war on kingdom. 11There will be disturbances around the world—from great earthquakes to famines to epidemics. Terrifying things will happen, and there will be shocking signs from heaven. 12But before any of this happens, they will capture you and persecute you. They'll send you to synagogues *for trial* and to prisons *for punishment*; you'll stand before kings and government officials for the sake of My name. 13This will be your opportunity—your opportunity to tell your story. 14Make up your mind in advance not to plan your strategy for answering their questions, 15for when the time comes, I will give you the words to say—wise words—which none of your adversaries will be able to answer or argue against. 16Your own parents, brothers, relatives, and friends will turn on you and turn you in. Some of you will be killed, 17and all of you will be hated by everyone for the sake of My name.

18But whatever happens, not a single hair of your heads will be harmed. 19By enduring all of these things, you will find *not loss but gain*—not death but authentic life.

20Here's how you will know that the destruction of Jerusalem *and her temple* is imminent: Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies. 21When that happens, *there's only one thing to do:* if you're in Judea, flee to the mountains; and if you're inside the city, escape; and if you're outside the city, stay there—don't enter—22because the time has come for the promised judgment to fall. 23How sad it will be for all the pregnant women, for all the nursing mothers in those days! All the land of Israel and all her people will feel the distress, the anger, falling on them *like rain*. 24The sword will cut some down, the outsider nations will take others captive, and this holy city, this Jerusalem, will be trampled upon by the outsiders until their times are fulfilled.

25*There will be earth-shattering events*—the heavens themselves will seem to be shaken with signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars. And across the earth the *outsider* nations will feel powerless and terrified in the face of a roaring flood *of fear and foreboding*, crashing like tidal waves upon them. 26"What's happening to the world?" people will wonder. The cosmic order will be destabilized. 27And then, at that point, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and blazing glory. 28So when the troubles begin, *don't be afraid*. Look up—raise your head high, because the truth is that your liberation is fast approaching.

29(continuing with a parable) Look over there at that fig tree—and all the trees surrounding it. 30When the leaves break out of their buds, nobody has to tell you that summer is approaching; it's obvious to you. 31*It's the same in the larger scheme of things*. When you see all these things happening, you can be confident that the kingdom of God is approaching. 32I'm telling you the truth: this generation will not pass from the scene before everything I'm telling you has occurred. 33Heaven and earth will cease to exist before My words ever fail.

34So be careful. Guard your hearts. They can be made heavy with moral laxity, with drunkenness, with the hassles of daily life. Then the day I've been telling you about might catch you unaware and trap you. 35Because it's coming—nobody on earth will escape it. 36So you have to stay alert, praying that you'll be able to escape the coming trials so you can stand tall in the presence of the Son of Man.

37-38Through this whole period of time, He taught in the temple each day. People

would arrive at the temple early in the morning to listen. Then, at day's end, He would leave the city and sleep on Mount Olivet.

22 *This daily pattern continued* as they came closer to the holiday of Unleavened Bread, also known as the Passover.

Jesus teaches of judgment to come and the destruction of the temple. All things move toward a collision of ideas and faith at the most important feast of the year.

2The chief priests and religious scholars continued looking for a way to kill Jesus; they hadn't been able to act yet due to their fear of the people's reaction. 3At this point, Satan entered into one of the twelve, Judas (also called Iscariot). 4Judas set up a private meeting with the chief priests and the captains of the temple police to discuss a plan for betraying Jesus and putting Him in their hands. 5*This was just the kind of break they had been waiting for,* so they were thrilled and agreed to a handsome payment. 6Everything was settled, and Judas simply waited for the right moment, when the crowds weren't around, to betray Jesus into their custody.

7They came to the Day of Unleavened Bread, a holy day when a special lamb (called the Passover lamb) had to be sacrificed. 8Jesus chose Peter and John and gave them instructions.

Jesus: Go and make all the necessary preparations for the Passover meal so we can eat together.

Peter and John: 9Where do You want us to make preparations?

Jesus: 10When you enter the city, you'll encounter a man carrying a jar of water. Just follow him *wherever he goes,* and when he enters a house, 11tell the homeowner, "The Teacher has this question for you: 'Where is the guest room where I can share the Passover meal with My disciples?'" 12He'll show you a spacious second-story room that has all the necessary furniture. That's where you should prepare our meal.

13They did as He said and found everything just as He said it would be, and they prepared the Passover meal. 14When the meal was prepared, Jesus sat at the table, joined by His emissaries.*

► The meal that Jesus and His disciples shared is still celebrated today among followers of Jesus. We surround it with varied rituals and music, but the original meal took place in the midst of great drama and tension. The disciples were arguing, and Jesus was teaching them yet another lesson about life in the kingdom of God. Jesus even spoke of His own suffering and their betrayal and denial. Yet through it all, Jesus' focus remained on the central theme of His life and mission: the coming of the kingdom of God.

Jesus: 15It has been My deep desire to eat this Passover meal with you before My suffering begins. 16Know this: I will not eat another Passover meal until its meaning is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

17He took a cup *of wine* and gave thanks for it.

Jesus: Take this; share it among yourselves. 18Know this: I will not drink another sip of wine until the kingdom of God has arrived in fullness.

19Then He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and shared it with them.

Jesus: This is My body, My body given for you. Do this to remember Me.

20And similarly, after the meal had been eaten, He took the cup.

Jesus: This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant, made in My blood. 21But even now, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on this table. 22As it has been determined, the Son of Man, *that firstfruit of a new generation of humanity,* must be betrayed, but how pitiful it will be for the person who betrays Him.

* 22:14 Literally, apostles

There is powerful consistency in Jesus' life. Again and again, He withdraws from the crowds to pray in solitude. Now, at this dramatic moment, Jesus again withdraws to pray—in a solitude made more intense by the fact that He has asked His disciples to pray, too, but they have fallen asleep. And in this moment of anguished emotion, Jesus mouths a prayer that resonates with His consistent message of the Kingdom. He has taught His disciples to pray, "May Your kingdom come," which is a request for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Now, drenched in sweat, Jesus Himself prays simply for God's will to be done, even if it means He must drink the cup of suffering that awaits Him in the hours ahead.

We often speak of having faith *in* Jesus; but we seldom speak of the faith *of* Jesus, a faith He demonstrated consistently throughout His life and especially at its end. In a moment of agony, Jesus still trusted God, still yielded His will to God, and still approached God as "Father," placing Himself in the position of a child, in trust—profound, tested, sincere.

23They immediately began questioning each other.

Disciples: Which one of us could do such a horrible thing?

24Soon they found themselves arguing about the opposite question.

Disciples: Which one of us is the most faithful, the most important?

Jesus *(interrupting)***:** 25The authority figures of the outsiders play this game, flexing their muscles in competition for power over one another, masking their quest for domination behind words like "benefactor" or "public servant." 26But you must not indulge in this charade. Instead, among you, the greatest must become like the youngest and the leader must become a true servant. 27Who is greater right here as we eat this meal—those of us who sit at the table, or those who serve us? Doesn't everyone normally assume those who are served are greater than those who serve? But consider My role among you. I have been with you as a servant.

28You have stood beside Me faithfully through My trials. 29I give you a kingdom, just as the Father has given Me a kingdom. 30You will eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will have authority over the twelve tribes of Israel.

31Simon, Simon, how Satan has pursued you, that he might make you part of his harvest. 32But I have prayed for you. I have prayed that your faith will hold firm and that you will recover from your failure and become a source of strength for your brothers here.

Peter: 33*Lord, what are You talking about?* I'm going all the way to the end with You—to prison, to execution—*I'm prepared to do anything for You.*

Jesus: 34No, Peter, the truth is that before the rooster crows at dawn, you will have denied that you even know Me, not just once, but three times. 35Remember when I sent you out with no money, no pack, not even sandals? Did you lack anything?

Disciples: Not a thing.

Jesus: 36It's different now. If you have some savings, take them with you. If you have a pack, *fill it and* bring it. If you don't have a sword, sell your coat and buy one. 37Here's the truth: what the Hebrew Scriptures said, "And He was taken as one of the criminals,"* must come to fruition in Me. These words must come true.

Disciples: 38Look, Lord, we have two swords here.

Jesus: That's enough.

39Once again He left the city as He had been doing during recent days, returning to Mount Olivet along with His disciples. 40And He came to a certain place.

Jesus: Pray for yourselves, that you will not sink into temptation.

* 22:37 Isaiah 53:12

41He distanced Himself from them about a
stone's throw and knelt there, 42praying.

Jesus: Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Yet not My will, but Your will, be done.

[43Then a messenger from heaven
appeared to strengthen Him. 44And in His
anguish, He prayed even more intensely,
and His sweat was like drops of blood fall-
ing to the ground.]* 45When He rose from
prayer and returned to the disciples, He
found them asleep, weighed down with
sorrow. 46He roused them.

Jesus: Why are you sleeping? Wake up and pray that you will not sink into temptation.

47Even as He said these words, *the sound of a crowd could be heard in the distance,* and as the crowd came into view, it was clear that Judas was leading them. He came close to Jesus and gave Jesus *the traditional greeting of* a kiss.

Jesus: 48Ah, Judas, is this how you betray the Son of Man—with a kiss?

Disciples *(realizing what was going on)*: 49Lord, is this why You told us to bring the swords? Should we attack?

50Before Jesus could answer, one of them had swung his sword at the high priest's slave, cutting off his right ear.

Jesus: 51Stop! No more of this!

Then He reached out to touch—and heal—the man's ear. 52Jesus turned to the chief priests, the captains of the temple, and the elders and spoke.

Jesus: Do you think I'm some sort of violent criminal? Is that why you came with swords and clubs? 53*I haven't been hard to find*—each day I've been in the temple in broad daylight, and you never tried to seize Me there. But this is your time—*night*—and this is your power—the power of darkness.

54They grabbed Him at this point and took Him away to the high priest's home. Peter followed—at a distance. 55*He watched from the shadows as* those who had seized Jesus made a fire in the center of the courtyard and sat down around it. Then Peter *slipped in quietly and* sat with them. 56But a young servant girl saw his face in the firelight. She stared for a while and then spoke.

Servant Girl: This fellow here was with Jesus. *I recognize him.*

Peter *(denying it)*: 57Woman, I don't even know the man.

58A little later, a man also recognized him.

Man: *I recognize you.* You're one of Jesus' followers.

Peter: Man, you're wrong. I'm not.

59An hour or so passed, and then another person pointed to Peter.

Another Person: This fellow is obviously Galilean. He must be a member of Jesus' group.

Peter: 60Look, I have no idea what you're talking about.

And he hadn't even finished the sentence when a nearby rooster crowed. 61The Lord turned toward Peter, and their eyes met. Peter remembered Jesus' words about his triple denial before the rooster would crow, 62so he left the courtyard and wept bitter tears.

63At this point, the men who were holding Jesus began to mock Him and beat Him. 64They put a blindfold on Him.

Men Holding Jesus: *Hey, Prophet!* Use Your prophetic powers to tell us who just whacked You!

65They kept on with this sort of insulting, degrading treatment for quite some time. 66When dawn had given way to full day, the Sanhedrin council assembled, consisting of religious leaders *of the Sadducean party,* along with the chief priests and religious scholars. They took Him to their headquarters *for interrogation.*

Sanhedrin: 67If you are the Anointed One whom God promised us, tell us plainly.

Jesus: If I give you an answer, you won't believe it. 68And if I ask you a question, you won't answer it. 69But *this I will say*

* 22:43-44 Some early manuscripts omit these verses.

Crucifixion is a favorite Roman punishment for insurrectionists, slaves, and prisoners of war. Anyone daring to defy the power and authority of Caesar is executed in this public and humiliating way. Jesus indeed is a revolutionary. He doesn't come to proclaim a new religion, but a new kingdom—a new way of life. He is indeed a threat to Caesar's way of doing things, a way that co-opts the religious leaders.

Jesus' revolution is a peaceful revolution. He doesn't advocate the use of violence—in fact, when one of His disciples uses the sword to try to protect Jesus from arrest, Jesus heals the "enemy" and rebukes His disciple. So Jesus doesn't support the regime of Caesar or follow the usual violent path of revolution: He leads a revolutionary revolution—in a path of love, healing, justice, and reconciliation.

Jesus appropriates and transforms the symbol of their power into a symbol of His greater power. He makes the cross not the icon of violent domination, but the reverse. By hanging on the cross and speaking of forgiveness, Jesus shows that there is a greater power at work in the world than the power of domination: it's the power of God's saving and reconciling love.

to you: from now on, the Son of Man will take His seat at the right hand of the power of God.

Sanhedrin: 70So You are the Son of God, then?

Jesus: It's as you say.

Sanhedrin: 71What more evidence do we need? We've heard it with our own ears from His own lips.

23 So the whole council got up and took Jesus to Pilate. 2They brought accusations against Him.

Sanhedrin: We have observed this man leading our nation astray. He even forbade us to pay our taxes to Caesar. He claims to be the Anointed One and a King Himself.

Pilate: 3Are You the King of the Jews?

Jesus: It's as you say.

Pilate *(to the chief priest and crowd)*: 4I find this man guilty of no crime.

Sanhedrin *(growing more intense)*: 5He has been stirring up discontent among the people all over Judea. He started up in Galilee, and now He's brought His brand of trouble all the way to Jerusalem!

Pilate: 6*Just a minute.* Is this man a Galilean?

7When Pilate learned *that Jesus was indeed Galilean*—which meant He was officially under Herod's jurisdiction—Pilate sent Him over to Herod, who was currently in Jerusalem. 8Herod was fascinated to meet Jesus for he had heard about Him for a long time. He was hoping he might be treated to a miracle or two. 9He interrogated Jesus for quite a while, but Jesus remained silent, refusing to answer his questions. 10Meanwhile the chief priests and religious scholars had plenty to say—angrily hurling accusations at Jesus.

11Eventually Herod and his soldiers began to insult Jesus, mocking and degrading Him. They put expensive clothing on Him and sent Him back to Pilate. 12This ended a long-standing rift between Herod and Pilate; they became friends from that day forward.

13Pilate assembled the chief priests and other Jewish authorities.

Pilate: 14You presented this man to me as a rabble-rouser, but I examined Him in your presence and found Him not guilty of the charges you have leveled against Him. 15Herod also examined Him and released Him to my custody. So He hasn't done anything deserving the death penalty. 16I'll see to it that He is properly whipped and then let Him go.

[17It was the custom for Pilate to set one prisoner free during the holiday festivities.]*

Crowd *(all shouting at once)*: 18Away with this man! Free Barabbas instead!

* 23:17 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 17.

19Barabbas had been imprisoned after being convicted of an insurrection he had led in Jerusalem. He had also committed murder. 20Pilate argued with them, wishing he could release Jesus, 21but they wouldn't be silenced.

Crowd *(shouting)*: Crucify Him! Crucify Him!

Pilate *(countering a third time)*: 22Why? What has He done that is so evil? I have found in Him no offense worthy of capital punishment. As I said, I will punish Him and then release Him.

23But they would not relent. They shouted louder and louder that He should be crucified, and eventually Pilate capitulated. 24So he pronounced the punishment they demanded.

25He released the rebel and murderer *Barabbas*—the insurrectionist they had pleaded for in His place—and he handed Jesus over to them to do with as they desired.

26On the way to the place of crucifixion, they pulled a man from the crowd—his name was Simon of Cyrene, a person from the countryside who happened to be entering the city at that moment. They put Jesus' cross on Simon's shoulders, and he followed behind Jesus. 27Along with Him was a huge crowd of common people, including many women shrieking and wailing in grief.

Jesus *(to the people in the crowd)*: 28Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me. Weep instead for yourselves and weep for your children. 29Days are coming when people will say, "Blessed are the infertile; blessed are the wombs that never bore *a child*; blessed are the breasts that never nursed *an infant*." 30People will beg the mountains, "Surround us!" They'll plead with the hills, "Cover us!"* 31For if they treat Me like this when I'm like green unseasoned wood, what will they do to a nation that's ready to burn like seasoned firewood?

32*Jesus wasn't the only one being crucified that day.* There were two others, criminals, who were also being led to their execution. 33When they came to the place known as "The Skull," they crucified Jesus there, in the company of criminals, one to the right of Jesus and the other to His left.

Jesus: 34[Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.]*

Meanwhile they were drawing lots to see who would win Jesus' clothing. 35The crowd of people stood, watching.

Authorities *(mocking Jesus)*: So He was supposed to rescue others, was He? He was supposed to be God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*? Let's see Him start by liberating Himself!

36The soldiers joined in the mockery. First, they *pretended to offer Him a soothing drink*—but it was sour wine.

Soldiers: 37Hey, if You're the King of the Jews, why don't You free Yourself!

38Even the inscription they placed over Him was intended to mock Him—"This is the King of the Jews!" [This was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.]*

39One of the criminals joined in the cruel talk.

Cynical Criminal: You're supposed to be the Anointed One, right? *Well—do it!* Rescue Yourself and us!

40But the other criminal told him to be quiet.

Believing Criminal: Don't you have any fear of God at all? You're getting the same death sentence He is! 41We're getting what we deserve since we've committed crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong at all! 42(turning to Jesus) Jesus, when You come into Your kingdom, please remember me.

Jesus: 43I promise you that this very day you will be with Me in paradise.

44At this point, it was about noon, and a darkness fell over the whole region. The darkness persisted until about three in the afternoon, 45and at some point during this darkness, the curtain in the temple was torn in two.

► The tearing of this heavy curtain in the temple is highly symbolic. Because this curtain separated the

* 23:30 Hosea 10:8 * 23:34 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 23:38 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

This phrase, "Son of Man," is very important in Luke's story and may have many layers of meaning. It may mean "epitome of humanity" or "prime example of what a human can be." But it also evokes a specific passage of Scripture that is very important to Jewish people, Daniel 7:13-27. There the phrase "Son of Man" refers to a king who receives an eternal and universal kingdom, and it also represents "the saints of the Most High"—the people of God. In light of Jesus' central message about the kingdom of God, it is likely that the phrase suggests Jesus is the long-awaited Anointed One who launches a new era in human history and who creates a community of people who represent the eternal and universal kingdom of God. In this way, "Son of" suggests "new generation of," and "Man" suggests "humanity." Jesus is Himself the new generation of humanity (a second Adam, a new beginning), and the community He creates shares this identity (a new creation, a new humanity in Jesus). The two messengers here use this pregnant phrase in a way that shocks everyone: The way this long-awaited Anointed One receives His kingdom is not through conventional military victory where enemies are defeated and killed. No, this King receives His kingdom by suffering, dying, and rising again Himself. Amazing news—good news!

holiest place in the temple from the rest of the temple, some see in this act a symbol of God opening the way for unholy humans to enter into His holy presence: Jesus' death brought forgiveness and opened the way for all to come to God. Others see in the curtain's being torn the opposite meaning: God's presence can no longer be confined to any single geographical place. The suffering and death of Jesus ended one age of human history, and now a new era has begun. Now God is on the move, at large, invading the whole world. Or perhaps this graphic image means both.

Jesus *(shouting out loudly)***:** 46Father, I entrust My spirit into Your hands!*

And with those words, He exhaled—and breathed no more.

47The Centurion**—***one of the soldiers who performed the execution*—saw all this, and he praised God.

Centurion: No doubt, this man must have been innocent.

48The crowds of common people who had gathered and watched the whole ordeal through to its conclusion left for their homes, pounding on their own chests *in profound grief*. 49And all who knew Jesus personally, including the group of women who had been with Him *from the beginning* in Galilee, stood at a distance, watching all of these things unfold.

50Meanwhile a man named Joseph *had been at work*. He was a member of the council, a good and fair man, 51from a Judean town called Arimathea. He had objected to the plans and actions of the council; he was seeking the kingdom of God. 52He had gone to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53He removed the body from the cross and wrapped it in a shroud made of *fine* linen. He then laid the body in a cavelike tomb cut from solid rock, a tomb that never had been used before. 54It was Preparation Day—*the day before the holy* Sabbath—and it was about to begin *at sundown*. 55The women who had accompanied Jesus *from the beginning* in Galilee now came, took note of where the tomb was and how His body had been prepared, 56then left to prepare spices and ointments *for His proper burial*. They ceased their work on the Sabbath so they could rest as the *Hebrew* Scriptures required.

24 Early on Sunday morning, even before the sun had fully risen, these women made their way back to the tomb with the spices *and ointments* they had prepared. 2When they arrived, they found the stone was rolled away from the tomb entrance, 3and when they looked inside, the body of the Lord Jesus was nowhere to be seen. 4They didn't

* 23:46 Psalm 31:5 * 23:47 A Roman military officer in charge of 100 soldiers

Luke has told his story. It ends with joy and praise. The crucified Jesus has been resurrected and has ascended to heaven to take His place at God's right hand just as the ancient prophets predicted. For the band of disciples, Easter joy has eclipsed Good Friday sorrow.

This ending point becomes the starting point for Luke's sequel, known as the Acts of the Apostles. The story isn't really over; it's just begun. The life and ministry of Jesus that Luke has just recounted is the mustard-seed stage of the kingdom of God that continues to grow and grow and grow. Now it's time for this Kingdom to fill the world. If Luke's Gospel is about what Jesus began to do and teach, then Luke's sequel is about what the risen Jesus continues to do and teach through His followers for millennia. Luke writes in hope that future believers will be taken up into this beautiful story that will never, ever end.

know what to think. As they stood there in confusion, two men suddenly appeared standing beside them. These men seemed to glow with light. 5The women were so terrified that they fell to the ground face-down.

Two Men: Why are you seeking the living One in the place of the dead? 6He is not here. He has risen *from the dead.* Don't you remember what He told you way back in Galilee? 7He told you that the Son of Man must be handed over to wicked men, He must be crucified, and then on the third day He must rise.

8The women did remember Jesus' words about this, 9so they returned from the tomb and found the eleven and recounted for them—and others with them—everything they had experienced. 10-11The Lord's emissaries* heard their stories as fiction, a lie; they didn't believe a word of it. (By the way, this group of women included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, along with a number of others.) 12Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. *When he reached the opening,* he bent down, looked inside, and saw the linen burial cloths lying there. But the body was gone. He walked away, full of wonder about what had happened.

13*Picture this:*

That same day, two other disciples *(not of the eleven)* are traveling the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. 14As they walk along, they talk back and forth about all that has transpired during recent days. 15While they're talking, discussing, and conversing, Jesus catches up to them and begins walking with them, 16but for some reason they don't recognize Him.

Jesus: 17*You two seem deeply engrossed in conversation.* What are you talking about as you walk along this road?

They stop walking and just stand there, looking sad. 18One of them—Cleopas is his name—speaks up.

Cleopas: You must be the only visitor in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about what's been going on over the last few days.

Jesus: 19What are you talking about?

Two Disciples: It's all about the man named Jesus of Nazareth. He was a mighty prophet who did amazing miracles and preached powerful messages in the sight of God and everyone around. 20Our chief priests and authorities handed Him over to be executed—crucified, in fact.

21We had been hoping that He was the One—you know, the One who would liberate all Israel *and bring God's promises.* Anyway, on top of all this, just this morning—the third day after the execution—22some women in our group really shocked us. They went to the tomb early this morning, 23but they didn't see His body anywhere. Then they came back and told us they did see something—a vision of heavenly messengers—and these messengers said that Jesus was alive. 24Some people in our group went to the tomb to check it out, and just as the women had said, it was empty. But they didn't see Jesus.

Jesus: 25Come on, men! Why are you being so foolish? Why are your hearts so sluggish when it comes to believing what the prophets have been saying all along?

* 24:10-11 Literally, apostles

26 Didn't it have to be this way? Didn't the
Anointed One have to experience these
sufferings in order to come into His glory?

27 Then He begins with Moses and continues, prophet by prophet, explaining the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, showing how they were talking about the very things that had happened to Jesus.

28 About this time, they are nearing their destination. Jesus keeps walking ahead as if He has no plans to stop there, 29 but they convince Him to join them.

Two Disciples: Please, be our guest. It's
getting late, and soon it will be too dark
to walk.

So He accompanies them to their home. 30 When they sit down at the table for dinner, He takes the bread in His hands, He gives thanks for it, and then He breaks it and hands it to them. 31 At that instant, *two things happen simultaneously:* their eyes are suddenly opened so they recognize Him, and He instantly vanishes—just disappears before their eyes.

Two Disciples *(to each other)*: 32 *Amazing!*
Weren't our hearts on fire within us while
He was talking to us on the road? *Didn't
you feel it all coming clear* as He explained
the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures?

33 So they get up immediately and rush back to Jerusalem—*all seven miles*—where they find the eleven gathered together—the eleven plus a number of others. 34 *Before Cleopas and his companion can tell their story,* the others have their own story to tell.

Other Disciples: The Lord has risen
indeed! It's true! He appeared to Simon!

35 Then the two men report their own experience—their conversation along the road, their moment of realization and recognition as He broke the bread. 36 At that very instant, as they're still telling the story, Jesus is there, standing among them!

Jesus: May you have peace!

You might expect them to be overjoyed, but they aren't.

37 They're startled and terrified; they think they're seeing a ghost.

Jesus: 38 Why are you upset? Why are
your hearts churning with questions?
39 Look—look at My hands and My feet!
See that it's Me! Come on; touch Me;
see for yourselves. A ghost doesn't have
flesh and bones, as you can see that I
have!

[40 Then He shows them His hands and His feet.]*

41 Now their fear gives way to joy; but it seems too good to be true, and they're still unsure.

Jesus: Do you have anything here to eat?

42 They hand Him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and He takes it and eats it in front of them.

Jesus: 44 I've been telling you this all
along, that everything written about
Me in the Hebrew Scriptures must be
fulfilled—everything from the law of
Moses to the prophets to the psalms.

45 Then He opens their minds so they can comprehend the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus: 46 This is what the Scriptures said:
that the promised Anointed One should
suffer and rise from the dead on the
third day, 47 that in His name a radical
change of thought and life should be
preached, and that in His name the
forgiveness of sins should be preached,
beginning in Jerusalem and extending to
all nations. 48 You have witnessed the fulfillment of these things. 49 So I am sending My Father's promise to you. Stay in the city until you receive it—until power from heaven comes upon you.

50 Then He leads them out to Bethany. He lifts up His hands and blesses them, 51 and at that moment, with His hands raised in blessing, He leaves them and is carried up into heaven. 52 They worship Him, then they return to Jerusalem, filled with intense joy, 53 and they return again and again to the temple to celebrate God.

* 24:40 Some manuscripts omit verse 40.

JOHN

Visitation of God's Son

By John, the apostle

According to tradition, this Gospel was written by John the apostle toward the end of his life from Ephesus in Asia Minor. Along with Peter and James, John was part of an inner circle of disciples closest to Jesus. Many interpreters think that "the beloved disciple"—a unique description in this book for one of Jesus' followers—refers to John. If so, John enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus that allowed him to offer a unique account of Jesus' life.

This Gospel is distinct from the other New Testament Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the life of Jesus from a similar perspective. They share a number of parallel accounts, arrange them in a similar order, and use many of the same words and expressions. Because of their similarities, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the Synoptic Gospels. "Synoptic" means "with the same eye" or "seeing together." The Gospel of John, on the other hand, contains only a little of the material found in the other Gospels. John takes us behind the scenes into Jesus' conversations with people and into long, often private talks He has with His disciples. Jesus is clearly a miracle worker in this Fourth Gospel, but His miracles are regarded as "signs" because they point to a greater reality, the reality of life—abundant and eternal—that has entered our world. Further, John makes many bold claims to Jesus' deity. For example, John includes a number of "I am" sayings spoken by Jesus (for example, "I am the bread that gives life," "I am the light of the world," and "I am the resurrection and the source of all life"). These statements associate Jesus with God's holy, unspeakable name and are implicit claims to His divinity. Plus, in John's theological prologue (John 1:1-18), the author calls Jesus the *Logos* ("the Voice") that preexists with God, is the agent of creation, and is made flesh for the world's salvation.

Another unique feature of this Gospel is its simplicity. Its language and grammar are easily grasped. Its ideas—while deeply symbolic and evocative—can be understood by people of all ages and experiences. It is filled with dualisms that emphasize the difference eternal life makes when it enters into the world: life and death, belief and unbelief, light and darkness, to name a few. For many people, the simplicity of this Gospel, with its intimate look at Jesus' life, makes it their favorite story of the Anointed One sent from God.

This Gospel begins not with Jesus' birth or John's baptism but with a deliberate echo of the creation story in Genesis. It takes us back before time began to the moment when God interrupts the silence and speaks the cosmos into existence. Only John's Gospel names Jesus as the *Logos* and declares that He existed long before time was measured. This Greek word carries a variety of meanings, all relating to the act of speaking. It could be translated "word," a thought that comes to expression, message, declaration, reason, or the content of preaching; most are found in various translations. It is clear that John means that *logos* is declared to all creation.

John's use of *logos* is unique and has often been rendered as "Word." While this is a useful translation, even a casual understanding demonstrates that "Word" reflects only part of its meaning. Most readers will interpret "word" as a unit of language—a combination of sounds generally spoken but also written—that carries meaning. To understand what John means, readers need something more than their cultural understanding of "word"; they need a new way of thinking about it. This is why we have chosen to offer another rendering, an interpretive, poetic translation, of what may be one of the most theologically loaded words in Scripture. Since *logos* essentially refers to the act of speaking or bringing thoughts to expression, we have decided to use the word "voice" to capture that reality. John declares that truth has culminated in the person of Jesus. No single word captures the complete meaning of *logos*, but "voice" has a number of advantages.

First, "voice" manifests the act of speaking. Voice is that which is spoken and that which is heard; it comes on both sides of any communication event, bridging the gap between sender and receiver. John intends that in Jesus God is speaking and revealing Himself to the world.

Second, a voice is distinct and personal. We can distinguish people from one another simply by their voices. In John 10 Jesus describes the fact that the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd when he calls and they follow, but they refuse to follow a stranger because they do not know his voice (John 10:1-5). John desires that we know Jesus as the Son of God and believe in Him personally as the Good Shepherd.

Third, "voice" is dynamic in that it reflects the robust and powerful activity of a living God. It is historical in that any act of speaking comes to expression and takes place in the real world as a "voice" calling, demanding a response. It challenges any notion that the Christian faith can be reduced to rules, propositions, or doctrines that can be merely believed or dismissed and not lived out in our lives. Since in Jesus God is speaking and revealing Himself to the world, and since in Jesus we hear the Voice of God, then this new reality changes everything so we, too, must change.

In the beginning

1 Before time itself was measured, the
Voice was speaking.

The Voice was and is God.
2This *celestial* Word remained ever
present with the Creator;
3His speech shaped the entire
cosmos.
Immersed in the practice of creating,
all things that exist were birthed
in Him.
4His breath filled all things
with a living, breathing light—
5A light that thrives in the depths of
darkness,
blazes through murky bottoms.
It cannot and will not be quenched.

6A man named John, who was sent by God, *was the first to clearly articulate the source of this Light.* 7This *baptizer* put in plain words the *elusive mystery of the Divine* Light so all might believe through him. *Some wondered whether he might be*

the Light, [8]but John was not the Light. He merely pointed to the Light. [9]The true Light, who shines upon *the heart of* everyone, was coming into the cosmos.

Jesus as the Light does not call out from a distant place but draws near by coming into the world.

[10]He entered our world, a world He made; yet the world did not recognize Him. [11]Even though He came to His own people, they refused to *listen and* receive Him. [12]But for all who did receive and trust in Him, He gave them the right to be *reborn as* children of God; [13]He bestowed this birthright not by human power or initiative but by God's will.

[14]The Voice took on flesh *and became human* and chose to live alongside us. We have seen Him, enveloped in undeniable splendor—the one *true* Son of the Father—*evidenced in* the perfect balance of grace and truth. [15]John *the Baptist* testified about Him and shouted, "This is the one I've been telling you is coming. He is much greater than I am because He existed *long* before me." [16]Through this man we all receive *gifts of* grace beyond our imagination. [17]You see, Moses gave *us* rules to live by, but Jesus the Anointed offered *us* gifts of grace and truth. [18]God, unseen until now, is revealed in the Voice, God's only Son, *straight from* the Father's heart.

► Before Jesus comes along, many wonder whether John the Baptist might be the Anointed One sent by God. But when Jesus appears in the wilderness, John points others to Him. John knows his place in God's redemptive plan: he speaks God's message, but Jesus is the Word of God. John rejects any messianic claim outright. Jesus, though, accepts it with a smile, but only from a few devoted followers—at least at first. Of course John is crucial to the unfolding drama, but he isn't the long awaited One sent to free His people. He preaches repentance and tells everybody to get ready for One greater to come along. The One who comes will cleanse humanity in fire and power, he says. John even urges some of his followers to leave him and go follow Jesus.

[19]The reputation of John was *growing*; and many had questions, including Jewish religious leaders from Jerusalem. [28]So some *priests and Levites* approached John in Bethany just beyond the Jordan River while he was baptizing *and bombarded him with questions*:*

Religious Leaders: Who are you?

John the Baptist: [20]I'm not the Anointed One, *if that is what you are asking.*

Religious Leaders: [21]*Your words sound familiar, like a prophet's.* Is that how we should address you? Are you the Prophet Elijah?

John the Baptist: No, I am not Elijah.

Religious Leaders: Are you the Prophet *Moses told us would come*?

John the Baptist: No.

Religious Leaders: [22]Then tell us who you are and what you are about because everyone is asking us, *especially the Pharisees,* and we must prepare an answer.

[23]John replied with the words of Isaiah the prophet:

John the Baptist: *Listen!* I am a voice
calling out in the wilderness.
Straighten out the road for the
Lord. *He's on His way.**

[24-25]Then some of those sent by the Pharisees questioned him again.

Religious Leaders: How can you *travel the countryside* baptizing* people if you are not the Anointed One or Elijah or the Prophet?

John the Baptist: [26]Baptizing with water is what I do; but the One *whom I speak of, whom we all await,* is standing among you; and you have no idea who He is. [27]Though He comes after me, I am not even worthy to unlace His sandals.*

* 1:28 Verse 28 has been inserted here to help retain the continuity of events. * 1:23 Isaiah 40:3 * 1:24-25 Literally, immersing, to show repentance * 1:27 Verse 28 has been moved before verse 20 to retain the continuity of events.

► The mystery of Jesus' identity occupies His contemporaries and will continue to occupy generations of believers for centuries to come. As the twelve journey with Him, it gradually becomes clearer who this man is, where He comes from, and how His existence will profoundly affect the rest of human history. The question of "Who is this man?" cannot be answered overnight.

29The morning after *this conversation,* John sees Jesus coming toward him. *In eager astonishment,* he shouts out:

John the Baptist: Look! *This man is more than He seems!* He is the Lamb sent from God, *the sacrifice* to erase the sins of the world! 30He is the One I have been saying will come after me, who existed long before me and is much greater than I am. 31*No one* recognized Him—myself included. But I came baptizing* with water so that He might be revealed to Israel. 32As I watched, the Spirit came down like a dove from heaven and rested on Him. 33I didn't recognize Him *at first,* but the One who sent me to baptize told me, "The One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit will be the person you see the Spirit come down and rest upon." 34I have seen this *with my own eyes* and can attest that this One is the Son of God!

35-36The day after, John *saw Him again as he* was visiting with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, he announced again:

John the Baptist: Do you see Him? This man is the Lamb of God, *God's sacrifice to cleanse our sins.*

37At that moment, the two disciples began to follow Jesus, 38-39who turned back to them, saying:

Jesus: What is it that you want?

Two Disciples: We'd like to know where You are staying. Teacher, *may we remain at Your side today?*

Jesus: Come and see. *Follow Me, and we will camp together.*

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon *when they met Jesus.* They came and saw where He was staying, *but they got more than they imagined.* They remained with Him the rest of the day *and followed Him for the rest of their lives.* 40-41One of these new disciples, Andrew, rushed to find his brother Simon and tell him they had found the One who is promised, God's Anointed *who will heal the world.* 42As Andrew approached with Simon, Jesus looked into him.

Jesus: Your name is Simon, and your father is called John. But from this day forward you will be known as Peter,* the rock.

43-44The next day Jesus set out to go into Galilee; and when He came upon Philip, He invited him to join them.

Jesus: Follow Me.

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, came from a town called Bethsaida; *and he decided to make the journey with Him.* 45Philip found Nathanael, *a friend, and burst in with excitement*:

Philip: We have found the One. Moses wrote about Him in the Law, all the prophets spoke of the day when He would come, and now He is here—His name is Jesus, son of Joseph *the carpenter*; and He comes from Nazareth.

Nathanael: 46How can anything good come from *a place like* Nazareth?

Philip: Come with me, and see for yourself.

47As Philip and Nathanael approached, Jesus saw Nathanael and spoke to those standing around Him.

Jesus: Look closely, and you will see an Israelite who is a truth-teller.

Nathanael *(overhearing Jesus)***:** 48How would You know this about me? *We have never met.*

Jesus: *I have been watching you* before Philip invited you here. *Earlier in the day,* you were enjoying *the shade and fruit of* the fig tree. I saw you then.

Nathanael: 49Teacher, You are the One—God's own Son and Israel's King.

* 1:31 Literally, immersing, to show repentance * 1:42 Literally, Cephas

Jesus: 50Nathanael, if all it takes for you to believe is My telling you I saw you under the fig tree, then what you will see later will astound you. 51I tell you the truth: *before our journey is complete*, you will see the heavens standing open while heavenly messengers ascend and descend, *swirling* around the Son of Man.

2 Three days later, they all went to celebrate a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was invited 2together with Him and His disciples. 3While they were celebrating, the wine ran out; and Jesus' mother hurried over to her son.

Mary: *The host stands on the brink of embarrassment; there are many guests, and* there is no more wine.

Jesus: 4Dear woman, is it our problem *they miscalculated when buying wine and inviting guests*? My time has not arrived.

5*But* she turned to the servants.

Mary: Do whatever my son tells you.

6In that area were six *massive* stone water pots that could each hold 20 to 30 gallons.* They were typically used for Jewish purification rites. 7Jesus' instructions *were clear*:

Jesus: Fill each water pot with water until it's ready to spill over the top; 8then fill a cup, and deliver it to the headwaiter.

They did exactly as they were instructed. 9After tasting the water that had become wine, the headwaiter couldn't figure out where such wine came from (even though the servants knew), and he called over the bridegroom *in amazement*.

Headwaiter: 10*This wine is delectable.* Why would you save the most exquisite fruit of the vine? A host would generally serve the good wine first and, when his inebriated guests don't notice or care, he would serve the inferior wine. You have held back the best for last.

11Jesus performed this miracle, the first of His signs, in Cana of Galilee. *They did not know how this happened;* but when the disciples *and the servants* witnessed this miracle, their faith blossomed.

With a wedding as the setting of Jesus' first sign, John shows how Jesus' ministry isn't limited to just "spiritual" things, but is His blessing for all of life.

12Jesus then gathered His clan—His family members and disciples—for a journey to Capernaum where they lingered several days. 13The time was near to celebrate the Passover*, the festival commemorating when God rescued His children from slavery in Egypt*, so Jesus went to Jerusalem *for the celebration*. 14*Upon arriving*, He entered the temple *to worship. But the porches and colonnades* were filled with merchants selling *sacrificial animals* (*such as* doves, oxen, and sheep) and exchanging money. 15Jesus fashioned a whip of cords and used it *with skill* driving out animals; He scattered the money and overturned the tables, emptying profiteers from the house of God. 16There were dove merchants *still standing around*, and Jesus reprimanded them.

Jesus: *What are you still doing here?* Get all your stuff, and haul it out of here! Stop making My Father's house a place for your own profit!

17*The disciples were astounded*, but they remembered that the Hebrew Scriptures said, "Jealous devotion for God's house consumes me."* 18Some of the Jews cried out to Him *in unison*.

Jews: Who gave You the right to shut us down? *If it is God, then* show us a sign.

Jesus: 19*You want a sign? Here it is.* Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in 3 days.

Jews: 20*Three days?* This temple took more than 46 years to complete. You think You can replicate that feat in 3 days?

21The true temple was His body. 22His disciples remembered this bold prediction after He was resurrected. *Because of this knowledge,* their faith in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jesus' teachings grew.

23During the Passover feast in Jerusalem, *the crowds were watching Jesus closely*; and many began to believe in Him because of the signs He was doing. 24-25But

* 2:6 Literally, two to three measures * 2:17 Psalm 69:9

Jesus saw through to the heart of humankind, and He chose not to give them what they requested. He didn't need anyone to prove to Him the character of humanity. He knew what man was made of.

3 Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees, a man with some clout among his people. 2He came to Jesus under the cloak of darkness to question Him.

Nicodemus: Teacher, some of us have been talking. You are obviously a teacher who has come from God. The signs You are doing are proof that God is with You.

► At this time, Israel's Roman occupiers have given a small group of Sadducees and Pharisees limited powers to rule, and Nicodemus is one of the Pharisees. He holds a seat on the ruling council known as the Sanhedrin, and surprisingly Nicodemus is among those who seek Jesus for His teaching. It appears that he believes more about Jesus than he wants others to know, so he comes at night.

Jesus: 3I tell you the truth: only someone who experiences birth for a second time* can *hope to* see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus: 4*I am a grown man.* How can someone be born again when he is old *like me*? Am I to crawl back into my mother's womb for a second birth? *That's impossible!*

Jesus: 5I tell you the truth, if someone does not experience water and Spirit birth, there's no chance he will make it into God's kingdom. 6*Like from like.* Whatever is born from flesh is flesh; whatever is born from Spirit is spirit. 7Don't be shocked by My words, *but I tell you the truth.* Even you, *an educated and respected man among your people,* must be reborn *by the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God.* 8The wind* blows all around us as if it has a will of its own; we *feel and* hear it, but we do not understand where it has come from or where it will end up. Life in the Spirit is as if it were the wind of God.

Nicodemus: 9I still do not understand how this can be.

Jesus: 10Your responsibility is to instruct Israel *in matters of faith*, but you do not comprehend *the necessity of life in the Spirit*? 11I tell you the truth: we speak about the things we know, and we give evidence about the things we have seen, and you choose to reject *the truth of* our witness. 12If you do not believe when I talk to you about ordinary, earthly realities, then heavenly realities will certainly elude you. 13No one has ever journeyed to heaven above except the One who has come down from heaven—the Son of Man, who is of heaven. 14Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. In the same way, the Son of Man must be lifted up; 15then all those who believe in Him will experience everlasting life.

16For God expressed His love for the world in this way: He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not face everlasting destruction, but will have everlasting life. 17Here's the point. God didn't send His Son into the world to judge it; instead, He is here to rescue a world *headed toward certain destruction.*

18No one who believes in Him has to fear condemnation, yet condemnation is already the reality for everyone who refuses to believe because they reject the name of the only Son of God. 19Why does God allow for judgment *and condemnation*? Because the Light, *sent from God,* pierced through the world's darkness *to expose ill motives, hatred, gossip, greed, violence, and the like.* Still some people preferred the darkness over the light because their actions were dark. 20Some of humankind hated the light. They *scampered hurriedly* back into the darkness where vices thrive and wickedness flourishes. 21Those who *abandon deceit and* embrace what is true, they will enter into the light where it will be clear that all their deeds come from God.

► Jesus makes the point clear: stay connected to Him, and have no reason to fear. Jesus doesn't mean that at the instant someone has faith, fear simply

* 3:3 Or "from above" * 3:8 "Wind" and "spirit" are the same word in Greek.

vanishes or only good things happen in that person's life. In fact, the blessings that come with eternal life often have nothing to do with present or future circumstances, but they have everything to do with the individual's connections to God and others. That is John's message to his listeners. God came to earth embodied in flesh, and then He reached His greatest acclaim through a torturous death. If this is all true, then believers will find strength and beauty in places never imagined. Abiding in Jesus the Anointed is the good life, regardless of the external circumstances.

22Not long after, Jesus and His disciples traveled to the Judean countryside where they could enjoy one another's company and ritually cleanse *new followers* through baptism.* 23-24About the same time, *Jesus' cousin* John—*the wandering prophet* who had not yet been imprisoned—was *upriver* at Aenon near Salim baptizing *scores of* people in the abundant waters there. 25John's activities raised questions about the nature of purification among his followers and a religious leader, 26so they approached him with their questions.

John's Followers: Teacher, the One who was with you *earlier* on the other side of the Jordan, the One whom you have been pointing to, is baptizing* the multitudes who are coming to Him.

John the Baptist: 27Apart from the gifts that come from heaven, no one can receive anything at all. 28I have said it many times, and you have heard me—I am not the Anointed One; I am the one who comes before Him. 29If you are confused, consider this: the groom is the one with the bride. The best man takes his place close by and listens for him. When he hears the voice of the groom, he is swept up in the joy *of the moment.* So hear me. My joy could not be more complete. 30He, *the groom,* must take center stage; and I, *the best man,* must step to His side.

31If someone comes from heaven above, he ranks above it all *and speaks of heavenly things.* If someone comes from earth, he speaks of earthly things. The One from the heavens is superior; He is over all. 32He reveals the mysteries seen and *realities* heard *of the heavens above,* but no one below is listening. 33Those who are listening and accept His witness *to these truths* have gone on record. They acknowledge the fact that God is true! 34The One sent from God speaks with the very words of God and abounds with the very Spirit and essence of God. 35The Father loves the Son and withholds nothing from Him. 36Those who believe in the Son will bask in eternal life, but those who disobey the Son will never experience life. They will know only God's lingering wrath.

4 The picture was becoming clear to the Pharisees that Jesus had gained a following much larger than that of John the Baptist, *the wandering prophet.* Now He could see *that the Pharisees were beginning to plot against Him.* 2This was because His disciples were busy ritually cleansing many new disciples through baptism,* 3He chose to leave Judea *where most Pharisees lived* and return to *a safer location in* Galilee. 4This was a trip that would take them through Samaria.

► For Jews in Israel, Samaria is a place to be avoided. Before Solomon's death 1,000 years earlier, the regions of Samaria and Judea were part of a united Israel. After the rebellion that divided the kingdom, Samaria became a hotbed of idol worship. The northern kings made alliances that corrupted the people by introducing foreign customs and strange gods. They even had the nerve to build a temple to the True God on Mt. Gerizim to rival the one in Jerusalem. By the time the twelve are traveling with Jesus, it has long been evident that the Samaritans have lost their way. By marrying outsiders, they have polluted the land. Israel's Jews consider them to be half-breeds—mongrels—and the Jews know to watch out for them or else be bitten by temptation.

* 3:22 Literally, immerse, to show repentance * 3:26 Literally, immersing, to show repentance * 4:2 Literally, immersing, to show repentance

5-8In a *small* Samaritan town known as Sychar, Jesus *and His entourage* stopped to rest at the historic well that Jacob gave his son Joseph. It was about noon when Jesus found a spot to sit close to the well while the disciples ventured off to find provisions. *From His vantage, He watched as* a Samaritan woman approached to draw some water. *Unexpectedly* He spoke to her.

Jesus: Would you *draw water, and* give Me a drink?

Woman: 9I cannot believe that You, a Jew, would associate with me, a Samaritan woman; much less ask me to give You a drink.

Jews, you see, have no dealings with Samaritans.

Also, a man never approaches a woman like this in public. Jesus is breaking accepted social barriers with this confrontation.

Jesus: 10You don't know the gift of God or who is asking you for a drink *of this water from Jacob's well.* Because if you did, you would have asked Him *for something greater;* and He would have given you the living water.

Woman: 11Sir, You sit by this deep well *a thirsty man* without a bucket in sight. Where does this living water come from? 12Are You claiming superiority to our father Jacob who labored long and hard to dig *and maintain* this well so that he could share clean water with his sons, *grandchildren,* and cattle?

Jesus: 13Drink this water, and your thirst is quenched only for a moment. *You must return to this well again and again.* 14I offer water that will become a wellspring within you that gives life throughout eternity. You will never be thirsty again.

Woman: 15*Please,* Sir, give me some of this water, so I'll never be thirsty and never again have to make the trip to this well.

Jesus: 16Then bring your husband to Me.

Woman: 17-18I do not have a husband.

Jesus: Technically you are telling the truth. But you have had five husbands and are currently living with a man you are not married to.

Woman: 19Sir, it is obvious to me that You are a prophet. 20Our fathers worshiped here on this mountain, but Your people say that Jerusalem is the only place for all to worship. *Which is it?*

Jesus: 21-24Woman, I tell you that neither *is so.* Believe this: a new day is coming—in fact, it's already here—when the importance will not be placed on the time and place of worship but on the truthful hearts of worshipers. You worship what you don't know while we worship what we do know, for God's salvation is coming through the Jews. The Father is spirit, and He is seeking followers whose worship is sourced in truth and deeply spiritual as well. Regardless of whether you are in Jerusalem or on this mountain, if you do not seek the Father, then you do not worship.

Woman: 25These mysteries will be made clear by He who is promised, the Anointed One.

Jesus: 26The Anointed is speaking to you. I am the One you have been looking for.

27The disciples returned to Him *and gathered around Him* in amazement that He would *openly break their customs by* speaking to this woman, but none of them would ask Him what He was looking for or why He was speaking with her. 28The woman went back to the town, leaving her water pot behind. She stopped men and women on the streets and told them about what had happened.

Woman: 29*I met* a stranger who knew everything about me. Come and see for yourselves; can He be the Anointed One?

30A crowd came out of the city and approached Jesus. 31During all of this, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat the food they gathered.

Jesus: 32I have food to eat that you know nothing about.

Disciples *(to one another)***:** 33Is it possible someone else has brought Him food while we were away?

Jesus: 34I receive My nourishment by serving the will of the Father who sent

Me and completing His work. 35You have heard others say, "*Be patient;* we have four more months to wait until the crops are ready for the harvest." I say, take a closer look and you will see that the fields are ripe and ready for the harvest. 36The harvester is collecting his pay, harvesting fruit ripe for eternal life. So even now, he and the sower are celebrating *their fortune.* 37The saying *may be old, but it* is true: "One person sows, and another reaps." 38I sent you to harvest where you have not labored; someone else took the time to plant and cultivate, and you feast on the fruit of their labor.

39Meanwhile, because one woman shared with her neighbors how Jesus exposed her past and present, the village *of Sychar* was transformed—many Samaritans heard and believed. 40The Samaritans approached Jesus and repeatedly invited Him to stay with them, so He lingered there for two days *on their account.* 41With the words that came from His mouth, there were many more believing Samaritans. 42They began their faith journey because of the testimony of the woman *beside the well*; but when they heard for themselves, they were convinced the One they were hearing was and is God's Anointed, *the Liberating King,* sent to rescue the entire world.

43-45After two days *of teaching and conversation*, Jesus proceeded to Galilee where His countrymen received Him *with familiar smiles.* After all, they witnessed His miracle at the feast in Jerusalem; but Jesus understood and often quoted *the maxim:* "No one honors a hometown prophet."

These old friends should be the first to believe, but it takes outsiders like the Samaritans to recognize Him.

46-47As Jesus traveled to Cana (the village in Galilee where He transformed the water into *fine* wine), He was met by a government official. This man had heard *a rumor that* Jesus had left Judea and was heading to Galilee, and he came *in desperation* begging for Jesus' help because his young son was near death. *He was fearful that unless* Jesus would go with him to Capernaum, his son would have no hope.

Jesus *(to the official)*: 48*My word is not enough*; you only believe when you see miraculous signs.

Official: 49Sir, this is my son; please come with me before he dies.

Jesus *(interrupting him)*: 50Go home. Your son will live.

When he heard the voice of Jesus, faith took hold of him and he turned to go home. 51Before he reached his village, his servants met him on the road celebrating his son's miraculous recovery.

Official: 52What time did this happen?

Servants: Yesterday about one o'clock in the afternoon.

53At that moment, it dawned on the father the exact time that Jesus spoke the words, "He will live." After that, he believed; and *when he told* his family *about his amazing encounter with this Jesus,* they believed too. 54This was the second sign Jesus performed when He came back to Galilee from Judea.

5 When these events were completed, Jesus led His followers to Jerusalem where they would celebrate a Jewish feast* together.

Jesus takes His disciples into one of the most miserable places they have ever seen. The suffering and impurity is frightening, but He comes to serve these precious people.

2-3In Jerusalem they came upon a pool by the sheep gate surrounded by five covered porches. In Hebrew this place is called Bethesda.

Crowds of people lined the area, lying around the porches. All of these people were *disabled in some way;* some were blind, lame, paralyzed, or plagued by diseases[; and they were waiting for the waters to move. 4From time to time, a heavenly messenger would come to stir the water in the pool. Whoever reached the water first and got in after it was agitated would be healed of his or her disease].* 5-6In the crowd, Jesus noticed one particular man who had been living with his disability for 38 years. He knew this man had been waiting here a long time.

Jesus *(to the disabled man)*: Are you *here in this place* hoping to be healed?

* 5:1 Perhaps Passover * 5:4 Some early manuscripts omit the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4.

Disabled Man: 7Kind Sir, I wait, *like all of these people,* for the waters to stir; *but I cannot walk. If I am to be healed in the waters,* someone must carry me into the pool. Without a helping hand, someone else beats me to the water's edge each time it is stirred.

Jesus: 8Stand up, carry your mat, and walk.

9At the moment Jesus uttered these words, a healing energy coursed through the man and returned life to his limbs—he stood and walked *for the first time in 38 years.* But this was the Sabbath Day; *and any work, including carrying a mat, was prohibited on this day.*

► It is impossible to imagine this man's excitement. His entire life has been defined by his illness. Now he is free from it. Free from the pain and weakness. Free from the depression that gripped his soul. Free, too, from the shame he always knew. Now he does not just walk—he runs and celebrates with friends and family. Everyone is rejoicing with him, except for some of the Jewish leaders. Instead, they drill him with questions as if they can disregard this miracle.

Jewish Leaders *(to the man who had been healed)***:** 10Must you be reminded that it is the Sabbath? You are not allowed to carry your mat today!

Formerly Disabled Man: 11The man who healed me gave me specific instructions to carry my mat and go.

Jewish Leaders: 12Who is the man who gave you these instructions? *How can we identify Him?*

13The man genuinely did not know who it was that healed him. In the midst of the crowd *and the excitement of his renewed health,* Jesus had slipped away. 14Some time later, Jesus found him in the temple and again spoke to him.

Jesus: Take a look at your body; it has been made whole and strong. So avoid a life of sin, or else a calamity greater than any disability may befall you.

15The man went immediately to tell the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the mysterious healer. 16So they began pursuing and attacking Jesus because He performed these miracles on the Sabbath.

Jesus *(to His attackers)***:** 17My Father is at work. So I, too, am working.

► This issue keeps arising from the Jewish leaders. They do not appreciate the good things Jesus does on the Sabbath. Most Jews cower at the rebuke from these men, but Jesus does not. He is very clear about this. He cares for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized more than He cares for how some people may interpret and apply God's law. It is easy to follow a set of rules; it is much harder to care for the things of the heart. He also makes it clear that those who follow His path are put on earth to serve. His followers' service comes out of love for Him. All who follow Him are to love and to serve, especially on the Sabbath.

18He was justifying the importance of His work on the Sabbath, claiming God as His Father in ways that suggested He was equal to God. These pious religious leaders sought an opportunity to kill Jesus, and these words fueled their hatred.

Jesus: 19The truth is that the Son does nothing on His own; *all these actions are led by the Father.* The Son watches the Father closely and then mimics the work of the Father. 20The Father loves the Son, so He does not hide His actions. Instead, He shows Him everything, and the things not yet revealed by the Father will dumbfound you. 21The Father can give life to those who are dead; in the same way, the Son can give the gift of life to those He chooses.

22The Father does not *exert His power to* judge anyone. Instead, He has given the authority as Judge to the Son. 23So all of creation will honor *and worship* the

Son as they do the Father. If you do not honor the Son, then you dishonor the Father who sent Him.

24I tell you the truth: eternal life belongs to those who hear My voice and believe in the One who sent Me. These people have no reason to fear judgment because they have already left death and entered life.

25I tell you the truth: a new day is imminent—in fact, it has arrived—when the voice of the Son of God will penetrate death's domain, and everyone who hears will live. 26-27You see, the Father radiates with life; and He also animates the Son *of God* with the same life-giving *beauty and* power to exercise judgment *over all of creation.* Indeed, the Son of God is also the Son of Man. 28If this sounds amazing to you, what is even more amazing is that when the time comes, those buried long ago will hear His voice *through all the rocks, sod, and soil* 29and step out *of decay into resurrection. When this hour arrives,* those who did good will be resurrected to life, and those who did evil will be resurrected to judgment.

30I have not ever acted, and will not in the future act, on My own. I listen *to the directions of the One who sent Me* and act *on these divine instructions. For this reason*, My judgment is always fair and never self-serving. I'm committed to pursuing God's agenda and not My own.

31If I stand as the lone witness to My true identity, then I can be dismissed as a liar. 32*But if you listen,* you will hear another testify about Me, and I know what He says about Me is genuine and true. 33You sent *messengers* to John, and he told the truth *to everyone who would listen.* 34Still his message about Me *originated in heaven,* not in mortal man. I am telling you these things *for one reason*—so that you might be rescued. 35*The voice of* John the Baptist, *the wandering prophet,* is like a light in the darkness; and for a time, you took great joy and pleasure in the light he offered.

36There's another witness standing in My corner who is greater than John *or any other man.* The mission that brings Me here, and the things I am called to do, demonstrate the authenticity of My calling which comes directly from the Father. 37In the act of sending Me, the Father has endorsed Me. *None of you really knows the Father.* You have never heard His voice or seen His profile. 38His word does not abide in you because you do not believe in the One sent by the Father.

39Here you are scouring through the Scriptures, hoping that you will find eternal life among a pile of scrolls. *What you don't seem to understand is that* the Scriptures point to Me. 40*Here I am with you,* and still you reject the truth *contained in the law and prophets* by refusing to come to Me so that you can have life.

Jesus is the source of life, the animating energy of creation that humanity desperately lacks.

41This kind of glory does not come from mortal men. 42And I see that you do not possess the love of God. 43I have *pursued you*, coming here in My Father's name, and you have turned Me away. If someone else were to approach you with a different set of credentials, you would welcome him. 44*That's why it is hard to see* how true faith is even possible for you: you are consumed by the approval of other men, *longing to look good in their eyes;* and yet you disregard the approval of the one true God. 45Don't worry that I might bring you up on charges before My Father. Moses is your accuser even though you've put your hope in him 46because if you believed *what* Moses had to *say*, then you would believe in Me because he wrote about Me. 47But if you ignore Moses and the deeper meaning of his writings, then how will you ever believe what I have to say?

6 Once this had transpired, Jesus made His way to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (which some these days call the Sea of Tiberias). 2As Jesus walked, a large crowd pursued Him hoping to see new signs *and miracles*; His healings of the sick and lame were garnering great attention. 3Jesus went up a mountain and found a place to sit down *and teach.* His disciples gathered around. 4The celebration of the Passover, one of the principal Jewish feasts, would take place soon. 5But when Jesus looked up, He could see an immense crowd coming toward Him. Jesus approached Philip.

Jesus *(to Philip)***:** Where is a place to buy bread so these people may eat?

6Jesus knew what He was planning to do, but He asked Philip nonetheless. He had

something to teach, and it started with a test.

Philip: [7]I could work for more than half of a year* and still not have the money to buy enough bread to give each person a very small piece.

[8]Andrew, the disciple who was Simon Peter's brother, spoke up.

Andrew: [9]I met a young boy in the crowd carrying five barley loaves and two fish, but that is practically useless in feeding a crowd this large.

Jesus: [10]Tell the people to sit down.

They all sat together on a large grassy area. *Those counting the people reported* approximately 5,000 men—*not including the women and children*—sitting in the crowd. [11]Jesus picked up the bread, gave thanks to God, and passed it to everyone. He repeated this ritual with the fish. *Men, women, and children* all ate until their hearts were content. [12]When the people had all they could eat, He told the disciples *to gather the leftovers.*

Jesus: Go and collect the leftovers, so we are not wasteful.

[13]They filled 12 baskets with fragments of the five barley loaves. [14]After witnessing this sign that Jesus did, the people stirred in conversation.

Crowd: This man must be the Prophet *God said was* coming into the world.

[15]Jesus sensed the people were planning to mount a revolution *against Israel's Roman occupiers* and make Him king, so He withdrew farther up the mountain by Himself.

► Since the Babylonians seized Judah in 586 B.C., the Jews have endured one foreign occupier after another in their land. As conquerors go, the Romans aren't all that bad. They allow the Jews to worship God in His temple, and they appoint some of them to government positions. Of course, the Judeans still long to rule themselves and throw the Roman rulers out. Some think Jesus is just the man to lead that revolution. But political upheaval isn't what He is teaching, and it isn't why He has come to earth.

[16]Later that evening the disciples walked down to the sea, [17]boarded a boat, and set sail toward Capernaum. Twilight gave way to darkness. Jesus had not yet joined them. [18]*Suddenly,* the waves rose and a fierce wind began *to rock the boat.* [19]After rowing three or four miles* *through the stormy seas*, they spotted Jesus approaching the boat walking mysteriously upon the deep waters that surrounded them. They panicked.

Jesus *(to the disciples)***:** [20]I am the One. Don't be afraid.

[21]They welcomed Jesus aboard their small vessel; and when He stepped into the boat, the next thing they knew, they were ashore at their destination.

[22]The following day some people gathered on the other side of the sea and saw that only one boat had been there; *they were perplexed.* They remembered seeing the disciples getting into the boat without Jesus.

[23]Other boats were arriving from Tiberias near the grassy area where the Lord offered thanks and passed out bread. [24]When this crowd could not find Him or His disciples, they boarded their small boats and crossed the sea to Capernaum looking for Him. [25]When they found Jesus across the sea, they questioned Him.

Crowd: Teacher, when did You arrive at Capernaum?

Jesus: [26]I tell you the truth—you are tracking Me down because I fed you, not because you saw signs from God. [27]Don't spend your life chasing food that spoils and rots. Instead, seek the food that lasts into all the ages and comes from the Son of Man, the One on whom God the Father has placed His seal.

Crowd: [28]What do we have to do to accomplish the Father's works?

Jesus: [29]If you want to do God's work, then believe in the One He sent.

* 6:7 Literally, 200 denarii * 6:19 Literally, 25 or 30 stadia

Crowd: 30Can You show us a miraculous sign? *Something spectacular?* If we see something like that, it will help us to believe. 31Our fathers ate manna when they wandered in the desert. The Hebrew Scriptures say, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."*

Jesus: 32I tell you the truth: Moses did not give you bread from heaven; it is My Father who offers you true bread from heaven. 33The bread of God comes down out of heaven and breathes life into the cosmos.

Crowd: 34Master, we want a boundless supply of this bread.

Jesus: 35I am the bread that gives life. If you come to My table and eat, you will never go hungry. Believe in Me, and you will never go thirsty. 36Here I am standing in front of you, and still you don't believe. 37All that My Father gives to Me comes to Me. I will receive everyone; I will not send away anyone who comes to Me. 38And here's the reason: I have come down from heaven not to pursue My own agenda but to do what He desires. I am here on behalf of the Father who sent Me. 39He sent Me to care for all He has given Me so that nothing *and no one* will perish. *In the end,* on the last day, He wants everything to be resurrected *into new life.* 40So if you want to know the will of the Father, know this: everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will live eternally; and on the last day, I am the One who will resurrect him.

41Some of the Jews began to grumble *quietly* against Him because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

Crowd: 42Isn't Jesus the son of Joseph? We know His parents! *We know where He came from*, so how can He claim to have "come down from heaven"?

Jesus: 43Stop grumbling *under your breaths.* 44If the Father who sent Me does not draw you, then there's no way you can come to Me. But I will resurrect everyone who does come on the last day. 45Among the prophets, it's written, "Everyone will be taught of God."* So everyone who has heard and learned from the Father finds Me. 46No one has seen the Father, except the One sent from God. He has seen the Father. 47I am telling you the truth: the one who accepts these things has eternal life. 48I am the bread that gives life. 49Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died *as you know.* 50But there is another bread that comes from heaven; if you eat this bread, you will not die. 51I am the living bread that has come down from heaven *to rescue those who eat it.* Anyone who eats this bread will live forever. The bread that I will give breathes life into the cosmos. This bread is My flesh.

52*The low whispers of* some of Jesus' detractors turned into an out-and-out debate.

Crowd: *What is He talking about?* How is He able to give us His flesh to eat?

Jesus: 53I tell you the truth; unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not know life. 54If you eat My flesh and drink My blood, then you will have eternal life and I will raise you up at the end of time. 55My flesh and blood provide true nourishment. 56If you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you will abide in Me and I will abide in you. 57The Father of life who sent Me has given life to Me; and as you eat My flesh, I will give life to you. 58This is bread that came down from heaven; I am not like the manna that your fathers ate and then died! If you eat this bread, your life will never end.

59He spoke these words in the synagogue as part of His teaching mission in Capernaum. 60Many disciples heard what He said, and they had questions *of their own.*

Disciples: How are we supposed to understand all of this? It is a hard teaching.

61Jesus was aware that even His disciples were murmuring about this.

Jesus: Has My teaching offended you? 62What if you were to see the Son of Man ascend *to return* to where He came from? 63The Spirit brings life. The flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have been teaching you are spirit and life, 64but some of you do not believe.

From the first day *Jesus began to call disciples,* He knew those who did not have genuine faith. He knew, too, who would betray Him.

* 6:31 Exodus 16:4 * 6:45 Isaiah 54:13

How is it possible to follow this path and believe these truths? To be honest, it is not easy. In fact, some find this so hard that they leave Jesus for good. The rest readily admit they are still working on what it means to follow Him. So Jesus leaves behind a number of practices to help believers. One of these is known as the Lord's Supper. Jesus instructs His disciples to break bread and share wine to remember how He will allow His body to be broken for all humankind. In some beautiful, mysterious way, Jesus is present in the simple elements of bread and wine, so the worshiper may touch Him, taste His richness, and remember His most glorious hours on the cross. In that moment, He embraces all darkness and shame and transforms them into light. As believers come to the table together and feast on His light, life seems more hopeful and complete. Taking the bread and the wine means affirming the reality that the One who has come to liberate souls is among and within His people.

Jesus: 65This is why I have been telling you that no one comes to Me without the Father's blessing and guidance.

66After hearing these teachings, many of His disciples walked away and no longer followed Jesus.

Jesus *(to the twelve)***:** 67Do you want to walk away too?

Simon Peter: 68Lord, if we were to go, whom would we follow? You speak the words that give everlasting life. 69We believe and recognize that You are the Holy One sent by God.*

Jesus: 70I chose each one of you, the twelve, Myself. But one of you is a devil.

71This cryptic comment referred to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he was the one of the twelve who was going to betray Him.

7 After these events, *it was time for Jesus to move on.* He began a long walk through the Galilean countryside. He was purposefully avoiding Judea because of *the violent threats made against Him by* the Jews there who wanted to kill Him. 2*It was fall,* the time of year when the Jews celebrated the Festival of Booths.

On this holiday, everyone camps in temporary quarters, called booths, to remember that God was with their ancestors when they wandered for 40 years without a home.

Brothers of Jesus *(to Jesus)***:** 3Let's get out of here and go *south* to Judea so You can show Your disciples there what You are capable of doing. 4No one who seeks the public eye is content to work in secret. If You want to perform these signs, then step forward on the world's stage; *don't hide up here in the hills, Jesus.*

5Jesus' own brothers *were speaking contemptuously*; they did not yet believe in Him, *just as the people in His hometown did not see Him as anything more than Joseph's son.*

Jesus: 6My time has not yet arrived; but for you My brothers, *by all means,* it is always the right time. 7*You have nothing to worry about because* the world doesn't hate you, but it despises Me because I am always exposing the dark evil in its works. 8Go on to the feast without Me; I am not going *right now* because My time is not yet at hand.

9This conversation came to an *abrupt* end, and Jesus stayed in Galilee 10until His brothers were gone. Then He, too, went up to Jerusalem. But He traveled in secret to avoid drawing any public attention. 11Some Jewish leaders were searching for Him at the feast and asking the crowds where they could find Him. 12The crowds would talk in groups: some favored Jesus and thought He was a good man; others disliked Him and thought He was leading people astray. 13*All of these conversations took place in whispers.* No one was willing to speak openly about Jesus for fear of the religious leaders.

14In the middle of the festival, Jesus marched directly into the temple and started to teach. 15Some of the Jews *who*

* 6:69 Other ancient manuscripts read, "You are God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*, the Son of the Living God."

heard Him were amazed at Jesus' ability, and people questioned repeatedly:

Jews: How can this man be so wise *about the Hebrew Scriptures*? He has never had a formal education.

Jesus: 16I do not claim ownership of My words; they are *a gift* from the One who sent Me. 17If anyone is willing to act according to His purposes *and is open to hearing truth*, he will know the source of My teaching. Does it come from God or from Me? 18If a man speaks his own words, *constantly quoting himself*, he is after adulation. But I chase only after glory for the One who sent Me. My intention is *authentic and* true. You'll find no wrong *motives* in Me.

19Moses gave you the law, didn't he? Then how can you *blatantly* ignore the law and look for an opportunity to murder Me?

Notice how Jesus changes in tone and subject. This shift seems abrupt because the Pharisees' plotting is yet to be exposed.

Crowd: 20You must be possessed with a demon! Who is trying to kill You?

Jesus: 21*Listen*, all it took was for Me to do one thing, *heal a crippled man*, and you all were astonished. 22Don't you remember how Moses passed down circumcision as a tradition of our ancestors? When you pick up a knife to circumcise on the Sabbath, *isn't that work*? 23If a male is circumcised on the Sabbath to keep the law of Moses intact, how can making one man whole on the Sabbath be a cause for your violent rage? 24You should not judge by outward appearance. When you judge, search for what is right and just.

Some People of Jerusalem: 25There is the man they are seeking to kill; surely He must be the one. 26But here He is, speaking out in the open to the crowd, while they have not spoken a word to *stop or challenge* Him. Do these leaders now believe He is the Anointed One? 27But He can't be; we know where this man comes from, but the true origin of the Anointed will be a mystery to all of us.

Jesus *(speaking aloud as He teaches on the temple's porch)***:** 28*You think* you know Me and where I have come from, but I have not come here on My own. I have been sent by the One who embodies truth. You do not know Him. 29I know Him because I came from Him. He has sent Me.

30Some were trying to seize Him because of His words, but no one laid as much as a finger on Him—His time had not yet arrived. 31In the crowd, there were many in whom faith was taking hold.

Believers in the Crowd: When the Anointed arrives, will He perform any more signs than this man has done?

32Some Pharisees *were hanging back in the crowd*, overhearing the gossip about Him. The temple authorities and the Pharisees *took action and* sent officers to arrest Jesus.

Jesus: 33I am going to be with you for a little while longer; then I will return to the One who sent Me. 34You will look for Me, but you will not be able to find Me. Where I am, you are unable to come.

Some Jews in the Crowd *(to each other)***:** 35Where could He possibly go that we could not find Him? You don't think He's about to go into the Dispersion* and teach our people scattered among the Greeks, do you? 36What do you think He means, "You will look for Me, but you will not be able to find Me," and, "Where I am, you are unable to come"?

37On the last day, the biggest day of the festival, Jesus stood again and spoke aloud.

Jesus: If any of you is thirsty, come to Me and drink. 38If you believe in Me, the Hebrew Scriptures say that rivers of living water will flow from within you.*

39Jesus was referring to *the realities of life in* the Spirit made available to everyone who believes in Him. But the Spirit had not yet arrived because Jesus had not been glorified.

► The Holy Spirit connects believers to the Father and His Son. So any fear about being disconnected from God may be abandoned; the Creator of

* 7:35 Literally, the Diaspora (Greek for "scattering"). The Diaspora refers to those Jews who were exiled or settled outside the traditional lands of Israel. * 7:38 Isaiah 44:3; 55:1; 58:11

the Universe dwells within His people, sustains them, and will accomplish the impossible through them.

Some of the Crowd: 40This man is definitely the Prophet.

Others: 41This is God's Anointed, *the Liberating King!*

Still Others: Is it possible for the Anointed to come from Galilee? 42Don't the Hebrew Scriptures say that He will come from Bethlehem,* King David's village, and be a descendant of King David?

43*Rumors and* opinions about the true identity of Jesus divided the crowd. 44Some wanted to arrest Him, but no one dared to touch Him.

45The officers *who had been sent by* the chief priests and Pharisees *to take Jesus into custody* returned *empty-handed,* and they faced some hard questions.

Chief Priest and Pharisees: *Where is Jesus?* Why didn't you capture Him?

Officers: 46*We listened to Him.* Never has a man spoken like this man.

Pharisees: 47So you have also been led astray? 48Can you find one leader or educated Pharisee who believes this man? *Of course not.* 49This crowd is plagued by ignorance about the teachings of the law; *that is why they will listen to Him.* That is also why they are under God's curse.

50Nicodemus, *the Pharisee* who approached Jesus *under the cloak of darkness,* was present when the officers returned empty-handed. He addressed the leaders.

Nicodemus: 51Does our law condemn someone without first giving him a fair hearing and learning something about him?

Pharisees *(ignoring Nicodemus's legal point)*: 52Are you from Galilee too? Look it up for yourself; no real prophet is supposed to come from Galilee.

[53The time came for everyone to go home.

8 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2He awoke early in the morning to return to the temple. *When He arrived,* the people surrounded Him, so He sat down and began to teach them. 3*While He was teaching,* the scribes and Pharisees brought in a woman who was caught in the act of adultery; and they stood her before Jesus.

Pharisees: 4Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5Moses says in the law that we are to kill such women by stoning. What do You say about it?

6This was all set up as a test for Jesus; His answers would give them grounds to accuse Him *of crimes against Moses' law.* Jesus bent over and wrote something in the dirt with His finger. 7They persisted in badgering Jesus, so He stood up straight.

Jesus: Let the first stone be thrown by the one among you who has not sinned.

8Once again Jesus bent down to the ground and resumed writing with His finger. 9The Pharisees who heard Him *stood still for a few moments and then* began to leave slowly, one by one, beginning with the older men. Eventually only Jesus and the woman remained, 10and Jesus looked up.

Jesus: *Dear* woman, where is everyone? *Are we alone?* Did no one step forward to condemn you?

Woman Caught in Adultery: 11Lord, no one *has condemned me.*

Jesus: Well, I do not condemn you either; *all I ask is that you* go and from now on avoid the sins that plague you.]*

12*On another occasion,* Jesus spoke to the crowds again.

Jesus: I am the light that shines through the cosmos; if you walk with Me, you will thrive in the *nourishing* light that gives life and will not know darkness.

Pharisees: 13Jesus, what You are claiming about Yourself cannot possibly be true. The only person bearing witness is You.

* 7:42 Micah 5:1-2 * 7:53–8:11 Many early manuscripts omit these verses.

Jesus: 14Even if I am making *bold* claims about Myself—*who I am, what I have come to do*—I am speaking the truth. You see, I know where I came from and where I will go *when I am done here*. You know neither where I come from nor where I will go. 15You spend your time judging *by the wrong criteria*, by human standards; but I am not here to judge anyone. 16If I were to judge, then My judgment would be based on truth; but I would not judge anyone alone. I act in harmony with the One who sent Me. 17Your law states that if the testimonies of two witnesses agree, their testimony is true. 18Well, I testify about Myself, and so does the Father who sent Me here.

Pharisees: 19Where is the Father *who testifies on Your behalf*?

Jesus: You don't know the Father or Me. If you knew Me, then you would also know the Father.

20Jesus said all of these things in the treasury while He was teaching in the temple; *followers and opponents alike gathered to hear Him,* but none of His enemies tried to seize Him because His time had not yet come.

Jesus *(to the crowds)*: 21I am leaving this place, and you will look for Me and die in your sin. For where I am going, you are unable to come.

Jews: 22Is He suicidal? He keeps saying, "Where I am going, you are unable to come."

Jesus: 23You originate from *the earth* below, and I have come from *the heavens* above. You are from this world, and I am not. 24That's why I told you that you will die here as a result of your sins. Unless you believe I am who I have said I am, your sins will lead to your death.

Jews: 25Who exactly are You?

Jesus: From the beginning of My mission, I have been telling you who I am. 26I have so much to say about you, so many judgments to render; *but if you hear one thing*, hear that the One who sent Me is true, and all the things I have heard from Him I speak into the world.

27The people had not understood that Jesus was teaching about the Father.

Jesus: 28Whenever *the day comes and* you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He. *It will be clear then* that I am not acting alone, but that I am speaking the things I have learned directly from the Father. 29The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not abandoned Me because I always do what pleases Him.

30As Jesus was speaking, many in the crowd believed in Him.

Even though many believe, they cannot imagine what He means about the lifting up of the Son of Man.

Jesus *(to the new Jewish believers)*: 31If you *hear My voice and* abide in My word, you are truly My disciples; 32you will know the truth, and that truth will give you freedom.

Jewish Believers: 33We are Abraham's children, and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can You say to us, "You will be set free"?

Jesus: 34I tell you the truth: everyone who commits sin surrenders his freedom to sin. He is a *slave to sin's power.* 35Even a household slave does not live in the home like a member of the family, but a son belongs there forever. 36So *think of it this way:* if the Son comes to make you free, you will really be free.

Jesus notices that some of His opponents are listening, so He speaks louder and turns His remarks to them.

37I know you are descendants of Abraham, but here you are plotting to murder Me because you do not welcome My voice into your lives. 38As I speak, I am painting you a picture of what I have seen with My Father; here you are repeating the things you have seen from your father.

Jews: 39Abraham is our father.

Jesus: If you are truly Abraham's children, then act like Abraham! 40From what I see you are trying to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that comes from the Father. This is not something Abraham would do, 41but you are doing what you have learned from your father.

Jews: We were not born from adulterous parents; we have one Father: God.

Jesus: 42I come from the one True God, and I'm not here on My own. He sent Me *on a mission*. If God were your Father, you would *know that and would* love Me. 43You don't even understand what I'm saying. *Do you?* Why not? It is because You cannot stand to hear My voice. 44You are just like your true father, the devil; and you spend your time pursuing the things your father loves. He started out as a killer, and he cannot tolerate truth because he is void of anything true. At the core of his character, he is a liar; everything he speaks originates in these lies because he is the father of lies. 45So when I speak truth, you don't believe Me. 46-47If I speak the truth, why don't you believe Me? If you belong to God's family, then why can't you hear God speak? The answer is clear; you are not in God's family. *I speak truth, and you don't believe Me.* Can any of you convict Me of sin?

Jews: 48We were right when we called You a demon-possessed Samaritan.

Jesus: 49-50I'm not taken by demons. You dishonor Me, but I give *all glory and* honor to the Father. But I am not pursuing My own fame. There is only One who pursues and renders justice. 51I tell you the truth, anyone who *hears My voice and* keeps My word will never experience death.

Jews: 52We are even more confident now that You are demon-possessed. *Just go down the list:* Abraham died, the prophets all died. Yet You say, "If you keep My word, you will never taste death." 53Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died; *remember?* Prophets—are any of them still alive? No. Who do You think You are?

Jesus: 54If I were trying to make Myself somebody important, *it would be a waste of time*. That kind of fame is worth nothing. It is the Father who *is behind Me, urging Me on,* giving Me praise. You say, "He is our God," 55but you are not in relationship with Him. I know Him *intimately*; even if I said anything other than the truth, I would be a liar, like you. I know Him, and I do as He says. 56Your father Abraham anticipated the time when I would come, and he celebrated My coming.

Jews: 57You aren't even 50 years old, yet You have seen *and talked with* Abraham?

Jesus: 58I tell you the truth; I AM before Abraham was born.

59The people picked up stones to hurl at Him, but Jesus slipped out of the temple. *Their murderous rage would have to wait.*

► John and many people in his community are Jews. As a son of Abraham, his criticism of certain Jewish leaders is not a criticism of a whole people. He's not stereotyping or making generalizations. "The Jews" he remembers in this passage are a corrupt group of power brokers who conspire against Jesus with the Romans to have Him crucified and who later have John's own followers expelled from the synagogue. Their behavior may be compared to the behavior of those Israelites condemned by Old Testament prophets. Prophets have the duty—Jeremiah said he had a fire in his bones (20:9)—to speak for God and condemn hypocrisy and unbelief wherever it is found, especially when it's found close to home. That's what John's doing when recalling this event.

9 While walking along the road, Jesus saw a man who was blind since his birth.

Disciples: 2Teacher, who sinned? *Who is responsible for this man's blindness?* Did he commit sins that merited this punishment? If not his sins, is it the sins of his parents?

Jesus: 3Neither. His blindness cannot be *explained or* traced to any particular person's sins. He is blind so the deeds of God may be put on display. 4While it is daytime, we must do the works of the One who sent Me. But when the *sun sets and* night falls, this work is impossible. 5Whenever I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.

6After He said these things, He spat on the ground and mixed saliva and dirt to form

mud, which He smeared across the blind man's eyes.

Jesus *(to the blind man)*: 7Go, wash yourself in the pool of Siloam.

Siloam means "sent," *and its name reminded us that his healing was sent by God*. The man went, washed, and returned to Jesus, his eyes now alive with sight. 8Then neighbors and others who knew him were confused to see a man so closely resembling the blind beggar running about.

Townspeople: Isn't this the man we see *every day* sitting and begging *in the streets*?

Others: 9This is the same man.

Still Others: This cannot be him. But this fellow bears an uncanny resemblance to the blind man.

Formerly Blind Man: I am the same man. *It's me!*

Townspeople: 10How have your *lifeless* eyes been opened?

Formerly Blind Man: 11A man named Jesus *approached me and* made mud from the ground and applied it to my eyes. He then said to me, "Go, wash yourself in the pool of Siloam." I went and washed, and suddenly I could see.

Townspeople: 12Where is this man *who healed you*?

Formerly Blind Man: I don't know.

13-14The townspeople brought the formerly blind beggar to appear before the Pharisees *the same day Jesus healed him*, which happened to be on the Sabbath Day. 15The Pharisees began questioning him, looking for some explanation for how he could now see.

Formerly Blind Man: He smeared mud on my eyes, and I washed; now I see.

Some Pharisees: 16God can't possibly be behind this man because He is breaking the rules of the Sabbath.

Other Pharisees: How can such a law-breaking scoundrel do something like this?

The Pharisees were at odds with one another about Jesus and could not agree *whether His power came from God or the devil*.

Pharisees *(to the formerly blind man)*: 17What do you say about this man, about the fact He opened your eyes so you could see?

Formerly Blind Man: *I have no doubt*—this man is a prophet.

18Some of the Jews suspected the whole situation was a charade, that this man was never blind. So they summoned the man's parents to testify about his condition.

Pharisees: 19Is this man your son? Do you testify that he has been blind from birth? How therefore does he now see?

Parents: 20We can tell you this much: he is our son, and he was born blind. 21But his new sight is a complete mystery to us! We do not know the man who opened his eyes. Why don't you ask our son? He is old enough to speak for himself.

22The man's parents were a bit evasive because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. It had been rumored that anyone who spoke of Jesus as the Anointed One would be expelled from the synagogue. 23So they deferred the thorny question to their son, 24and the Pharisees called on him a second time.

Pharisees: Give God the credit. *He's the One who healed you.* All glory belongs to God. We are persuaded this man you speak of is a sinner *who defies God*.

Formerly Blind Man: 25If this man is a sinner, I don't know. *I am not qualified to say*. I only know one thing: I was blind, and now I see.

Pharisees: 26What did He do to you? How did He give you sight?

Formerly Blind Man: 27*Listen,* I've already answered all these questions, and you don't like my answers. Do you really need me to say it all over again? Are you thinking about joining up with Him and becoming His followers?

Pharisees *(berating him)*: 28You're one of His followers, but we follow Moses.

[29]We have confidence that God spoke to Moses, but this man *you speak of is a mystery;* we don't even know where He comes from.

Formerly Blind Man: [30]Isn't it ironic that you, *our religious leaders,* don't even know where He comes from; yet He gave me sight! [31]We know that God does not listen to sinners, but He does respond and work through those who worship Him and do His will. [32]No one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of any person blind from birth. [33]This man must come from God; otherwise, this miracle would not be possible. *Only God can do such things.*

Pharisees: [34]You were born under a cloud of sin. How can you, *of all people*, lecture us?

The religious leaders banished him from their presence. [35]Jesus heard what had happened and sought out the man.

Jesus: Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Formerly Blind Man: [36]I want to believe, Lord. Who is He?

Jesus: [37]You have seen His face *with your new eyes*, and you are talking to Him now.

Formerly Blind Man: [38]Lord, I do believe.

The man bowed low to worship Jesus.

Jesus: [39]I have entered this world to announce a verdict *that changes everything.* Now those without sight may begin to see, and those who see may become blind.

Some Pharisees *(who overheard Jesus)*: [40]Surely we are not blind, are we?

Jesus: [41]If you were blind, you would be without sin. But because you claim you can see, your sin is ever present.

► The Pharisees are frequently around to challenge whatever Jesus says and does, but He always gets the better of them. Once again, Jesus turns what the Pharisees say inside out. They think blindness is a curse that evidences sin, and they think vision ensures knowledge and understanding—even concerning spiritual matters. Instead, the Pharisees' confidence in their vision and discernment make them unable to see the truth about Jesus. Ironically, they have blind trust in their sighted leaders. By refusing to believe in Him, they are the sinners—not the blind man.

10 **Jesus:** I tell you the truth: the man who crawls through the fence of the sheep pen, rather than walking through the gate, is a thief or a vandal. [2]The shepherd walks openly through the entrance. [3]The guard who is posted to protect the sheep opens the gate for the shepherd, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. [4]When all the sheep have been gathered, he walks on ahead of them; and they follow him because they know his voice. [5]The sheep would not be willing to follow a stranger; they run because they do not know the voice of a stranger.

[6]Jesus explained a profound truth through this metaphor, but they did not understand His teaching. [7]So He explained further.

Jesus: I tell you the truth: I am the gate of the sheep. [8]All who approached the sheep before Me came as thieves and robbers, and the sheep did not listen to their voices. [9]I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be liberated, will go in and go out, and will find pastures. [10]The thief approaches *with malicious intent*, looking to steal, slaughter, and destroy; I came to give life with joy and abundance.

[11]I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep *in His care.* [12]The hired hand is not like the shepherd caring for His own sheep. When a wolf attacks, snatching and scattering the sheep, he runs for his life, leaving them *defenseless.* [13]The hired hand runs because he works only for wages and does not care for the sheep. [14]I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me. [15]As the Father knows Me, I know the Father; I

will give My life for the sheep. 16There are many more sheep than you can see here, and I will bring them as well. They will hear My voice, and the flock will be united. One flock. One shepherd. 17The Father loves Me because I *am willing to* lay down My life—but I will take it up again. 18My life cannot be taken away by anybody else; I am giving it of My own free will. My authority allows Me to give My life and to take it again. All this has been commanded by My Father.

► Jesus loves to explain truth through everyday things like vines, fruit, fishing, building, and shepherding, as He does here. He is a master communicator. In this metaphor, Jesus is the shepherd. Eventually He becomes the sheep as well. On the cross, He is destined to become the innocent sacrifice that makes all future sin sacrifices and burnt offerings unnecessary.

19When He spoke these words, some of the Jews began to argue.

Many Jews: 20He has a demon and is a raving maniac. Why are you people listening to Him?

Other Jews: 21No demon-possessed man ever spoke like this. Do demons give sight to the blind?

22-23It was winter and time for the Festival of Dedication.* While in Jerusalem, Jesus was walking through the temple in an area known as Solomon's porch, 24and Jews gathered around Him.

Jews: How long are You going to keep us guessing? If You are God's Anointed, *the Liberating King,* announce it clearly.

Jesus: 25I have told you, and you do not believe. The works I am doing in My Father's name tell the truth about Me. *You do not listen;* 26you lack faith because you are not My sheep. 27My sheep *respond as they* hear My voice; I know them *intimately*, and they follow Me. 28I give them a life that is unceasing, and death will not have the last word. *Nothing or* no one can steal them from My hand. 29My Father has given the flock to Me, and He is superior to all *beings and things*. No one is powerful enough to snatch the flock from My Father's hand. 30The Father and I are one.

31The Jews gathered stones to execute Jesus right then and there.

Jesus: 32I have performed many beautiful works before you in the name of the Father. Which of these can be judged as an offense that merits My execution?

Jews: 33You are not condemned for performing miracles. We demand Your life because You are a man, yet you claim to be God. This is blasphemy!

Jesus: 34*You know* what is written in the Scriptures. Doesn't it read, "I said, you are gods"?* 35If the Scriptures called your ancestors *(mere mortals)* gods to whom the word of God came—and the Scriptures cannot be set aside—36what should you call One *who is unique*, sanctified by and sent from the Father into the world? I have said, "I am God's Son." How can you call that blasphemy? 37*By all means,* do not believe in Me, if I am not doing the things of the Father. 38But examine My actions, *and you will see that My work is the work of the Father.* Regardless of whether you believe in Me—believe the miracles. Then you will know that the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father.

39Once again, *some of* the Jews tried to capture Him, but He slipped away, eluding their grasp. 40Jesus crossed the Jordan River and returned to the place where John was ritually cleansing the people through baptism* in the early days. He lingered in the area, 41and scores of people gathered around Him.

Crowds: John never performed any miracles, but every word he spoke about this man has come to pass. It is all true!

42In that place, many believed in Him.

► John points to stories where Jesus returns to the issue of faith again and again. The crowds are fickle,

* 10:22-23 The Festival of Lights or Hanukkah * 10:34 Psalm 82:6 * 10:40 Literally, immersing, to show repentance

believing sometimes and not others. The religious leaders refuse to believe because Jesus doesn't fit their paradigms. The disciples and close friends constantly face situations that challenge their faith, and this especially happens when Lazarus dies. John is implicitly urging his readers to have faith in Christ, even in difficult times, because He is the source of life and well being.

11 There was a certain man who was very ill. He was known as Lazarus from Bethany, which is the hometown of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary *did a beautiful thing for Jesus. She* anointed the Lord with a pleasant-smelling oil and wiped His feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus became deathly ill, 3so the sisters immediately sent a message to Jesus which said, "Lord, the one You love is very ill." 4Jesus heard the message.

Jesus: His sickness will not end in his death but will bring great glory to God. As these events unfold, the Son of God will be exalted.

5Jesus *dearly* loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. 6However, after receiving this news, He waited two more days where He was.

Jesus *(speaking to the disciples)***:** 7It is time to return to Judea.

Disciples: 8Teacher, the last time You were there, some Jews attempted to execute You by crushing You with stones. Why would You go back?

Jesus: 9There are 12 hours of daylight, correct? If anyone walks in the day, that person does not stumble because he or she sees the light of the world. 10If anyone walks at night, he will trip and fall because he does not have the light within. 11(Jesus briefly pauses.) Our friend Lazarus has gone to sleep, so I will go to awaken him.

Disciples: 12Lord, if he is sleeping, then he will be all right.

13Jesus used "sleep" *as a metaphor* for death, but the disciples took Him literally *and did not understand.* 14Then Jesus spoke plainly.

Jesus: Lazarus is dead, 15and I am grateful for your sakes that I was not there when he died. Now you will *see and* believe. Gather yourselves, and let's go to him.

Thomas, the Twin *(to the disciples)***:** 16Let's go so we can die with Him.

17-18As Jesus was approaching Bethany (which is about two miles east of Jerusalem), He heard that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. 19Now many people had come to comfort Mary and Martha as they mourned the loss of their brother. 20Martha went to meet Jesus when word arrived that He was approaching Bethany, but Mary stayed behind at the house.

Martha: 21Lord, if You had been with us, my brother would not have died. 22Even so I still believe that anything You ask of God will be done.

Jesus: 23Your brother will rise to life.

Martha: 24I know. He will rise again when everyone is resurrected on the last day.

Jesus: 25I am the resurrection and the source of all life; those who believe in Me will live even in death. 26Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never truly die. Do you believe this?

Martha: 27Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* God's own Son who *we have heard* is coming into the world.

28After this Martha ran home to Mary.

Martha *(whispering to Mary)***:** Come with me. The Teacher is here, and He has asked for you.

29Mary did not waste a minute. She got up and went 30to the same spot where Martha had found Jesus outside the village. 31The people gathered in her home offering support and comfort assumed she was going back to the tomb to cry and mourn, so they followed her. 32Mary approached Jesus, saw Him, and fell at His feet.

Mary: Lord, if only You had been here, my brother would still be alive.

33When Jesus saw Mary's *profound grief and the moaning and* weeping of her companions, He was deeply moved *by their pain* in His spirit and was intensely troubled.

Jesus: 34Where have you laid his body?

Jews: Come and see, Lord.

35*As they walked,* Jesus wept; 36and everyone noticed how much Jesus must have loved Lazarus. 37But others were skeptical.

Others: If this man can give sight to the blind, He could have kept him from dying.

They are asking, if Jesus loves Lazarus so much, why didn't He get here much sooner?

38Then Jesus, who was intensely troubled by all of this, approached the tomb—a *small* cave covered by a *massive* stone.

Jesus: 39Remove the stone.

Martha: Lord, he has been dead four days; the stench will be unbearable.

Jesus: 40Remember, I told you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God.

41They removed the stone, and Jesus lifted His eyes toward heaven.

Jesus: Father, I am grateful that You have heard Me. 42I know that You are always listening, but I proclaim it loudly so that everyone here will believe You have sent Me.

43After these words, He called out in a thunderous voice.

Jesus: Lazarus, come out!

44Then, the man who was dead walked out of his tomb bound from head to toe in a burial shroud.

Jesus: Untie him, and let him go.

► Once again Jesus amazes everyone around Him. How does He raise Lazarus? What kind of man can speak life into death's darkness? Throughout His time on earth, those around Him are continually surprised by Jesus. He is unique. How does He have power over death? It takes a while, but more and more His followers become convinced this is no ordinary man.

45As a result, many of the Jews who had come with Mary saw what happened and believed in Him. 46But some went to the Pharisees to report what they witnessed Jesus doing. 47As a result of these reports—*and on short notice*—the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the high council.

Pharisees: What are we going to do about this man? He is performing many miracles. 48If we don't stop this now, every man, woman, and child will believe in Him. *You know what will happen next?* The Romans *will think He's mounting a revolution and* will destroy our temple. It will be the end of our nation.

Caiaphas, the High Priest That Year: 49You have no idea what you are talking about; 50what you don't understand is that it's better for you that one man should die for the people so the whole nation won't perish.

51*His speech was more than it seemed.* As high priest that year, Caiaphas prophesied (without knowing it) that Jesus would die on behalf of the entire nation, 52and not just for the *children of* Israel—He would die so all God's children could be gathered from the four corners of the world into one people. 53In that moment, they cemented their intentions to have Jesus executed.

54From that day forward, Jesus refrained from walking publicly among the people in Judea. He withdrew to a small town known as Ephraim, a rural area near the wilderness, where He set up camp with His disciples.

55The Passover was approaching, and Jews everywhere traveled to Jerusalem early so they could purify themselves and prepare for Passover. 56People were looking for Jesus, hoping to catch a glimpse of Him in the city. All the while, some Jews were discussing Him in the temple.

Some Jews: Do you think He will decide not to come *to Jerusalem this year* for the feast?

57 *In the midst of this confusion,* the Pharisees and the chief priests ordered that if anyone knew the whereabouts of Jesus *of Nazareth*, it must be reported immediately so they could arrest Him.

12 Six days before the Passover feast, Jesus journeyed to the village of Bethany, to the home of Lazarus who had recently been raised from the dead, 2 where they hosted Him for dinner. Martha was busy serving *as the hostess*, Lazarus reclined at the table with Him, 3 and Mary took a pound of fine ointment, pure nard (which is *both rare and* expensive), and anointed Jesus' feet with it; and then she wiped them with her hair. As the pleasant fragrance of this extravagant ointment filled the entire house, 4 Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (who was plotting to betray Jesus), began to speak.

Judas Iscariot: 5 *How could she pour out* this vast amount of fine oil? Why didn't she sell it? It is worth nearly a year's wages;* the money could have been given to the poor.

6 This had nothing to do with Judas's desire to help the poor. The truth is he served as the treasurer, and he helped himself to the money from the common pot at every opportunity.

Jesus: 7 Leave her alone. She has observed this custom in anticipation of the day of My burial. 8 The poor are ever present, but I will be leaving.

9 Word spread of Jesus' presence, and a large crowd was gathering to see Jesus and the formerly deceased Lazarus, whom He had brought back from the dead. 10 The chief priests were secretly plotting Lazarus's murder since, 11 because of him, many Jews were leaving their teachings and believing in Jesus.

12 The next day, a great crowd of people who had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem; 13 so they gathered branches of palm trees to wave as they celebrated His arrival.

Crowds *(shouting)***:** Hosanna!
He who comes in the name of the Lord
is truly blessed*
and is King of all Israel.

14 Jesus found a young donkey, sat on it, *and rode through the crowds mounted on this small beast.* The Scriptures foretold of this day:

15 Daughter of Zion, do not be afraid.
Watch! Your King is coming.
You will find Him seated on the colt
of a donkey.*

16 The disciples did not understand any of this at the time; these truths did not sink in until Jesus had been glorified. As they reflected on their memories of Jesus, they realized these things happened just as they were written. 17 Those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus enthusiastically spoke of Jesus to all who would listen, 18 and that is why the crowd went out to meet Him. They had heard of the miraculous sign He had done.

► His followers may suspect during their time with Jesus that He is more than a man, but it takes the power and glory of the resurrection to convince them completely that Jesus is divine. When they see Him, touch Him, and hear the sound of His voice thunder in their souls, the disciples know they are face-to-face with God's immense glory, the unique Son of God. Reading and rereading the Scriptures in light of their experiences of Him, it becomes clear that Jesus' life and story are the climax of God's covenants with His people.

Pharisees *(to one another)***:** 19 Our efforts to squelch Him have not worked, *but now is not the time for action.* Look, the world is following after Him.

20 Among the crowds traveling to Jerusalem were Greeks seeking to *follow God and* worship at the great feast. 21-22 Some of them came to Philip with an important request.

Greek Pilgrims *(to Philip)***:** Sir, we are hoping to meet Jesus.

* 12:5 Literally, 300 denarii, Roman coins * 12:13 Psalm 118:26 * 12:15 Zechariah 9:9

Philip, a disciple from the Galilean village of Bethsaida, told Andrew *that these Greeks wanted to see Jesus*. Together Andrew and Philip approached Jesus to inform Him about the request.

Jesus *(to Philip and Andrew)*: 23The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24I tell you the truth: unless a grain of wheat is planted in the ground and dies, it remains a solitary seed. But when it is planted, it produces in death a great harvest. 25The one who loves this life will lose it, and the one who despises it in this world will have life forevermore. 26Anyone who serves Me must follow My path; anyone who serves Me will want to be where I am, and he will be honored by the Father. 27My spirit is low and unsettled. How can I ask the Father to save Me from this hour? This hour is the purpose for which I have come *into the world. But what I can say is this:* 28"Father, glorify Your name!"

Suddenly a voice echoed from the heavens.

The Father: I have glorified My name. And again I will bring glory *in this hour that will resound throughout time.*

29The crowd of people surrounding Jesus were confused.

Some in the Crowd: It sounded like thunder.

Others: A heavenly messenger spoke to Him.

Jesus: 30The voice you hear has not spoken for My benefit, but for yours. 31Now judgment comes upon this world, *and everything will change.* The tyrant of this world, *Satan*, will be thrown out. 32When I am lifted up from the earth, then all of humanity will be drawn to Me.

33These words foreshadowed the nature of His death.

Crowd: 34The law teaches that the Anointed is the One who will remain without end. How can You say it is essential that the Son of Man be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man *You are talking about*?

Jesus: 35Light is among you, but very soon it will flicker out. Walk as you have the light, and then the darkness will not surround you. Those who walk in darkness don't know where they are going. 36While the light is with you, believe in the light; and you will be reborn as sons *and daughters* of the light.

After speaking these words, Jesus left the people to go to a place of seclusion. 37Despite all the signs He performed, they still did not believe in Him. 38Isaiah spoke of this reality, saying,

> Lord, who could accept what we've
> been told?
> And who has seen the awesome
> power of the Lord revealed?*

39This is the reason they are unable to believe. 40Isaiah also said,

> God has blinded their eyes
> and hardened their hearts
> So that their eyes cannot see *properly*
> and their hearts cannot understand
> *and be persuaded*
> *by the truth* to turn to Me
> and be reconciled by My healing
> hand.*

41Isaiah could say this because he had seen the glory of the Lord *with his own eyes* and declared His beauty aloud. 42Yet many leaders secretly believed in Him but would not declare their faith because the Pharisees continued their threats to expel all His followers from the synagogue; 43here's why: they loved to please men more than they desired to glorify God.

Jesus *(crying out before the people)*: 44Anyone who believes in Me is not placing his faith in Me, but in the One who sent Me here. 45If one sees Me, he sees the One who sent Me. 46I am here to bring light in this world, freeing everyone who believes in Me from the darkness *that blinds him.* 47If anyone listening to My teachings chooses to ignore them, so be it: I have come to liberate the world, not to judge it. 48However, those who reject Me and My teachings will be judged: in the last day, My words will be their judge 49because I am not speaking *of My own volition and* from My own authority. The Father who sent Me has commanded

* 12:38 Isaiah 53:1 * 12:40 Isaiah 6:10

Me what to say and speak. 50I know His command is eternal life, so every word I utter originates in Him.

13 Before the Passover festival began, Jesus was keenly aware that His hour had come to depart from this world and to return to the Father. From beginning to end, Jesus' days were marked by His love for His people. 2Before Jesus and His disciples gathered for dinner, the adversary filled Judas Iscariot's heart with plans of deceit and betrayal. 3Jesus, knowing that He had come from God and was going away to God, 4stood up from dinner and removed His outer garments. He then wrapped Himself in a towel, 5poured water in a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with His towel.

Simon Peter *(as Jesus approaches)***:** 6Lord, are You going to wash my feet?

Jesus: 7Peter, you don't realize what I am doing, but you will understand later.

Peter: 8You will not wash my feet, now or ever!

Jesus: If I don't wash you, you will have nothing to do with Me.

Peter: 9Then wash me but don't stop with my feet. Cleanse my hands and head as well.

Jesus: 10Listen, anyone who has bathed is clean all over except for the feet. But I tell you this, not all of you are clean.

► Within pain and filth, there is an opportunity to extend God's kingdom through an expression of love, humility, and service. This simple act of washing feet is a metaphor for how the world looks through the lens of Jesus' grace. He sees the people—the world He created—which He loves. He also sees the filthy corruption in the world that torments everyone. His mission is to cleanse those whom He loves from those horrors. This is His redemptive work with feet, families, disease, famine, and hearts.

When Jesus sees disease, He sees the opportunity to heal. When He sees sin, He sees a chance to forgive and redeem. When He sees dirty feet, He sees a chance to wash them.

11He knew the one with plans of betraying Him, which is why He said, "not all of you are clean." 12After washing their feet and picking up His garments, He reclined at the table again.

Jesus: Do you understand what I have done to you? 13You call Me Teacher and Lord, and truly, that is who I am. 14So if your Lord and Teacher washes your feet, then you should wash one another's feet. 15I am your example; keep doing what I do. 16I tell you the truth: a servant is not greater than the master. Those who are sent are not greater than the one who sends them.* 17If you know these things, and if you put them into practice, you will find happiness. 18I am not speaking about all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but let the Hebrew Scripture be fulfilled that says, "The very same man who eats My bread with Me will stab Me in the back." 19Assuredly, I tell you these truths before they happen so that when it all transpires, you will believe that I am. 20I tell you the truth: anyone who accepts the ones I send accepts Me. In turn, the ones who accept Me also accept the One who sent Me.

21Jesus was becoming visibly distressed.

Jesus: I tell you the truth: one of you will betray Me.

22The disciples began to stare at one another, wondering who was the unfaithful disciple. 23One disciple in particular, who was loved by Jesus, reclined next to Him at the table. 24Peter motioned to the disciple at Jesus' side.

Peter *(to the beloved disciple)***:** Find out who the betrayer is.

Beloved Disciple *(leaning in to Jesus)***:** 25Lord, who is it?

Jesus: 26I will dip a piece of bread in My cup and give it to the one who will betray Me.

* 13:16 Literally, apostle

He dipped one piece in the cup and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27After this occurred, Satan entered into Judas.

Jesus *(to Judas)***:** Make haste, and do what you are going to do.

28No one understood Jesus' instructions to Judas. 29Because Judas carried the money, some thought he was being instructed to buy the necessary items for the feast or give some money to the poor. 30So Judas took his piece of bread and departed into the night.

31Upon Judas's departure, Jesus spoke:

Jesus: Now the Son of Man will be glorified as God is glorified in Him. 32If God's glory is in Him, His glory is also in God. The moment of this astounding glory is imminent. 33My children, My time here is brief. You will be searching for Me; and as I told the Jews, "You cannot go where I am going." 34So I give you a new command: Love each other *deeply and fully*. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. 35Everyone will know you as My followers if you demonstrate your love to others.

Simon Peter: 36Lord, where are You going?

Jesus: Peter, you cannot come with Me now, but later you will join Me.

Peter: 37Why can't I go now? I'll give my life for You!

Jesus: 38Will you really give your life for Me? I tell you the truth: you will deny Me three times before the rooster crows.

► Ultimately Peter is telling the truth. He is more than willing to lay down his life. But none of His disciples understand the magnitude of the persecution and hatred that is about to be unleashed.

Even Peter, Jesus' dear Peter, is afraid. He protests any inference to Jesus' impending departure. Each of the twelve would do the same. Jesus calms their fears over and over again with stories, metaphors, and outright promises, saying, "I will never abandon you like orphans; I will return to be with you" (14:18).

14 **Jesus:** Don't get lost in despair; believe in God, and keep on believing in Me. 2My Father's home is designed to accommodate all of you. If there were not room for everyone, I would have told you that. I am going to make arrangements for your arrival. 3I will be there to greet you personally and welcome you home, where we will be together. 4You know where I am going and how to get there.

Thomas: 5Lord, we don't know where You are going, so how can we know the path?

Jesus: 6I am the path, the truth, and the *energy of* life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. 7If you know Me, you know the Father. Rest assured now; you know Him and have seen Him.

Philip: 8Lord, all I am asking is that You show us the Father.

Jesus *(to Philip)***:** 9I have lived with you all this time, and you still don't know who I am? If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. How can you keep asking to see the Father? 10Don't you believe Me when I say I abide in the Father and the Father dwells in Me? I'm not making this up as I go along. The Father has given Me these truths that I have been speaking to you, and He empowers all My actions. 11Accept these truths: I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me. If you have trouble believing based on My words, believe because of the things I have done. 12I tell you the truth: whoever believes in Me will be able to do what I have done, but they will do even greater things, because I will return to be with the Father. 13Whatever you ask for in My name, I will do it so that the Father will get glory from the Son. 14*Let Me say it again:* if you ask for anything in My name, I will do it. 15If you love Me, obey the commandments I have given you. 16I will ask the Father to send you another Helper, *the Spirit of truth,* who will remain constantly with you. 17The world does not recognize the Spirit of truth, because it does not know the

Spirit and is unable to receive Him. But you do know the Spirit because He lives with you, and He will dwell in you. 18I will never abandon you like orphans; I will return to be with you. 19In a little while, the world will not see Me; but I will not vanish completely from your sight. Because I live, you will also live. 20At that time, you will know that I am in the Father, you are in Me, and I am in you. 21The one who loves Me will do the things I have commanded. My Father loves everyone who loves Me; and I will love you and reveal My heart, will, and nature to you.

► God becomes flesh and lives among humanity, not just to have a transaction with people and ultimately die, but to continue to be with them and to send His Spirit to be present with believers. So God calls His Spirit-indwelled people to something greater, something more significant: they are here as redeeming forces on this earth; their time here is about reclaiming the things He has created. Believing God has created the entire cosmos and that it is restored in Jesus, the believer's work here through the Spirit is to say, "This belongs to God," and to help point out the beauty of creation to everyone. And most of all, to live in it themselves by the power of the Holy Spirit who plants the teachings of the Lord in their hearts.

The Other Judas: 22Lord, why will You reveal Yourself to us, but not to the world?

Jesus: 23Anyone who loves Me will listen to My voice and obey. The Father will love him, and We will draw close to him and make a dwelling place within him. 24The one who does not love Me ignores My message, which is not from Me, but from the Father who sent Me.

25I have spoken these words while I am here with you. 26The Father is sending a great Helper, the Holy Spirit, in My name to teach you everything and to remind you of all I have said to you. 27My peace is the legacy I leave to you. I don't give gifts like those of this world. Do not let your heart be troubled or fearful. 28You were listening when I said, "I will go away, but I will also return to be with you." If you love Me, celebrate the fact that I am going to be with the Father because He is far greater than I am. 29I have told you all these things in advance so that your faith will grow as these things come to pass. 30I am almost finished speaking to you. The one who rules the world is stepping forward, and he has no part in Me; 31but to demonstrate to the cosmos My love for the Father, I will do just as He commands. Stand up. It is time for us to leave this place.

15 **Jesus:** I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard. 2My Father examines every branch in Me and cuts away those who do not bear fruit. He leaves those bearing fruit and carefully prunes them so that they will bear more fruit; 3already you are clean because you have heard My voice. 4Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. A branch cannot bear fruit if it is disconnected from the vine, and neither will you if you are not connected to Me.

5I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear great fruit. Without Me, you will accomplish nothing. 6If anyone does not abide in Me, he is like a branch that is tossed out and shrivels up and is later gathered to be tossed into the fire to burn. 7If you abide in Me and My voice abides in you, anything you ask will come to pass for you. 8Your abundant growth and your faithfulness as My followers will bring glory to the Father.

► At a time when all of His disciples are feeling as if they are about to be uprooted, Jesus sketches a picture of this new life as a flourishing vineyard—a labyrinth of vines and strong branches steeped in rich soil, abundant grapes hanging from their vines ripening in the sun. Jesus sculpts a new garden of Eden in their imaginations—one that is bustling with fruit, sustenance, and satisfying aromas. This is the Kingdom life. It is all about connection, sustenance, and

beauty. But within this promise of life is the warning that people must be in Christ or they will not experience these blessings.

Jesus: [9]I have loved you as the Father has loved Me. Abide in My love. [10]Follow My example in obeying the Father's commandments and receiving His love. If you obey My commandments, you will stay in My love. [11]I want you to know the delight I experience, to find ultimate satisfaction, which is why I am telling you all of this.

[12]My commandment to you is this: love others as I have loved you. [13]There is no greater way to love than to give your life for your friends. [14]You celebrate our friendship if you obey this command. [15]I don't call you servants any longer; servants don't know what the master is doing, but I have told you everything the Father has said to Me. I call you friends. [16]You did not choose Me. I chose you, and I orchestrated all of this so that you would be sent out and bear great and perpetual fruit. As you do this, anything you ask the Father in My name will be done. [17]This is My command to you: love one another.

[18]If you find that the world despises you, remember that before it despised you, it first despised Me. [19]If you were a product of the world order, then it would love you. But you are not a product of the world because I have taken you out of it, and it despises you for that very reason. [20]Don't forget what I have spoken to you: "a servant is not greater than the master." If I was mistreated, you should expect nothing less. If they accepted what I have spoken, they will also hear you. [21]Everything they do to you they will do on My account because they do not know the One who has sent Me. [22]If I had not spoken within their hearing, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for ignoring My voice.

[23]If someone despises Me, he also despises My Father. [24]If I had not demonstrated things for them that have never been done, they would not be guilty of sin. But the reality is they have stared Me in the face, and they have despised Me and the Father nonetheless. [25]Yet their law, which says, "They despised Me without any cause,"* has again been proven true.

[26]I will send a great Helper to you from the Father, one known as the Spirit of truth. He comes from the Father and will point to the truth as it concerns Me. [27]But you will also point others to the truth about My identity, because you have journeyed with Me since this all began.

► As Jesus warns of the mistreatment His followers can expect, He disarms fears by noting the most important things. If the Spirit is within, there is no reason to fear. In fact, the church will thrive under persecution. Yet humans are obsessed with power and political prominence as a means to influence the culture. Christian citizens have an obligation to strive for justice and freedom through the transforming power of the Spirit in people's lives. Rather than exerting temporal power, the real work of the Kingdom often thrives under fierce attack and opposition. Jesus announces this coming persecution to His followers, believing this will lead to their finest hour.

16 **Jesus:** I am telling you all of this so that you may avoid the offenses that are coming. [2]The time will come when they will kick you out of the synagogue because some believe God desires them to execute you as an act of faithful service. [3]They will do this because they don't know the Father, or else they would know Me. [4]I'm telling you all this so that when it comes to pass you will remember what you have heard. It was not important for Me to give you this information in the beginning when I was with you. [5]But now, I am going to the One who has sent Me, and none of you ask Me, "Where are You going?"

[6]I know that hearing news like this is overwhelming and sad. [7]But the truth is that My departure will be a gift that will serve you well, because if I don't leave,

* 15:25 Psalm 35:19

the great Helper will not come to your aid. When I leave, I will send Him to you. [8-9]When He arrives, He will uncover the sins of the world, expose unbelief as sin, and allow all to see their sins in the light of righteousness for the first time. [10]This new awareness of righteousness is important because I am going to the Father and will no longer be present with you. [11]The Spirit will also carry My judgment because the one who rules in this world has already been defeated.

[12]I have so much more to say, but you cannot absorb it right now. [13-15]The Spirit of truth will come and guide you in all truth. He will not speak His own words to you; He will speak what He hears, revealing to you the things to come and bringing glory to Me. The Spirit has unlimited access to Me, to all that I possess and know, just as everything the Father has is Mine. That is the reason I am confident He will care for My own and reveal the path to you. [16]For a little while you will not see Me; but after that, a time will come when you will see Me again.

Some of His Disciples: [17]What does He mean? "I'll be here, and then I won't be here, because I'll be with the Father"?

Other Disciples: [18]What is He saying? "A little while"? We don't understand.

► The promise of eternity is a reminder that God's children are made for a renewed world. There is great comfort amid fear, knowing believers will be reunited with Jesus and joined with the Father. As believers labor together in this world—enduring pain, loss, and unfulfilled desires—they should be encouraged that in eternity all needs will be fulfilled in the presence of God.

[19]Jesus knew they had questions to ask of Him, so He approached them.

Jesus: Are you trying to figure out what I mean when I say you will see Me in a little while? [20]I tell you the truth, a time is approaching when you will weep and mourn while the world is celebrating. You will grieve, but that grief will give birth to great joy. [21-22]In the same way that a woman labors in great pain during childbirth only to forget the intensity of the pain when she holds her child, when I return, your labored grief will also change into a joy that cannot be stolen.

[23]When all this transpires, you will finally have the answers you have been seeking. I tell you the truth, anything you ask of the Father in My name, He will give to you. [24]Until this moment, you have not sought after anything in My name. Ask and you will receive so that you will be filled with joy.

[25]I have been teaching you all of these truths through stories and metaphors, but the time is coming for Me to speak openly and directly of the Father.

[26]The day is coming when you will make a request in My name, but I will not represent you before the Father. [27]*You will be heard directly by the Father.* The Father loves you because you love Me and know that I come from the Father. [28]I came from the Father into the cosmos, but soon I will leave it and return to the Father.

► All His disciples mourn Jesus' refusal to take His rightful place as a king and lead a revolution. Jesus knows political might, brute force, and earthly governments are not helpful tools in a battle for hearts. Spiritual revolutions are subversive. They are led by defiant acts of love (for example, healing, foot washing, and martyrdom). Laws do not change hearts, and violence induces hatred and fear. But a sincere community of faith in which love and hope are demonstrated even in the darkest hours will lead a spiritual revolution. It is time to go forward with open eyes and continue to labor as Christian citizens, placing hope only in the redemptive work of the gospel.

Disciples: [29]We hear You speaking clearly and not in metaphors. *How could we misunderstand?* [30]We see now that You are aware of everything and You reveal things at the proper time. So we do not need to question You, because we believe You have come from God.

Jesus: 31So you believe now? 32Be aware that a time is coming when you will be scattered *like seeds*. You will return to your own way, and I will be left alone. But I will not be alone, because the Father will be with Me. 33I have told you these things so that you will be *whole and* at peace. In this world, you will be plagued with times of trouble, but you need not fear; I have triumphed over this corrupt world order.

17 **Jesus** *(lifting His face to the heavens)***:** Father, My time has come. Glorify Your Son, and I will bring You great glory 2-3because You have given Me total authority over humanity. *I have come bearing the plentiful gifts of God*; and all who receive Me will experience everlasting life, a new intimate relationship with You (the one True God) and Jesus the Anointed (the One You have sent). 4I have glorified You on earth and fulfilled the mission You set before Me.

5In this moment, Father, fuse Our collective glory and bring Us together as We were before creation existed. 6You have entrusted Me with these men who have come out of this corrupt world order. I have told them about Your nature and declared Your name to them, and they have held on to Your words and understood that these words, 7like everything else You have given Me, come from You. 8It is true that these men You gave Me have received the words that come from You and not only understood them but also believed that You sent Me. 9I am now making an appeal to You on their behalf. This request is not for the entire world; it is for those whom You have given to Me because they are Yours. 10Yours and Mine, Mine and Yours, for all that are Mine are Yours. Through them I have been glorified.

11I will no longer be physically present in this world, but they will remain in this world. As I return to be with You, holy Father, remain with them through Your name, *the name You have given Me*. May they be one even as We are one. 12While I was physically present with them, I protected them through Your name. I watched over them closely; and only one was lost, the one the Scriptures said was the son of destruction. 13Now I am returning to You. I am speaking this prayer here in the created cosmos *alongside friends and foes* so that in hearing it they might be consumed with joy. 14I have given them Your word; and the world has despised them because they are not products of the world, in the same way that I am not a product of the corrupt world order. 15Do not take them out of this world; protect them from the evil one.

16Like Me, they are not products of the corrupt world order. 17Immerse them in the truth, the truth Your voice speaks. 18In the same way You sent Me into this world, I am sending them. 19It is entirely for their benefit that I have set Myself apart so that they may be set apart by truth. 20I am not asking solely for their benefit; this prayer is also for all the believers who will follow them and hear them speak. 21Father, may they all be one as You are in Me and I am in You; may they be in Us, for by this unity the world will believe that You sent Me.

22All the glory You have given to Me, I pass on to them. May that glory unify them and make them one as We are one, 23I in them and You in Me, that they may be refined so that all will know that You sent Me, and You love them in the same way You love Me.

In this great prayer that Jesus prays for His disciples, He returns repeatedly to the gathering of believers unified with the Father and the Son.

24Father, I long for the time when those You have given Me can join Me in My place so they may witness My glory, which comes from You. You have loved Me before the foundations of the cosmos were laid. 25Father, You are just; though this corrupt world order does not know You, I do. These followers know that You have sent Me. 26I have told them about Your nature; and I will continue to speak of Your name in order that Your love, which was poured out on Me, will be in them. And I will also be in them.

18 When Jesus finished praying, He began a brief journey with His disciples to the other side of the Kidron Valley, a deep ravine that floods in the winter rains, then farther on to a garden where He gathered His disciples.

2-3Judas Iscariot (who had already set his betrayal in motion and knew that Jesus often met with the disciples in this olive grove) entered the garden with an

entourage of Roman soldiers and officials sent by the chief priests and Pharisees. They brandished their weapons under the light of torches and lamps. 4Jesus stepped forward. It was clear He was not surprised because He knew all things.

Jesus: Whom are you looking for?

Judas's Entourage: 5Jesus the Nazarene.

Jesus: I am the One.

Judas, the betrayer, stood with the military force. 6As Jesus spoke "I am the One," the forces fell back on the ground. 7Jesus asked them a second time:

Jesus: Whom are you searching for?

Judas's Entourage: Jesus the Nazarene.

Jesus: 8I have already said that I am the One. If you are looking for Me, then let these men go free.

9This happened to fulfill the promise He made that none of those entrusted to Him will be lost.* 10Suddenly Peter lunged toward Malchus, one of the high priest's servants; and with his sword, Peter severed the man's right ear.

Jesus *(to Peter)*: 11Put down your sword, and return it to the sheath. Am I to turn away from the cup the Father has given Me to drink?

12So the Roman commander, soldiers, and Jewish officials arrested Jesus, cuffed His hands and feet, 13and brought Him to Annas (the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest). 14You may remember that Caiaphas counseled the Jews that one should die for all people. 15-16Simon Peter and another disciple followed behind Jesus. When they arrived, Peter waited in the doorway while the other disciple was granted access because of his relationship with the high priest. That disciple spoke to the woman at the door, and Peter was allowed inside.

Servant Girl *(to Peter)*: 17You are one of this man's disciples, aren't you?

Peter: I am not.

18All the servants and officers gathered around a charcoal fire to keep warm. It was a cold day, and Peter made his way into the circle to warm himself.

Annas *(to Jesus)*: 19Who are Your disciples, and what do You teach?

Jesus: 20I have spoken in public where the world can hear, always teaching in the synagogue and in the temple where the Jewish people gather. I have never spoken in secret. 21So why would you need to interrogate Me? Many have heard Me teach. Why don't you question them? They know what I have taught.

22While Jesus offered His response, an officer standing nearby struck Jesus with his hand.

Officer: Is that how You speak to the high priest?

Jesus: 23If I have spoken incorrectly, why don't you point out the untruths that I speak? Why do you hit Me if what I have said is correct?

24Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas bound as a prisoner. 25As this was happening, Peter was still warming himself by the fire.

Servants and Officers: You, too, are one of His disciples, aren't you?

Peter: No, I am not.

26One of the high priest's servants who was related to *Malchus*—the person Peter *attacked and* cut off his ear—*recognized Peter.*

High Priest's Servant: Didn't I see you in the garden with Him?

27Peter denied it again, and instantly a rooster crowed.

28Before the sun had risen, Jesus was taken from Caiaphas to the governor's palace. The Jewish leaders would not enter the palace because their presence in a Roman office would defile them and cause them to miss the Passover feast. Pilate, the governor, met them outside.

► Now Caiaphas is high priest at this time. The sacred office he occupies has been corrupted for more than a

* 18:9 John 6:39

Initially, Pilate tells the Jewish leaders to take Jesus and try Him according to Jewish law, but when they hint at capital charges, Pilate agrees to interrogate Jesus as a traitor to the empire. Rome reserves the right to decide who lives and dies in the provinces. They don't delegate that to the Jewish high council. The charge of blasphemy carries no weight in Roman jurisprudence, for it is a matter of Jewish religious law. Rome has no opinion on such matters. So a new charge must be concocted, a charge that Rome does care about. Rome does care about taxes, of course, and takes a dim view of anyone making royal claims under their noses.

Pilate agrees to hear the charge, not wasting a Roman minute. He takes Jesus inside and begins asking Him about these charges. Pilate can't handle the truth when he asks, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus is the King of the Jews, and that is the truth. But as Jesus knows, the world doesn't recognize His kingdom. That's because it is sourced in heaven above, not in Rome. His authority comes from God the Father, Creator, Sustainer—not from the Roman senate.

century by Jewish collaboration with Greeks and Romans. Reformers are few, and they have been unable to cleanse the high office from its pollutants. Because of this, many Jews have stopped coming to the temple. How can God's holy habitation on earth be pure if its primary representative is coddling the enemies of Israel? Caiaphas knows he needs friends in high places to put an end to Jesus, so he turns to Pilate, the Roman governor. It is Pilate's job to look out for Roman interests in Judea. He is an irritable man, unnecessarily cruel and intentionally provocative. Many Jews will die on his watch. For Pilate, Jesus is just one more.

Pilate: [29]What charges do you bring against this man?

Priests and Officials: [30]If He weren't a lawbreaker, we wouldn't have brought Him to you.

Pilate: [31]Then judge Him yourselves, by your own law.

Jews: Our authority does not allow us to give Him the death penalty.

[32]All these things were a fulfillment of the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way that He would die. [33]So Pilate reentered the governor's palace and called for Jesus to follow him.

Pilate: Are You the King of the Jews?

Jesus: [34]Are you asking Me because you believe this is true, or have others said this about Me?

Pilate: [35]I'm not a Jew, am I? Your people, including the chief priests, have arrested You and placed You in my custody. What have You done?

Jesus: [36]My kingdom is not recognized in this world. If this were My kingdom, My servants would be fighting for My freedom. But My kingdom is not in this physical realm.

Pilate: [37]So You are a king?

Jesus: You say that I am king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the cosmos: to demonstrate the power of truth. Everyone who seeks truth hears My voice.

Pilate *(to Jesus)*: [38]What is truth?

Pilate left Jesus to go and speak to the Jewish people.

Pilate *(to the Jews)*: I have not found any cause for charges to be brought against this man. [39]Your custom is that I should release a prisoner to you each year in honor of the Passover celebration; shall I release the King of the Jews to you?

Jews: [40]No, not this man! Give us Barabbas!

You should know that Barabbas was a terrorist.

19 Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. 2The soldiers twisted thorny branches together as a crown and placed it onto His brow and wrapped Him in a purple cloth. 3They drew near to Him, shouting:

Soldiers *(striking at Jesus)*: Bow down, everyone! This is the King of the Jews!

Pilate *(going out to the crowd)*: 4Listen, I stand in front of you with this man to make myself clear: I find this man innocent of any crimes.

5Then Jesus was paraded out before the people, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Pilate: Here is the man!

Chief Priests and Officers *(shouting)*: 6Crucify, crucify!

Pilate: You take Him and crucify Him; I have declared Him not guilty of any punishable crime!

Jews: 7Our law says that He should die because He claims to be the Son of God.

8Pilate was terrified to hear the Jews making their claims for His execution; 9so he retired to his court, the Praetorium.

Pilate *(to Jesus)*: Where are You from?

Jesus did not speak.

Pilate: 10How can You ignore me? Are You not aware that I have the authority either to free You or to crucify You?

Jesus: 11Any authority you have over Me comes from above, not from your political position. Because of this, the one who handed Me to you is guilty of the greater sin.

12Pilate listened to Jesus' words. Taking them to heart, he attempted to release Jesus; but the Jews opposed him, shouting:

Jews: If you release this man, you have betrayed Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king threatens Caesar's throne.

13After Pilate heard these accusations, he sent Jesus out and took his seat in the place where he rendered judgment. This place was called the Pavement, or Gabbatha in Hebrew. 14All this occurred at the sixth hour on the day everyone prepares for the Passover.

Pilate *(to the Jews)*: Look, here is your King!

Jews: 15Put Him away; crucify Him!

Pilate: You want me to crucify your King?

Chief Priests: We have no king but Caesar!

16Pilate handed Him over to his soldiers, knowing that He would be crucified. 17They sent Jesus out carrying His own instrument of execution, the cross, to a hill known as the Place of the Skull, or Golgotha in Hebrew. 18In that place, they crucified Him along with two others. One was on His right and the other on His left. 19Pilate ordered that a plaque be placed above Jesus' head. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20Because the site was near an urban region, it was written in three languages (Greek, Latin, and Hebrew) so that all could understand.

Chief Priests *(to Pilate)*: 21Don't write, "The King of the Jews." Write, "He said, 'I am King of the Jews'!"

Pilate: 22I have written what I have written.

23As Jesus was being crucified, the soldiers tore His outer garments into four pieces, one for each of them. They wanted to do the same with His tunic, but it was seamless—one piece of fabric woven from the top down. 24So they said,

Soldier *(to other soldiers)*: Don't tear it. Let's cast lots, and the winner will take the whole thing.

This happened in keeping with the Hebrew Scriptures, which said, "They divided My outer garments and cast lots for My clothes."* These soldiers did exactly what was foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. 25Jesus' mother was standing next

* 19:24 Psalm 22:18

to His cross along with her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26]Jesus looked to see His mother and the disciple He loved standing nearby.

Jesus *(to Mary, His mother)*: Dear woman, this is your son *(motioning to the beloved disciple)*! [27](to *John,* His disciple) This is now your mother.

► Now you know who "the beloved disciple" is: the last eyewitness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Mary has become family to John, fulfilling the dying wish of Jesus, his Savior. For those who are gathered at the foot of the cross, family is less about blood kinship than it is about covenant obedience.

The mother of the Lord will serve the redemptive purposes of her son and the Savior of the world until her last day on earth. Anyone feeling sorry for himself should think about Jesus. He spent all this time before His death, and through His death, demonstrating how to love and how to serve. He is asking John to do no more in serving Mary than He did in serving us.

From that moment, the disciple treated her like his own mother and welcomed her into his house. [28]Jesus knew now that His work had been accomplished, and the Hebrew Scriptures were being fulfilled.

Jesus: I am thirsty.

[29]A jar of sour wine had been left there, so they took a hyssop branch with a sponge soaked in the vinegar and put it to His mouth. [30]When Jesus drank, He spoke:

Jesus: It is finished!

In that moment, His head fell; and He gave up the spirit. [31]The Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken so the bodies would not remain on the crosses on the Sabbath. It was the day of preparation for the Passover, and that year the Passover fell on the Sabbath. [32]The soldiers came and broke the legs of both the men crucified next to Jesus. [33]When they came up to Jesus' cross, they could see that He was dead; so they did not break His legs. [34]Instead, one soldier took his spear and pierced His abdomen, which brought a gush of blood and water.

[35]This testimony is true. In fact, it is an eyewitness account; and he has reported what he saw so that you also may believe. [36]It happened this way to fulfill the Hebrew Scriptures that "not one of His bones shall be broken";* [37]and the Hebrew Scriptures also say, "They will look upon Him whom they pierced."*

[38]After all this, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple who kept his faith a secret for fear of the Jewish officials, made a request to Pilate for the body of Jesus. Pilate granted his request, and Joseph retrieved the body. [39]Nicodemus, who first came to Jesus under the cloak of darkness, brought over 100 pounds of myrrh and ointments for His burial. [40]Together, they took Jesus' body and wrapped Him in linens soaked in essential oils and spices, according to Jewish burial customs.

[41]Near the place He was crucified, there was a garden with a newly prepared tomb. [42]Because it was the day of preparation, they arranged to lay Jesus in this tomb so they could rest on the Sabbath.

► As the lifeless body of Jesus is laid into the virgin tomb, those who witnessed the spectacle retreat into the city that has claimed the lives of so many prophets. All are crushed that their teacher and friend has died such a horrible death. Their hopes are dashed against the rocks of Golgotha. In the first hours of grief, Jesus' followers huddle together in secret in the city, hoping to avoid arrests and executions. They mourn. They grieve. They remember. Three days later, some venture outside the city and return to the place where He was buried. Miraculously, the stone has been rolled back, and the rock-hewn tomb is empty. Has someone taken His body? Are His enemies laying a trap

* 19:36 Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20 * 19:37 Zechariah 12:10

for His followers? Or perhaps—could it be—that the last days have arrived?

20 Before the sun had risen on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene made a trip to the tomb where His body was laid to rest. In the darkness, she discovered the covering had been rolled away. 2She darted out of the garden to find Simon Peter and the dearly loved disciple to deliver this startling news.

Mary Magdalene: They have taken the body of our Lord, and we cannot find Him!

3Together, they all departed for the tomb to see for themselves. 4They began to run, and Peter could not keep up. The beloved disciple arrived first 5but did not go in. There was no corpse in the tomb, only the linens and cloths He was wrapped in. 6When Simon Peter finally arrived, he went into the tomb and observed the same: 7the cloth that covered His face appeared to have been folded carefully and placed, not with the linen cloths, but to the side. 8After Peter pointed this out, the other disciple (who had arrived long before Peter) also entered the tomb; and based on what he saw, faith began to well up inside him! 9Before this moment, none of them understood the Scriptures and why He must be raised from the dead. 10Then they all went to their homes.

11Mary, however, stood outside the tomb sobbing, crying, and kneeling at its entrance. 12As she cried, two heavenly messengers appeared before her sitting where Jesus' head and feet had been laid.

Heavenly Messengers: 13Dear woman, why are you weeping?

Mary Magdalene: They have taken away my Lord, and I cannot find Him.

14After uttering these words, she turned around to see Jesus standing before her, but she did not recognize Him.

Jesus: 15Dear woman, why are you sobbing? Who is it you are looking for?

She still had no idea who it was before her. Thinking He was the gardener, she muttered:

Mary Magdalene: Sir, if you are the one who carried Him away, then tell me where He is and I will retrieve Him.

Jesus: 16Mary!

Mary Magdalene *(turning to Jesus and speaking in Hebrew)***:** Rabboni, my Teacher!

Jesus: 17Mary, you cannot hold Me. I must rise above this world to be with My Father, who is also your Father; My God, who is also your God. Go tell this to all My brothers.

18Mary Magdalene obeyed and went directly to His disciples.

► The hope of resurrection has often been a topic on the lips of Jesus. Now it is taking shape. Confusion gives way to conviction as Jesus appears alive over the next few Sundays. One by one He convinces His followers that God has raised Him from the dead.

Mary Magdalene *(announcing to the disciples)***:** I have seen the Lord, and this is what He said to me . . .

19On that same evening (Resurrection Sunday), the followers gathered together behind locked doors in fear that some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were still searching for them. Out of nowhere, Jesus appeared in the center of the room.

Jesus: May each one of you be at peace.

20As He was speaking, He revealed the wounds in His hands and side. The disciples began to celebrate as it sank in that they were really seeing the Lord.

Jesus: 21I give you the gift of peace. In the same way the Father sent Me, I am now sending you.

22Now He drew close enough to each of them that *they could feel His breath*. He breathed on them:

Jesus: Welcome the Holy Spirit of the living God. 23You now have the mantle

of God's forgiveness. As you go, you are able to share the life-giving power to forgive sins, or to withhold forgiveness.

24All of the eleven were present with the exception of Thomas. 25He heard the accounts of each brother's interaction with the Lord.

The Other Disciples: We have seen the Lord!

Thomas: Until I see His hands, feel the wounds of the nails, and put my hand to His side, I won't believe what you are saying.

26Eight days later, they gathered again behind locked doors; and Jesus reappeared. This time Thomas was with them.

Jesus: May each one of you be at peace.

27He drew close to Thomas.

Jesus: Reach out and touch Me. See the punctures in My hands; reach out your hand, and put it to My side; leave behind your faithlessness, and believe.

Thomas *(filled with emotion)***:** 28You are the one True God and Lord of my life.

Jesus: 29Thomas, you have faith because you have seen Me. Blessed are all those who never see Me and yet they still believe.

30Jesus performed many other wondrous signs that are not written in this book. 31These accounts are recorded so that you, too, might believe that Jesus is the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* the Son of God, because believing grants you the life He came to share.

21 There was one other time when Jesus appeared to the disciples—this time by the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: 2Simon Peter, Thomas (the Twin), Nathanael (the Galilean from Cana), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

Simon Peter *(to disciples)***:** 3I am going fishing.

Disciples: Then we will come with you.

► After Jesus' death, the disciples don't know what to do with themselves, other than return to their old livelihood of fishing. This band of fishermen is lost and lonely, but just when they think things can't be stranger, Jesus shows up. He tells them to fish on the other side of the boat. They do, and they are suddenly overwhelmed with fish. The nets are bulging.

What He shows here is that not only will their old ways of living leave His followers as empty as the nets, but their old habits will not work either. He has impacted their lives in a way that changed them forever. They can't go back. And He knows they don't know how to go forward.

They went out in the boat and caught nothing through the night. 4As day was breaking, Jesus was standing on the beach; but they did not know it was Jesus.

Jesus: 5My sons, you haven't caught any fish, have you?

Disciples: No.

Jesus: 6Throw your net on the starboard side of the boat, and your net will find the fish.

They did what He said, and suddenly they could not lift their net because of the massive weight of the fish that filled it. 7The disciple loved by Jesus turned to Peter and said:

Beloved Disciple: It is the Lord.

Immediately, when Simon Peter heard these words, he threw on his shirt (which he would take off while he was working) and dove into the sea. 8The rest of the disciples followed him, bringing in the boat and dragging in their net full of fish. They were close to the shore, fishing only about 100 yards out. 9When they arrived on shore, they saw a charcoal fire laid with fish on the grill. *He had* bread too.

Jesus *(to disciples)*: [10]Bring some of the fish you just caught.

[11]Simon Peter went back to the boat to unload the fish from the net. He pulled 153 large fish from the net. Despite the number of the fish, the net held without a tear.

Jesus: [12]Come, and join Me for breakfast.

► Jesus reveals to His disciples a world where God is intimately involved, the main actor in the drama of history. These fish, all 153, are a sign from God representing the community of men and women transformed by faith. Some of them sit down and don't say a word as they ponder all of this. Others busy themselves in work. Each in his own way thinks, wonders, and prays.

That's how John always begins and ends his stories of Jesus: reminding believers to become the sons of God. The resurrection of Jesus shows the world He is the resurrection and the life. That isn't life after death; it is the reality that through Jesus believers can have abundant life, a full and meaningful life, here and now through faith.

Not one of the disciples dared to ask, "Who are You?" They knew it was the Lord. [13]Jesus took the bread and gave it to each of them, and then He did the same with the fish. [14]This was the third time the disciples had seen Jesus since His death and resurrection. [15]They finished eating breakfast.

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these other things?

Simon Peter: Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.

Jesus: Take care of My lambs.

[16]Jesus asked him a second time . . .

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love Me?

Simon Peter: Yes, Lord. You must surely know that I love You.

Jesus: Shepherd My sheep.

[17](for the third time) Simon, son of John, do you love Me?

Peter was hurt because He asked him the same question a third time, "Do you love Me?"

Simon Peter: Lord, You know everything! You know that I love You.

Jesus: Look after My sheep. [18]I tell you the truth: when you were younger, you would pick up and go wherever you pleased; but when you grow old, someone else will help you and take you places you do not want to go.

► Ever since the night Judas betrayed Jesus and Peter denied knowing Christ three times, Peter has felt small. He has felt he betrayed Jesus too. Matching the three denials, Jesus has Peter reaffirm his love for Him three times. At the same time, Jesus reaffirms Peter's call to ministry each time by challenging him to serve as a leader. The conversation on the beach that day affects him profoundly. From then on, Simon Peter is one of the most humble followers of Jesus, but he is also one of the great leaders of the early church, as Acts explains.

The disciples all learn a lesson that day. No matter what someone may have done, the Master wants the miracle of forgiveness to restore that person to be whom He made and called him or her to be.

[19]Jesus said all this as an indicator of the nature of Peter's death, which would glorify God. After this conversation, Jesus said,

Jesus: Follow Me!

[20]Peter turned around to see the disciple loved by Jesus following the two of them, the same disciple who leaned back on

Jesus' side during their supper and asked, "Lord, who is going to betray You?"

Peter: [21]Lord, and what will happen to this man?

Jesus: [22]If I choose for him to remain till I return, what difference will this make to you? You follow Me!

[23]It is from this exchange with Jesus that some thought this disciple would not die. But Jesus never said that. He said, "If I choose for him to remain till I return, what difference will this make to you?" [24]That very same disciple is the one offering this truthful account written just for you. [25]There are so many other things that Jesus said and did; and if these accounts were also written down, the books could not be contained in the entire cosmos.

► John has reached the end of his story. Future believers will go on without him, but not without his words. John's voice is added to the voices of the prophets and the witnesses declaring God has become flesh as Jesus, who manifested true life in the midst of humanity. Now that's a pretty big idea for a fisherman, but John goes to his grave bearing witness that it is true.

This account, in particular, shows how to enter into God's kingdom through faith in Jesus so they can experience eternal life. This is his invitation to join him in this marvelous journey.

ACTS

History of the early church

By Luke, the physician

The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, presents a selective history of the early church from Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the dispersion of the good news from Jerusalem to Rome, the center of the known world. Luke writes in the manner of an apologist, describing how the amazing growth of this Kingdom movement could have come only through the power of God. He presents it as an outgrowth of the Jewish faith and not a new religion in the Roman Empire. It begins in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, and fulfills the promises spoken centuries earlier by Israel's poets and prophets. Acts shows how the gospel message moves culturally from the Jews to the Samaritans to the non-Jews, and geographically from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Greece and, finally, to Rome.

As with his Gospel, Luke dedicates Acts to Theophilus, likely a high-ranking Roman official. He describes this account as the continuing story of what Jesus began to do and teach. Now the risen Jesus is working through people He chooses to carry the message of redemption to the ends of the earth. Despite the name of this book, not all of His apostles or emissaries are discussed in this history. Luke focuses his account on the contributions of two men: Simon Peter, one of "the twelve," and Paul (also called Saul), a Pharisee who persecuted the movement until he encountered the risen Jesus on his way to Damascus. Luke also traces the history of two churches: the church in Jerusalem, the mother church consisting mainly of Jewish Christians, and the church in Antioch, consisting of both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. It is the church in Antioch that helps to launch Paul's missionary efforts to Asia and Greece, and it is there that believers are first called Christians. At the heart of Luke's story are the conflicts and changes that take place as Jesus' kingdom message goes from place to place and people to people. Jesus was a polarizing figure in His day, so it's no wonder that Jesus' followers also create controversy as they carry on His message.

In spite of persecution by the Romans and disagreements within the church, the early church grows rapidly. When believers are forced out of Jerusalem and into other cities, they take the good news with them. Believers use their suffering as a catalyst to spread the message of Jesus, which is a lesson that will continue to inspire the church into the future.

Luke, in this his second volume concerning the genesis of the Christian movement, doesn't preserve Jesus' teachings during those mysterious meetings with His emissaries after His death. Surely they are filled with joy, curiosity, and amazement as His followers hang on His every word and gaze on the reality of His bodily resurrection as He describes the kingdom of God. His words are undoubtedly intended to prepare each of them for this journey, a journey with a clear destination in sight—the kingdom of God.

An integral part of this kingdom is the activity of the Holy Spirit to empower the people of God as they expand the kingdom beyond the region of Palestine. Luke records surprisingly little about the day-to-day life of these early Christians, about how they integrated their faith into their culture; but he does emphasize the work of the Spirit who empowers miracles and gives believers the means to testify of their faith before Jews and the outsiders.

1 To *a lover of God,* Theophilus: In my first book, I recounted the events of Jesus' life—His actions, His teachings—[2-3]*from the beginning of His life* until He was taken up into heaven. After His great suffering *and vindication,* He showed His apostles that He was alive—appearing to them repeatedly over a period of 40 days, giving them many convincing proofs of His resurrection. *As before,* He spoke constantly of the kingdom of God. During these appearances, He had instructed His chosen messengers through the Holy Spirit, [4]prohibiting them from leaving Jerusalem, but rather requiring them to wait there until they received what He called "the promise of the Father."

Jesus: This is what you heard Me teach—[5]that just as John ritually cleansed people with water through baptism,* so you will be washed with the Holy Spirit very soon.

[6]When they had gathered *just outside Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives,* they asked Jesus,

Disciples: Is now the time, Lord—the time when You will reestablish Your kingdom in *our land of* Israel?

Jesus: [7]The Father, on His own authority, has determined the ages and epochs *of history,* but you have not been given this knowledge. [8]*Here's the knowledge you need:* you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be My witnesses, first here in Jerusalem, then beyond to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the farthest places on earth.

[9]As He finished this commission, He began to rise from the ground before their eyes until the clouds obscured Him from their vision. [10]As they strained to get one last glimpse of Him going into heaven, the Lord's emissaries* realized two men in white robes were standing among them.

Two Men: [11]You Galileans, why are you standing here staring up into the sky? This Jesus who is leaving you and ascending to heaven will return in the same way you see Him departing.

[12]Then the disciples returned to Jerusalem—their short journey from the Mount of Olives was an acceptable Sabbath Day's walk.

[13-14]Back in the city, they went to the room where they were staying—a second-floor room. This whole group devoted themselves to constant prayer with one accord: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), Judas (son of James), a number of women including Mary (Jesus' mother), and some of Jesus' brothers.

[15]As the disciples prayed, Peter stood among the group of about 120 people and made this proposal:

Peter: [16-17]My friends, everything in the Hebrew Scriptures had to be fulfilled, including what the Holy Spirit foretold through David about Judas. *As you know,* Judas was one of us and participated in our ministry until he guided the authorities to arrest Jesus. [18](He was paid handsomely for his betrayal, and he bought a field with the blood money. But he died *on that land*—falling so that his abdomen burst and his internal organs gushed out. [19]News of this death spread

* 1:5 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 1:10 Literally, apostles

The Creator of heaven and earth is orchestrating a redemptive story that will radically change the course of history. The most significant supernatural event in the history of this newly formed church will be the filling of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God will direct the church's growth. But how does the early church make important decisions before the Holy Spirit descends on them?

The company of disciples turns to the practice of "drawing lots," a practice used by saints for centuries to discover God's providential leading. After much prayer, Joseph and Matthias most likely write their names on scraps; then someone draws the replacement's name out of a bag. What seems like a 50/50 chance is, in fact, God's way of imparting His will. The disciples aren't putting their faith in "chance"; they are putting their faith in a God who lives. This living God isn't distant; He is a player in their lives, active when His people seek Him and His will. They know God directs the process, start to finish, and determines whose name is drawn to join the eleven.

to everyone in Jerusalem, so Judas's property is known as Hakeldama, which means "field of blood.") 20In this way, one of *David's* psalms was fulfilled: "May their camps be bleak, with not one left in any tent."* But the psalms also include these words: "Let his position of oversight be given to another."* 21So we need *to determine his replacement* from among the men who have been with us during all of the Lord Jesus' travels among us— 22from His baptism* by John until His ascension. We need someone to join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection.

23The group put forward two men: Joseph (who was also known as Barsabbas or Justus) and Matthias.

Disciples: 24Lord, You know everyone's heart. Make it clear to us which of these two is Your choice 25to take on this ministry as Your apostle, replacing Judas who went his own way to his own destination.

26Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, so he was added to the eleven apostles *to reconstitute the twelve.*

2 When the holy day of Pentecost came *50 days after Passover*, they were gathered together in one place.

2*Picture yourself among the disciples:*

A sound roars from the sky without warning, the roar of a violent wind, and the whole house where you are gathered reverberates with the sound. 3Then a flame appears, dividing into smaller flames and spreading from one person to the next. 4All the people present are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in languages they've never spoken, as the Spirit empowers them.

5*Because of the holy festival,* there are devout Jews staying as pilgrims in Jerusalem from every nation under the sun. 6They hear the sound, and a crowd gathers. They are amazed because each of them can hear the group speaking in their native languages. 7They are shocked and amazed by this.

Pilgrims: Just a minute. Aren't all of these people Galileans? 8How in the world do we all hear our native languages being spoken? 9*Look*—there are Parthians here, and Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and Judeans, residents of Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, 10Phrygians and Pamphylians, Egyptians and Libyans from Cyrene, Romans including both Jews *by birth* and converts, 11Cretans, and Arabs. We're each, in our own languages, hearing these people talk about God's powerful deeds.

12Their amazement becomes confusion as they wonder,

Pilgrims: What does this mean?

Skeptics: 13It doesn't mean anything. They're all drunk on some fresh wine!

► This miraculous sign of God's kingdom is astounding. The followers of Jesus are not known as people who

* 1:20 Psalm 69:25-26 * 1:20 Psalm 109:8 * 1:22 Literally, immersion, an act to show repentance

drink too much wine with breakfast, so this fantastic episode requires some other kind of explanation. Unfortunately it is impossible to comprehend or explain what transpires on Pentecost. But this is not a novelty performance; rather, it is the foundation of the kingdom of God in that it establishes the church as the place where God moves on the earth through His Spirit. They expect a political kingdom, but God moves in people's hearts to transform individuals and communities.

14 As the twelve stood together, Peter
shouted to the crowd,

Peter: Men of Judea and all who are staying here in Jerusalem, listen. I want you to understand: 15 these people aren't drunk as you may think. Look, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! 16 *No, this isn't drunkenness;* this is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. 17 Hear what God says!

In the last days,
I will offer My Spirit to humanity as a libation.
Your children will boldly speak *the word of the Lord.*
Young warriors will see visions,
and your elders will dream dreams.
18 Yes, in those days I shall offer My Spirit to all servants,
both male and female, and they will boldly speak My word.
19 And in the heaven above and on the earth below,
I shall give signs *of impending judgment*:
blood, fire, and clouds of smoke.
20 The sun will become a void of darkness,
and the moon will become blood.
Then the great and dreadful day of the Lord will arrive,
21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
will be liberated *into God's freedom and peace.**

22 All of you Israelites, listen to my message: it's about Jesus of Nazareth, a man whom God authenticated for you by performing in your presence powerful deeds, wonders, and signs through Him, just as you yourselves know. 23 This man, *Jesus*, who came into your hands by God's sure plan and advanced knowledge, you nailed to a cross and killed in collaboration with lawless outsiders. 24 But God raised Jesus and unleashed Him from the agonizing birth pangs of death, for death could not possibly keep Jesus in its power. 25 David spoke of Jesus' *resurrection*, saying:

I see the Lord is ever present with me.
I will not live in fear *or abandon my calling* because He guides my right hand.
26 My heart is glad; my soul rejoices;
my body is safe.
27 You will not abandon me to experience the suffering of a miserable afterlife,
nor leave Your Holy One to rot *alone*.
28 *Instead*, You direct me on a path that leads to a beautiful life.
As I walk with You, the pleasures are never-ending, and I know true joy and contentment.*

29 My fellow Israelites, I can say without question that David our ancestor died and was buried, and his tomb is with us today. 30 *David wasn't speaking of himself;* he was speaking as a prophet. He saw *with prophetic insight* that God had made a solemn promise to him: God would put one of his descendants on His throne. 31 Here's what David was seeing in advance; here's what David was talking about—the Anointed One would be resurrected. Think *of David's words* about Him not being abandoned to the place of the dead nor being left to decay in the grave. 32 *He was talking about* Jesus, the One God has raised, whom all of us have seen with our own eyes *and announce to you today*. 33 Since Jesus has been lifted to the right hand of God—*the highest place of authority and power*—and since Jesus has received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has now poured out what you have seen and heard here today. 34 *Remember:* David couldn't have been speaking of himself rising to the heavens when he said,

The Master said to my master,
"Sit here at My right hand,
in the place of honor and power,

* 2:17-21 Joel 2:28-32 * 2:25-28 Psalm 16:8-11

35And I will gather Your enemies together,
lead them in on hands and knees,
and You will rest Your feet on their
backs."*

36Everyone in Israel should now realize with certainty *what God has done*: God has made Jesus both Lord and Anointed King—this same Jesus whom you crucified.

37When the people heard this, their hearts were pierced; and they said to Peter and his fellow apostles,

Pilgrims: Our brothers, what should we do?

Peter: 38Reconsider your lives; change your direction. Participate in the ceremonial washing of baptism* in the name of Jesus God's Anointed, *the Liberating King.* Then your sins will be forgiven, and the gift of the Holy Spirit will be yours. 39For the promise *of the Spirit* is for you, for your children, for all people—even those considered outsiders and outcasts—the Lord our God invites everyone to come to Him.

Just as God raised Jesus from a decaying body, Peter holds out hope for God to liberate those who follow Him from their decaying culture.

40Peter was pleading and offering many logical reasons to believe. 41Whoever made a place for his message in their hearts received the baptism;* in fact, that day alone, about 3,000 people joined the disciples.

42The community continually committed themselves to learning what the apostles taught them, gathering for fellowship, breaking bread, and praying. 43Everyone felt a sense of awe because the apostles were doing many signs and wonders among them. 44There was an intense sense of togetherness among all who believed; they shared all their material possessions in trust. 45They sold any possessions and goods *that did not benefit the community* and used the money to help everyone in need. 46They were unified as they worshiped at the temple day after day. In homes, they broke bread and shared meals with glad and generous hearts. 47The new disciples praised God, and they enjoyed the goodwill of all the people *of the city*. Day after day the Lord added to their number everyone who was experiencing liberation.

► Although this young and thriving church has no political influence, property, fame, or wealth, it is powerful. Its power is centered in living the gospel. The people value one another more than any possessions. They come together as a large, passionate, healthy family where it is natural to pray and share all of life together. The kingdom of God is blossoming on earth as these lovers of God embrace the teachings of Jesus. In the days ahead, the church will lose much of this initial beauty and appeal; it will become consumed with a desire for material possessions, cultural influence, and power.

3 One day at three o'clock in the afternoon, a customary time for daily prayer, Peter and John walked to the temple. 2Some people were carrying in a man who had been paralyzed since birth. Every day they brought him to a place near the beautiful gate *(one of the temple entrances)* so he could beg for money from people entering *to worship*. 3He saw Peter and John coming and asked them for a contribution. 4Peter gazed intensely at him—so did John.

Peter: Look at us.

5The man looked up at them, assuming they were about to give him some money.

Peter: 6I want to give you something, but I don't have any silver or gold. Here's what I can offer you: stand up and walk in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Anointed One.

7Then Peter took the man's right hand and lifted him to his feet. Instantly the man's feet and ankles grew strong. 8He jumped and walked, accompanying Peter and John into the temple where he walked, jumped for joy, and shouted praises to God. 9-11A crowd ran to the

* 2:34-35 Psalm 110:1 * 2:38 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification * 2:41 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification

commotion, and they gathered around this man in an open area called Solomon's Porch. There he was, standing on his own two feet, holding on to Peter and John. They knew exactly who he was—the beggar they passed at the beautiful gate every day. Everyone was absolutely amazed at this wonderful miracle; they were speechless, stunned.

Just as Jesus promised, the Spirit comes on believers in power, enabling them to do miracles like this. Now they can participate in the truth of the good news.

Peter *(to the crowd)*: 12Why are you so amazed, my fellow Israelites? Why are you staring at my friend and me as though we did this miracle through our own power or made this fellow walk by our own holiness? 13*We didn't do this—God did!* The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—the God of our ancestors has glorified Jesus, God's servant—the same Jesus whom you betrayed and rejected in front of Pilate, even though Pilate was going to release Him. 14He is the Holy and Righteous One, but you rejected Him and asked for a murderer to be released to you instead. 15*You not only rejected Him,* but you killed Him—the very Author of life! But God raised Jesus from the dead, whom my friend John and I have seen with our own eyes. 16So that's how this miracle happened: we have faith in the name of Jesus, and He is the power that made this man strong—this man who is known to all of you. It is faith in Jesus that has given this man his complete health here today, in front of all of you.

17Listen, friends, I know you didn't fully realize what you were doing *when you rejected and betrayed Jesus.* I know that you, and your rulers as well, were acting in ignorance. 18God was at work in all this, fulfilling what He had predicted through all the prophets—that the Anointed One would suffer. 19So now you need to rethink everything and turn to God so your sins will be forgiven and a new day can dawn, days of refreshing times flowing from the Lord. 20Then God may send Jesus the Anointed, whom God has chosen for you. 21He is in heaven now and must remain there until the day of universal restoration comes—the restoration which in ancient times God announced through the holy prophets. 22Moses, *for example,* said, "The Eternal One your God will raise up from among your people a prophet who will be like me. You must listen to Him. 23And whoever does not listen to His words will be completely uprooted from among the people."*

24Every prophet, from Samuel through all of his successors, agreed. 25You are the descendants of these prophets, and you are the people of God's covenant to your ancestors. God's word to Abraham includes you: "Because of your descendants, all the *families* of the earth will be blessed."* 26So when God raised up His Servant, God sent Him first to you, to begin blessing you by calling you to change your path from evil ways *to God's ways.*

4 The conversation continued *for a few hours there in Solomon's porch.* Suddenly, the head of the temple police and some members of the Sadducean party interrupted Peter and John. 2They were annoyed because Peter and John were *enthusiastically* teaching that in Jesus, resurrection of the dead is possible—*an idea the Sadducees completely rejected.* 3So they arrested Peter, John, *and the man who was healed* and kept them in jail overnight. 4*But during these few afternoon hours between the man's miraculous healing and their arrest,* Peter and John already had convinced about 5,000 more people to believe their message about Jesus!

5The next morning, *the Jewish leaders*—their officials, elders, and scholars—called a meeting in Jerusalem 6presided over by Annas (the patriarch of the ruling priestly clan), along with Caiaphas *(his son-in-law)*, John, Alexander, and other members of their clan. 7They made their prisoners stand in the middle of the assembly and questioned them.

Jewish Leaders: Who gave you the authority to create that spectacle in the temple yesterday?

Peter *(filled with the Spirit)*: 8Rulers and elders of the people, 9yesterday a good deed was done. Someone who was sick was healed. If you're asking us how this

* 3:23 Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19 * 3:25 Genesis 22:18; 26:4

happened, [10]I want all of you and all of the people of Israel to know this man standing in front of you—obviously in good health—was healed by the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, the Anointed One. This is the same Jesus whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead. [11]He is "the stone that you builders rejected who has become the very stone that holds together the entire foundation"* *on which a new temple is being built.* [12]There is no one else who can rescue us, and there is no other name under heaven given to any human by whom we may be rescued.

[13]Now the leaders were surprised and confused. They looked at Peter and John and realized they were *typical peasants*—uneducated, utterly ordinary fellows—with extraordinary confidence. The leaders recognized them as companions of Jesus, [14]then they turned their attention to the third man standing beside them—recently lame, now standing tall and healthy. What could they say in response to all this?

[15]*Because they were at a loss about what to do,* they excused the prisoners so the council could deliberate in private.

Jewish Leaders: [16]What do we do with these fellows? Anyone who lives in Jerusalem will know an unexplainable sign has been performed through these two preachers. We can't deny their story. [17]The best we can do is try to keep it from spreading. So let's warn them to stop speaking to anybody in this name.

[18]The leaders brought the prisoners back in and prohibited them from doing any more speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus. [19]Peter and John *listened quietly and then* replied,

Peter and John: You are the judges here, so we'll leave it up to you to judge whether it is right in the sight of God to obey your commands or God's. [20]*But one thing we can tell you:* we cannot possibly restrain ourselves from speaking about what we have seen and heard *with our own eyes and ears.*

[21-22]The council threatened them again, but finally let them go because public opinion strongly supported Peter and John and this man who had received this miraculous sign. He was over 40 years old, *so his situation was known to many people,* and they couldn't help but glorify God for his healing.

[23]Peter and John, upon their release, went right to their friends and told the story—including the warning from the council. [24]The whole community responded with this prayer to God:

Community of Believers: God, our King,
You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything they contain.*
[25]You are the One who, by the Holy Spirit, spoke through our ancestor David, Your servant, with these words:

Why did the nations rage?
Why did they imagine useless things?
[26]The kings of the earth took their stand;
their rulers assembled in opposition against the Eternal One and His Anointed King.*

[27]This is exactly what has happened among us, here in this city. *The foreign ruler* Pontius Pilate and *the Jewish ruler* Herod, along with their respective peoples, have assembled in opposition to Your holy servant Jesus, the One You chose. [28]They have done whatever Your hand and plan predetermined should happen. [29]And now, Lord, take note of their intimidations *intended to silence us.* Grant us, Your servants, the courageous confidence we need to go ahead and proclaim Your message [30]while You reach out Your hand to heal people, enabling us to perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

[31]They finished their prayer, and immediately the whole place where they had gathered began to shake. All the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began speaking God's message with courageous confidence.

► The Holy Spirit changes everyone and everything. If there is any doubt about the power of the Spirit, just take a look at Peter. When Jesus was

* 4:11 Psalm 118:22 * 4:24 A prayer inspired by other biblical prayers: 2 Kings 19:15; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 37:16
* 4:25-26 Psalm 2:1-2

captured, Peter cowered in fear that he might be identified as a man who loved Jesus. Now this same man is preaching, healing, and pointing his finger in the face of Jewish officials who have captured him and John. With a boldness that is not his own, he blames them for the death of Jesus and does not cower at their show of violence.

32*During those days,* the entire community of believers was deeply united in heart and soul to such an extent that they stopped claiming private ownership of their possessions. Instead, they held everything in common. 33The apostles with great power gave their eyewitness reports of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Everyone was surrounded by an extraordinary grace. 34Not a single person in the community was in need because those who had been affluent sold their houses or lands and brought the proceeds 35to the emissaries* of the Lord. They then distributed the funds to individuals according to their needs. 36-37One fellow, a Cyprian Levite named Joseph, earned a nickname *because of his generosity* in selling a field and bringing the money to the apostles *in this way*. From that time on, they called him Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement."

► This portrait of the early church as an unselfish community is captivating and inspiring. It presents a challenge for many followers of the Anointed One who want to show sacrificially their love to Him and His church. Many today wonder how to translate this into a modern culture so shaped by consumerism and self-interest, but no translation is necessary. These problems weren't foreign to the early community. In contrast to the generosity and sincerity of some like Barnabas, Luke now explains that others gave not out of love, but out of a desire to be honored by the community.

5 Once a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira fully cooperating, *committed fraud.* He sold some property 2and kept some of the proceeds, but he pretended to make a full donation to the Lord's emissaries.*

Peter: 3Ananias, have you allowed Satan to influence your lies to the Holy Spirit and hold back some of the money? 4Look, it was your property before you sold it, and the money was all yours after you sold it. Why have you concocted this scheme in your heart? You weren't just lying to us; you were lying to God.

5Ananias heard these words and immediately dropped to the ground, dead; fear overcame all those who heard of the incident. 6Some young men came, wrapped the body, and buried it immediately. 7About three hours had passed when Sapphira arrived. She had no idea what had happened.

Peter: 8Did you sell the land for such-and-such a price?

Sapphira: Yes, that was the price.

Peter: 9Why did the two of you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Do you hear those footsteps outside? Those are the young men who just buried your husband, and now they will carry you out as well.

10She—*like her husband*—immediately fell dead at Peter's feet. The young men came in and carried her corpse outside and buried it beside her husband. 11The whole church was terrified by this story, as were others who heard it.

► In these formative days, God sends some strong messages about His work in the church: the power to heal, the beauty of life in the Spirit, and His hatred for arrogant religion. If God does not rebuke the married couple who chooses to make a show of their supposed generosity, then Christianity might drift in the wrong direction. While the Jewish leaders are using religion as a means to gain power and

* 4:35 Literally, apostles * 5:2 Literally, apostles

increase their reputations, the teachings of Jesus lead down a path toward the kingdom of God rather than toward human advancement. God chooses to expose these bad motives quickly, so that the church can give out of pure motives rather than out of a desire to appear righteous.

12 *Those were amazing days*—with many signs and wonders being performed through the apostles among the people. The church would gather as a unified group in Solomon's Porch, 13 enjoying great respect by the people of the city—though most people wouldn't risk publicly affiliating with them. 14 Even so, record numbers of believers—both men and women—were added to the Lord. 15 *The church's renown was so great that* when Peter walked down the street, people would carry out their sick relatives hoping his shadow would fall on some of them as he passed. 16 Even people from towns surrounding Jerusalem would come, bringing others who were sick or tormented by unclean spirits, all of whom were cured.

17 *Of course, this popularity elicited a response:* the high priest and his affiliates in the Sadducean party were jealous, 18 so they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But that night, a messenger of the Lord opened the doors of the prison and led them to freedom.

Messenger of the Lord: 20 Go to the temple, and stand up to tell the people the whole message about this way of life *from Jesus*.

21 At dawn they did as they were told; they returned to their teaching in the temple.

Meanwhile the council of Jewish elders was gathering—convened by the high priest and his colleagues. They sent the temple police to the prison to have the Lord's emissaries* brought *for further examination*; 22 but of course, the temple police soon realized they weren't there. They returned and reported,

Temple Police: 23 The prison was secure and locked, and the guards were standing in front of the doors; but when we unlocked the doors, the cell was empty.

24 The captain of the temple police and the senior priests were completely mystified when they heard this. They had no idea what had happened. 25 Just then, someone arrived with this news:

Temple Messenger: You know those men you put in prison last night? *Well, they're free.* At this moment, they're *at it again,* teaching our people in the temple!

26 The temple police—this time, accompanied by their captain—rushed over *to the temple* and brought the emissaries* of the Lord to the council. They were careful not to use violence, because the people were so supportive of them that the police feared being stoned by the crowd *if they were too rough.* 27 Once again the men stood before the council. The high priest began the questioning.

High Priest: 28 Didn't we give you strict orders to stop teaching in this name? But here you are, spreading your teaching throughout Jerusalem. And you are determined to blame us for this man's death.

Peter and the Apostles: 29 If we have to choose between obedience to God and obedience to any human authority, then we must obey God. 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from death. You killed Jesus by hanging Him on a tree, 31 but God has lifted Him high, to God's own right hand, as the Prince, as the Liberator. God intends to bring Israel to a radical rethinking of our lives and to a complete forgiveness of our sins. 32 We are witnesses to these things. There is another witness, too—the Holy Spirit—whom God has given to all who choose to obey Him.

33 The council was furious and would have killed them; 34 but Gamaliel, a Pharisee in the council respected as a teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures, stood up and ordered the men to be sent out *so the council could confer privately*.

Gamaliel: 35 Fellow Jews, you need to act with great care in your treatment of these fellows. 36 Remember when a man named Theudas rose to notoriety? He claimed to be somebody important, and he attracted about 400 followers. But

* 5:21 Literally, apostles * 5:26 Literally, apostles

when he was killed, his entire movement disintegrated and nothing came of it.
37After him came Judas, that Galilean fellow, at the time of the census. He also attracted a following; but when he died, his entire movement fell apart. 38So here's my advice: in this case, just let these men go. Ignore them. If this is just another movement arising from human enthusiasm, it will die out soon enough.
39But then again, if God is in this, you won't be able to stop it—unless, of course, you're ready to fight against God!

40The council was convinced, so they brought the apostles back in. They were flogged, again told not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released. 41As they left the council, they *weren't discouraged at all. In fact, they* were filled with joy over being considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of His name. 42And constantly, *whether in public,* in the temple, or in their homes, they kept teaching and proclaiming Jesus as the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.*

► These emissaries of Jesus inspire us with their passion to serve Jesus and advance the gospel in the face of torture and abuse. After a night in prison and a public flogging, they moved forward with smiles on their faces. Believers in the Western church often enjoy the benefits of social and political power and are unwilling to suffer persecution for their faith as these men did. At the same time, many believers throughout the world face daily pressure to renounce their faith but choose boldly to remain faithful despite social, economic, and even physical persecution. These believers follow closely the path trodden by the Anointed One and His early followers.

6 *Things were going well,* and the number of disciples was growing. But a problem arose. The Greek-speaking believers became frustrated with the Hebrew-speaking believers. The Greeks complained that the Greek-speaking widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. 2The twelve convened the entire community of disciples.

The Twelve: We could solve this problem ourselves, but that wouldn't be right. We need to focus on proclaiming God's message, not on distributing food. 3So, friends, find seven respected men from the community of faith. These men should be full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom. Whomever you select we will commission to resolve this matter 4so we can maintain our focus on praying and serving—*not meals*—but the message.

► Life in the new community isn't perfect. However, the believers don't allow their linguistic and social barriers to divide the church; instead, the emissaries seize this opportunity to create greater unity between disparate groups. They appoint seven leaders, mostly Greek-speaking (based on their names), to oversee the distribution of food. This movement toward unity will be a challenge to the future church that will so easily be divided by any problem, real or perceived.

5The whole community—*Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking*—was very pleased with this plan, so they chose *seven men:* Stephen (a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit), Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (a Greek-speaking convert from Antioch). 6These men were presented to the apostles, who then prayed for them and commissioned them by laying their hands on them. 7The message of God continued to spread, and the number of disciples continued to increase significantly there in Jerusalem. Even priests in large numbers became obedient to the faith.

8Stephen continually overflowed with extraordinary grace and power, and he was able to perform a number of miraculous signs and wonders in public view.
9But eventually a group arose to oppose Stephen *and the message to which his signs and wonders pointed.* (These men were from a group called the Free Synagogue and included Cyrenians, Alexandrians,

Cilicians, and Asians.) 10The Holy Spirit gave Stephen such wisdom in responding to their arguments that they were humiliated; 11*in retaliation,* they spread a vicious rumor: "We heard Stephen speak blasphemies against Moses and God."

12Their rumor prompted an uprising that included common people, religious officials, and scholars. They surprised Stephen, grabbed him, and hauled him before the council. 13They convinced some witnesses to give false testimony.

False Witnesses: This fellow constantly degrades the holy temple and mocks our holy law. 14*With our own ears,* we've heard him say this Jesus fellow, this Nazarene *he's always talking about,* will actually destroy the holy temple and will try to change the sacred customs we received from Moses.

15The entire council turned its gaze on Stephen *to see how he would respond.* They *were shocked to* see his face radiant *with peace*—as if he were a heavenly messenger.

7 **High Priest:** *What do you have to say for yourself?* Are these accusations accurate?

Stephen: 2Brothers, fathers, please listen to me. Our glorious God revealed Himself to our common ancestor Abraham, when he lived far away in Mesopotamia before he immigrated to Haran. 3God gave him this command: "Leave your country. Leave your family *and your inheritance.* Move into unknown territory, where I will show you a new homeland."* 4First, he left Chaldea *in southern Mesopotamia* and settled in Haran until his father died. Then God led him still farther from his original home—until he settled here, in our land. 5*But at that point,* God still hadn't given him any of this land as his permanent possession—not even the footprint under his sandal actually belonged to him yet. But God did give Abraham a promise—a promise that yes, someday, the entire land would indeed belong to him and his descendants. *Of course, this promise was all the more amazing because* at that moment, Abraham had no descendants at all.

6God said that Abraham's descendants would first live in a foreign country as resident aliens, *as refugees,* for 400 years. During this time, they would be enslaved and treated horribly. *But that would not be the end of the story.* 7God promised, "I will judge the nation that enslaves them,"* and "I will bring them to this mountain to serve Me."* 8God gave him the covenant ritual of circumcision *as a sign of His sacred promise.* When Abraham fathered his son, Isaac, he performed this ritual of circumcision on the eighth day. Then Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered the twelve patriarchs.

9The patriarchs were jealous of *their brother* Joseph, so they sold him as a slave into Egypt. Even so, God was with him; 10and *time after time,* God rescued Joseph from whatever trials befell him. God gave Joseph the favor and wisdom *to overcome each adversity* and eventually to win the confidence and respect of *his captors, including* Pharaoh, the king of Egypt himself. So Pharaoh entrusted his whole nation and his whole household to Joseph's stewardship. 11*Some time later,* a terrible famine spread through the entire region—from Canaan down to Egypt—and everyone suffered greatly. Our ancestors, *living here in the region of Canaan,* could find nothing to eat. 12Jacob heard that Egypt had stores of grain; so he sent our forefathers, *his sons, to procure food* there. 13Later, when they returned to Egypt a second time, Joseph revealed his true identity to them. He also told Pharaoh his family story.

14-16Joseph then invited his father Jacob and all his clan to come and live with him in Egypt. So Jacob came, along with 75 extended family members. After their deaths, their remains were brought back to this land so they could be buried in the same tomb where Abraham *had buried Sarah* (he had purchased the tomb for a certain amount of silver from the family of Hamor in *the town of* Shechem).

17Still God's promise to Abraham had not yet been fulfilled, but the time for that fulfillment was drawing very near. In the meantime, our ancestors living in Egypt rapidly multiplied. 18Eventually a new king came to power—one who had not known Joseph *when he was the most powerful man in Egypt.* 19This new leader *feared the growing population of our ancestors and* manipulated them for his own benefit, eventually seeking

* 7:3 Genesis 12:1 * 7:7 Genesis 15:14 * 7:7 Exodus 3:12

to control their population by forcing
them to abandon their infants so they
would die. 20Into this horrible situation
our ancestor Moses was born, and he was
a beautiful child in God's eyes. He was
raised for three months in his father's
home, 21and then he was abandoned
as the brutal regime required. However,
Pharaoh's daughter found, adopted,
and raised him as her own son. 22So
Moses learned the culture and wisdom
of the Egyptians and became a powerful
man—both as an intellectual and as a
leader. 23When he reached the age of 40,
his heart drew him to visit his kinfolk,
our ancestors, the Israelites. 24During
his visit, he saw one of our people being
wronged, and he took sides with our peo-
ple by killing an Egyptian. 25He thought
his kinfolk would recognize him as their
God-given liberator, but they didn't real-
ize *who he was and what he represented.*

26The next day Moses was walking
among the Israelites again when he
observed a fight—but this time, it was
between two Israelites. He intervened
and tried to reconcile the men. "You
two are brothers," he said. "Why do you
attack each other?" 27But the aggressor
pushed Moses away and responded *with
contempt*: "Who made you our prince
and judge? 28Are you going to slay me
and hide my body as you did with the
Egyptian yesterday?"* 29Realizing this
murder had not gone unnoticed, he
quickly escaped Egypt and lived as a
refugee in the land of Midian. He *mar-
ried there and* had two sons.

30Forty more years passed. One day
while Moses was in the desert near
Mount Sinai, a heavenly messenger
appeared to him in the flames of a burn-
ing bush. 31The phenomenon intrigued
Moses; and as he approached for a closer
look, he heard a voice—the voice of
the Lord: 32"I am the God of your own
fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and
Jacob."* This terrified Moses—he began
to tremble and looked away in fear. 33The
voice continued: "Take off your sandals
*and stand barefoot on the ground in My
presence*, for this ground is holy ground.
34I have avidly watched how My people
are being mistreated by the Egyptians.
I have heard their groaning *at the treat-
ment of their oppressors.* I am descending
personally to rescue them. So get up. I'm
sending you to Egypt."*

35*Now remember:* this was the same
Moses who had been rejected by his kin-
folk when they said, "Who made you our
prince and judge?" This man, *rejected
by his own people,* was the one God had
truly sent and commissioned by the
heavenly messenger who appeared in
the bush, to be their leader and deliverer.

36Moses indeed led our ancestors to
freedom, and he performed miraculous
signs and wonders in Egypt, at the Red
Sea, and in the wilderness over a period
of 40 years. 37This Moses promised our
ancestors, "The Eternal One your God
will raise up from among your people
a Prophet who will be like me."* 38This
is the same one who led the people to
Mount Sinai, where a heavenly messen-
ger spoke to him and our ancestors, and
who received the living message of God
to give to us.

39But our ancestors still resisted.
They again pushed Moses away and
refused to follow him. In their hearts,
they were ready to return to *their former
slavery in* Egypt. 40*While Moses was on
the mountain communing with God,* they
begged Aaron to make idols to lead
them. "We have no idea what happened
to this fellow, Moses, who brought us
from Egypt,"* they said. 41So they made
a calf as their new god, and they even
sacrificed to it and celebrated an object
they had fabricated *as if it was their God.*

42*And you remember what God did
next:* He let them go. He turned from
them and let them follow their idola-
trous path—worshiping sun, moon, and
stars *just as their unenlightened neighbors
did.* The prophet *Amos* spoke for God
about this horrible betrayal:

Did you offer Me sacrifices or give Me
offerings
during your 40-year wilderness
journey, you Israelites?
43*No, but* you have taken along your
sacred tent for the worship of
Moloch,
and you honored the star of
Rompha, your false god.
So, if you want to worship your man-
made images,
you may do so—beyond Babylon.*

44Now recall that our ancestors had
a sacred tent in the wilderness, the tent
God directed Moses to build according

* 7:28 Exodus 2:13-14 * 7:32 Exodus 3:6 * 7:34 Exodus 3:5, 7-8, 10 * 7:37 Deuteronomy 18:15 * 7:40 Exodus 32:1
* 7:42-43 Amos 5:26-27

to the pattern revealed to him. 45When
Joshua led our ancestors to dispossess
the nations God drove out before them,
our ancestors carried this sacred tent.
It remained here in the land until the
time of David. 46David found favor with
God and asked Him for permission to
build a permanent structure *(rather
than a portable tent)* to honor Him. 47It
was, of course, Solomon who actually
built God's house. 48Yet we all know the
Most High God doesn't actually dwell in
structures made by human hands, as the
prophet *Isaiah* said,

49"Since My throne is heaven
and since My footstool is earth—
What kind of structure can you build
to contain Me?
What *man-made* space could provide
Me a resting place?" asks the
Eternal One.
50"Didn't I make all things with My own
hand?"*

► As Stephen recounts how God has worked with the Jews in spite of their faltering fidelity, his speech up to this point sounds like any good synagogue sermon. In the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, he narrates the history of God's work of salvation among the Jewish people in the midst of their repeated struggle with unfaithfulness and idolatry. However, it is one thing for his audience to agree that idolatry was a problem in the past and another when they are charged with the accusation of the same idolatry in the present. According to Stephen, those who reject Jesus are following the same path as the people who rejected Moses to follow idols. Such a strong message strikes a nerve, and Stephen becomes the first martyr of the church because of it.

Stephen: 51You stubborn, stiff-necked
people! Sure, you are physically Jews,
but you are no different from outsiders
in your hearts and ears! You are just
like your ancestors, constantly fighting
against the Holy Spirit. 52Didn't your
ancestors persecute the prophets? First,
they killed those prophets who predicted
the coming of the Just One; and now,
you have betrayed and murdered the
Just One Himself! 53Yes, you received the
law as given by heavenly messengers,
but you haven't kept the law which you
received.

54Upon hearing this, *his audience could contain themselves no longer*. They boiled in fury at Stephen; they clenched their jaws and ground their teeth. 55But Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. Gazing upward into heaven, he saw *something they couldn't see:* the glory of God, and Jesus standing at His right hand.

Stephen: 56Look, I see the heavens opening! I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!

57At this, they covered their ears and started shouting. The whole crowd rushed at Stephen, converged on him, 58dragged him out of the city, and stoned him.

They laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul, 59while they were pelting Stephen with rocks.

Stephen *(as rocks fell upon him)***:** Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60Then he knelt *in prayer*, shouting at the top of his lungs,

Stephen: Lord, do not hold this evil against them!

Those were his final words; then he fell asleep *in death*.

► Stephen's sermon weaves together the story of the Jews and the life of Jesus. The point of the message is that God pursues His children despite their constant failure. The crucifixion of Jesus is the greatest of all of these failures.

Stephen affirms that through circumcision they have made themselves look like Jews, but their hearts and ears need circumcising as well. Of course, telling the Jewish leaders to

* 7:49-50 Isaiah 66:1-2

get their hearts and ears circumcised elicits a rather violent response. Stephen speaks the truth so that all might hear, including a man named Saul.

8 1-2Some devout men buried Stephen and mourned his passing with loud cries of grief. But Saul, *this young man who seemed to be supervising the whole violent event,* was pleased by Stephen's death. That very day, the *whole* church in Jerusalem began experiencing severe persecution. All *of the followers of Jesus*—except for the emissaries* themselves—fled to the countryside of Judea and Samaria. 3*Young* Saul went on a rampage—hunting the church, house after house, dragging both men and women to prison.

► They flee to the very places where Jesus said His disciples would be His witnesses at the beginning of this book. As a result, the persecution spreads the message of Christ rather than hinders it. Commenting about similar events a century later, church father Tertullian will write, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church."

4All those who had been scattered *by the persecution* moved from place to place; *and wherever they went, they weren't afraid or silent. Instead,* they spread the message of Jesus.

5Philip, *for example,* headed north to the city of Samaria, and he told them the news of the Anointed One. 6The crowds were united in their desire to understand Philip's message. They not only listened with their ears, but they witnessed miraculous signs with their eyes. 7Unclean spirits cried out with loud screams as they were exorcised from people. Paralyzed people and lame people moved and walked in plain view. 8So the city was swept with joy.

9-11There was a fellow named Simon who had a widespread and long-standing reputation as a sorcerer in Samaria. Everyone—not just poor or uneducated people, but also the city's elite—paid him great respect. Because he had amazed them with his magic, they thought, "This is a truly great man, full of the power of the God of Greatness." 12But they were even more impressed with Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus the Anointed. Both men and women received ceremonial washing through baptism*—13and even Simon himself became a believer. After his baptism, he shadowed Philip constantly, and he was as amazed as everyone else when he saw great and miraculous signs taking place.

14Meanwhile word had reached the Lord's emissaries* in Jerusalem that the message of God was welcomed in Samaria—*a land of half-breeds and heretics in the minds of many Judeans.* They sent Peter and John 15to pray for the Samaritans. They were especially eager to see if the new believers would receive the Holy Spirit 16because until this point they had been baptized* in the name of the Lord Jesus but had not experienced the Holy Spirit. 17When Peter and John laid hands on the people, the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon them *all.*

18Simon *watched all this closely.* He saw the Holy Spirit coming to the people when the apostles laid hands on them. So he *came to Peter and John and* offered them money.

Simon: 19I want to purchase this ability to confer the Holy Spirit on people through the laying on of my hands.

Peter: 20May your silver rot right along with you, Simon! To think the Holy Spirit is some kind of magic that can be procured with money! 21You aren't even close to being ready for this kind of ministry; your heart is not right with God. 22You need to turn from your past, and you need to pray that the Lord will forgive the evil intent of your heart. 23I can see deep bitterness has poisoned you, and wickedness has locked you in chains.

Simon: 24*Please*—you must pray to the Lord for me. I don't want these terrible things to be true of me.

25Peter and John preached to and talked *with the Samaritans* about the message of the Lord; and then they returned to Jerusalem, stopping in many other Samaritan

* 8:1-2 Literally, apostles * 8:12 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification * 8:14 Literally, apostles
* 8:16 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification

villages along the way to proclaim the good news.

[26]A heavenly messenger brought this *short* message from the Lord to Philip *during his time preaching in Samaria:*

Messenger of the Lord: Leave Samaria. Go south to the Jerusalem-Gaza road.

The message was especially unusual because this road runs through the middle of uninhabited desert. [27]But Philip got up, *left the excitement of Samaria,* and did as he was told to do. *Along this road, Philip saw a chariot in the distance. In the chariot was* a dignitary from Ethiopia (the treasurer for Queen Candace), *an African man* who had been castrated. He had gone north to Jerusalem to worship *at the Jewish temple*, [28]and he was now *heading southwest* on his way home. He was seated in the chariot and was reading aloud from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

[29]Philip received another prompting from the Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit: Go over to the chariot and climb on board.

[30]So he started running until he was even with the chariot. Philip heard the Ethiopian reading aloud and recognized the words from the prophet Isaiah.

Philip: Do you understand the meaning of what you're reading?

The Ethiopian: [31]How can I understand it unless I have a mentor?

Then he invited Philip to sit in the chariot. [32]Here's the passage he was reading from the Hebrew Scriptures:

> Like a sheep, He was led to be slaughtered.
> Like a lamb about to be shorn of its wool,
> He was completely silent.
> [33]He was humiliated, and He received no justice.
> Who can describe His peers? *Who would treat Him this way?*
> For they snuffed out His life.*

The Ethiopian: [34]*Here's my first question.* Is the prophet describing his own situation, or is he describing someone else's *calamity*?

[35]That began a conversation in which Philip used the passage to explain the good news of Jesus. [36]Eventually the chariot passed a body of water beside the road.

The Ethiopian: Since there is water here, is there anything that might prevent me from being ceremonially washed through baptism* *and identified as a disciple of Jesus*?

Philip: [[37]If you believe in your heart that Jesus the Anointed is God's Son, then nothing can stop you.

The Ethiopian said that he believed.]*

Possibly a reference to the Jewish prohibition of full participation in temple worship by men who have been castrated—a prohibition he likely encounters in this very visit to Jerusalem.

[38]He commanded the charioteer to stop the horses. Then Philip and the Ethiopian official walked together into the water. There Philip baptized* him, *initiating him as a fellow disciple.* [39]When they came out of the water, Philip was immediately caught up by the Holy Spirit and taken from the sight of the Ethiopian, who climbed back into his chariot and continued on his journey, overflowing with joy. [40]Philip found himself at a town called Azotus *(formerly the Philistine capital city of Ashdod, on the Mediterranean)*; and from there he traveled north again, proclaiming the good news in town after town until he came to Caesarea.

9 Back to Saul—this fuming, raging, hateful man who wanted to kill every last one of the Lord's disciples: he went to the high priest *in Jerusalem* [2]for authorization to purge all the synagogues in Damascus of followers of the way of Jesus.* His plan was to arrest and chain any of Jesus' followers—women as well as men—and transport them back to Jerusalem. [3]He traveled north toward Damascus *with a group of companions.*

Imagine this: Suddenly a light flashes from the sky around Saul, [4]and he falls to the ground at the sound of a voice.

The Lord: Saul, Saul, why are you attacking Me?

* 8:32-33 Isaiah 53:7-8 * 8:36 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification * 8:37 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 37. * 8:38 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification * 9:2 The Christian movement

Saul: 5Lord, who are You?

Then he hears these words*:*

The Lord: I am Jesus. I am the One you are attacking. 6Get up. Enter the city. You will learn there what you are to do.

These are shocking, unexpected words that will change his life forever.

7His other traveling companions just stand there, *paralyzed,* speechless because they, too, heard the voice; but there is nobody in sight. 8Saul rises to his feet, his eyes wide open, but he can't see a thing. So his companions lead their blind friend by the hand and take him into Damascus. 9He waits for three days—completely blind—and does not eat a bite or drink a drop of anything.

10Meanwhile, in Damascus a disciple named Ananias had a vision in which the Lord Jesus spoke to him.

The Lord: Ananias.

Ananias: Here I am, Lord.

The Lord: 11Get up and go to Straight Boulevard. Go to the house of Judas, and inquire about a man from Tarsus, Saul by name. He is praying *to Me at this very instant.* 12He has had a vision—a vision of a man by your name who will come, lay hands on him, and heal his eyesight.

Ananias: 13Lord, *I know whom You're talking about.* I've heard rumors about this fellow. He*'s an evil man and* has caused great harm for Your special people in Jerusalem. 14I've heard that he has been authorized by the religious authorities to come here and chain everyone who associates with Your name.

The Lord: 15*Yes, but* you must go! I have chosen him to be My instrument to bring My name far and wide—to outsiders, to kings, and to the people of Israel as well. 16I have much to show him, including how much he must suffer for My name.

17So Ananias went and entered the house *where Saul was staying.* He laid his hands on Saul and called to him.

Ananias: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, sent me so you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

18At that instant, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see. So he got up, received the ceremonial washing of baptism* *identifying him as a disciple,* 19ate some food *(remember, he had not eaten for three days),* and regained his strength. He spent a lot of time with the disciples in Damascus over the next several days. 20Then he went into the very synagogues he had intended to purge, proclaiming,

Saul: Jesus is God's Son!

21Obviously this amazed everybody, and the buzz spread.

The People: Isn't he the man who caused so much trouble in Jerusalem for everyone identified with Jesus? Didn't he come here to arrest followers of Jesus and bring them in chains to the religious authorities? *Now he's switched sides and is preaching Jesus?*

22As time passed, Saul's confidence grew stronger and stronger, so much so that he debated with the Jews of Damascus and made an irrefutable case that Jesus is, in fact, God's Anointed, *the Liberating King.*

23*They didn't like being confounded like this;* so after several days, the Jews plotted to assassinate Saul. 24But he learned of the plot. He knew they were keeping the city gates under constant surveillance, so they could follow and kill him when he left. 25*To save Saul, the disciples came up with a plan of their own.* During the night, they put Saul in a basket and lowered him by ropes from an opening in the wall of the city *rather than passing through the gates. Their plan worked,* 26and he returned to Jerusalem.

He tried to join the disciples there, but they didn't think he was sincere.

27*Only one person accepted Saul as a genuine disciple,* Barnabas, who became Saul's advocate to the apostles. He told the whole story of what happened in Damascus, from Saul's vision and message from the Lord to his transformation into a confident proclaimer of the name of Jesus. 28Finally they accepted Saul and gave him access to their community, and he continued to speak confidently in the name of

* 9:18 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification

the Lord. 29He dialogued—and argued—with a group of Greek-speaking Jews. *That didn't go well either, because soon* they were plotting to kill him also. 30His fellow believers helped him escape by bringing him to Caesarea and sending him to *his hometown*, Tarsus.

31And so the church enjoyed a period of peace and growth throughout the regions of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The disciples lived in deep reverence for the Lord, they experienced the strong comfort of the Holy Spirit, and their numbers increased.

32*Peter hadn't been idle during all this time.* He was having a number of amazing experiences of his own, traveling from group to group and visiting the various communities of believers. Once he came to a town called Lydda, *a border town between Samaria and Judea,* and met with God's special people there. 33He visited a man named Aeneas. This poor fellow had been paralyzed for eight years, unable to leave his bed.

Peter: 34Aeneas, Jesus the Anointed heals you. Get up! Now you can make your own bed!

And immediately—he got up! 35All the local residents—both of Lydda and nearby Sharon—saw Aeneas *healthy and strong again,* so they turned to the Lord.

36In *a nearby coastal city,* Joppa, there lived a disciple whose *Aramaic* name was Tabitha, or Dorcas in Greek. She was a good woman—devotedly doing good and giving to the poor. 37While Peter was in Lydda, she fell sick and died. Her fellow disciples washed her body and laid her in an upstairs room. 38They had heard Peter was nearby, so two of them went with an urgent message, "Please come to Joppa as soon as possible."

39Peter went with them and immediately entered the room where the corpse had been placed. *It was quite a scene*—the widows *of the community* were crowded in the room, weeping, showing the various items of clothing that Dorcas had made for them.

40Peter asked them to leave the room; then he got on his knees. He prayed *for a while* and then turned to her body.

Peter: Tabitha, get up!

She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. 41Giving her his hand, Peter lifted her up. Then he called in the other disciples—including the widows—and reintroduced them to their beloved friend. 42The news of this miracle spread throughout the city, and many believed in the Lord. 43Peter stayed in Joppa for some time as the guest of Simon, a tanner by profession.

While Peter is in Joppa, another story is developing a day's journey to the north along the Mediterranean coast.

10 Cornelius, a Roman Centurion and a member of *a unit called* the Italian Cohort, lived in Caesarea. 2Cornelius was *an outsider, but he was* a devout man—a God-fearing fellow with a God-fearing family. He consistently and generously gave to the poor, and he practiced constant prayer to God. 3About three o'clock one afternoon, he had a vision of a messenger of God.

Messenger of God: Cornelius!

Cornelius *(terrified)***:** 4What is it, sir?

Messenger of God: God has heard your prayers, and He has seen your kindness to the poor. *God has taken notice of you.* 5-6Send men *south* to Joppa, to the house of a tanner named Simon. Ask to speak to a guest of his named Simon, but also called Peter. You'll find this house near the waterfront.

7After the messenger departed, Cornelius immediately called two of his slaves and a soldier under his command—an especially devout soldier. 8He told them the whole story and sent them to Joppa.

9Just as these men were nearing Joppa about noon the next day, Peter went up on the flat rooftop *of Simon the tanner's house*. He planned to pray, 10but he soon grew hungry. While his lunch was being prepared, Peter had a vision of his own—*a vision that linked his present hunger with what was about to happen:* 11A rift opened in the sky, and a wide container—something like a huge sheet suspended by its four corners—descended through the torn opening toward the ground. 12This container teemed with four-footed animals, creatures that crawl, and birds—*pigs, bats, lizards, snakes, frogs, toads, and vultures.*

A Voice: 13Get up, Peter! Kill! Eat!

Peter: 14No way, Lord! *These animals are forbidden in the dietary laws of the Hebrew Scriptures!* I've never eaten non-kosher foods like these before—*not once in my life*!

A Voice: 15If God calls something permissible and clean, you must not call it forbidden and dirty!

16Peter saw this vision three times; but the third time, the container of animals flew up through the rift in the sky, *the rift healed,* 17and Peter was confused and unsettled as he tried to make sense of this strange vision.

At that very moment, *Peter heard the voices of* Cornelius's delegation, who had asked for directions to Simon's house, coming from the front gate.

Delegation: 18Is there a man named Simon, also called Peter, staying at this house?

19-20Peter's mind was still racing about the vision when the voice of the Holy Spirit broke through his churning thoughts.

Holy Spirit: The three men who are searching for you have been sent by Me. So get up! Go with them. Don't hesitate *or argue*.

21Peter rushed downstairs to the men.

Peter: I'm the one you're seeking. Can you tell me why you've come?

Delegation: 22We've been sent by *our commander and master*, Cornelius. He is a Centurion, and he is a good, honest man who worships your God. All the Jewish people speak well of him. A holy messenger told him to send for you, so you would come to his home and he could hear your message.

23Peter extended hospitality to them and gave them lodging overnight. When they departed together the next morning, Peter brought some believers from Joppa.

24They arrived in Caesarea the next afternoon *just before three o'clock*. Cornelius had anticipated their arrival and had assembled his relatives and close friends *to welcome them*. 25When Peter and Cornelius met, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in worship, 26but Peter helped him up.

Peter: Stand up, man! I am just a human being!

27They talked and entered the house to meet the whole crowd inside.

Peter: 28You know *I am a Jew.* We Jews consider it a breach of divine law to associate, much less share hospitality, with outsiders. But God has shown me something in recent days: I should no longer consider any human beneath me or unclean. 29That's why I made no objection when you invited me; rather, I came willingly. Now let me hear the story of why you invited me here.

Cornelius: 30It was about this time of day four days ago when I was here, in my house, praying the customary midafternoon prayer. Suddenly a man appeared out of nowhere. His clothes were dazzling white, and he stood directly in front of me 31and addressed me: "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your kindness to the poor has been noticed by God. 32God wants you to find a man in Joppa, Simon who is also called Peter, who is staying at the home of a tanner named Simon, near the seaside." 33I wasted no time, *did just as I was told,* and you have generously accepted my invitation. So here we are, in the presence of God, ready to take in all that the Lord has told you to tell us.

Peter: 34It is clear to me now that God plays no favorites, 35that God accepts every person whatever his or her culture or ethnic background, that God welcomes all who revere Him and do right. 36*You already know that* God sent a message to the people of Israel; it was a message of peace, peace through Jesus the Anointed—who is King of all people. 37You know this message spread through Judea, beginning in Galilee where John called people to be ritually cleansed through baptism.* 38You know God identified Jesus as the uniquely chosen One by pouring out the Holy Spirit on Him, by empowering Him. You know Jesus went through the land doing good *for all* and healing all who were suffering under the oppression of the evil one, for God was with Him. 39My friends and I stand as witnesses to all Jesus did in *the region of* Judea and *the city of* Jerusalem.

* 10:37 Literally, immersed, to show repentance

The people of our capital city killed
Him by hanging Him on a tree, 40but
God raised Him up on the third day and
made it possible for us to see Him. 41Not
everyone was granted this privilege, only
those of us whom God chose as wit-
nesses. We actually ate and drank with
Him after His resurrection. 42He told us
to spread His message to everyone and
to tell them that He is the One whom
God has chosen to be Judge, *to make a
just assessment of all people*—both liv-
ing and dead. 43All the prophets tell us
about Him and assert that every person
who believes in Jesus receives forgive-
ness of sins through His name.

► The true gospel is becoming increasingly clear as the church spreads and develops. What happens that day in Caesarea changes the face of Christianity forever. It builds a bridge from Jews to Gentiles, from insiders to outsiders, and sends the community of Jesus on a journey beyond the kind of religious and cultural barriers that all people erect. Through Peter's short trip, the church makes an important journey toward reaching the ends of the earth because the message of Jesus is not for the Jews alone but for all people of all time. This is a hard lesson, and not everyone is eager to learn it.

44*Peter wasn't planning to stop at this point,
but* the Holy Spirit suddenly interrupted
and came upon all the people who were
listening. 45-46They began speaking in for-
eign languages *(just as the Jewish disciples
did on the Day of Pentecost),* and their
hearts overflowed in joyful praises to God.
Peter's friends *from Joppa—all of them Jew-
ish,* all circumcised—were stunned to see
that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured
out even on outsiders.

Peter: 47Can anyone give any good reason
not to ceremonially wash these people
through baptism* *as fellow disciples*?
After all, it's obvious they have received
the Holy Spirit just as we did *on the Day
of Pentecost.*

48So he had them baptized in the name of
the Lord Jesus. The new disciples asked
him to stay for several more days.

11 1-2*By the time Peter and his
friends from Joppa returned to
Jerusalem,* news about outsid-
ers accepting God's message had already
spread to the Lord's emissaries* and
believers there. *Some of* the circumcised
believers didn't welcome Peter with joy,
but with criticism.

Circumcised Believers: 3*Why did you
violate divine law by* associating with
outsiders and sitting at the table with
them for a meal? *This is an outrage!*

4Peter patiently told them what had hap-
pened, laying out in detail the whole story.

Peter: 5I was in Joppa, I was praying, and
I fell into a trance. In my vision, some-
thing like a huge sheet descended from
the sky as if it were being lowered by its
four corners. It landed right in front of
me. 6It was full of all kinds of four-footed
creatures *that we would call unclean*—I
could identify mammals, snakes, lizards,
and birds. 7Then I heard a voice say,
"Get up, Peter! Kill these creatures and
eat them!" 8Of course, I replied, "No way,
Lord! Not a single bite of forbidden, non-
kosher food has ever touched my lips."
9But then the voice spoke from heaven
a second time: "If God makes some-
thing clean, you must not call it dirty
or forbidden." 10This whole drama was
repeated three times, and then it was all
pulled back up into the sky.

11At that very second, three men
arrived at the house where I was staying.
They had come to me from Caesarea.
12The Holy Spirit told me I should go with
them, that I shouldn't make any distinc-
tion *between them as Gentiles and us as
Jews.* These six brothers *from Joppa* came
with me; and yes, we entered the man's
home *even though he was an outsider.*

13The outsider told us the story of
how he had seen a heavenly messenger
standing in his house who said, "Send
to Joppa and bring back Simon, also
called Peter, 14and he will give you a
message that will rescue both you and
your household." 15Then I began to
speak; and as I did, the Holy Spirit fell
upon them—it was exactly as it had

* 10:47 Literally, immerse, in a rite of initiation and purification
* 11:1-2 Literally, apostles

been with us at the beginning. 16Then I remembered what Jesus had said to us: "John ritually cleansed people with water through baptism,* but you will be washed with the Holy Spirit."* 17So, if God gave them the same gift we were given when we believed in the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, who was I to stand in God's way?

18There was no argument, only silence.

Circumcised Believers: Well then, we must conclude that God has given to the outsiders the opportunity to rethink their lives, turn to God,* and gain a new life.

► Just as the experience of the Holy Spirit transforms that small community of believers into the church at the beginning of this book, the presence of the Spirit's work among these outsiders, the ones who were not a part of God's covenant with Moses, demonstrates that they, too, are part of the church. This isn't what many expected, and questions about inclusion of outsiders consume the early life of the church.

19The believers who were scattered *from Judea* because of the persecution following Stephen's stoning kept moving out, reaching Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Until this time, they had only shared their message with Jews. 20Then some men from Cyprus and Cyrene who had become believers came to Antioch, and they began sharing the message of the Lord Jesus with some Greek *converts to Judaism.* 21The Lord was at work through them, and a large number *of these Greeks* became believers and turned to the Lord Jesus.

22Word of this new development came to the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch *to investigate.* 23He arrived and saw God's grace in action there, so he rejoiced and urged them to remain faithful to the Lord, to maintain an enduring, unshakable devotion. 24This Barnabas truly was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith. A very large number of people were brought to the Lord.

25Barnabas soon was off again—now to Tarsus to look for Saul. 26He found Saul and brought him back to Antioch. The two of them spent an entire year there, meeting with the church and teaching huge numbers of people. It was there, in Antioch, where the term "Christian" was first used to identify disciples of Jesus.

27During that year, some prophets came north from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28A prophet named Agabus stood in a meeting and made a prediction by the Holy Spirit: there would be an expansive, terrible famine in the whole region during the reign of Claudius. 29*In anticipation of the famine,* the disciples determined to give an amount proportionate to their financial ability and create a relief fund for all the believers in Judea. 30They sent Barnabas and Saul to carry this fund to the elders *in Jerusalem.*

12 *Back in Jerusalem, hard times came to the disciples.* King Herod violently seized some who belonged to the church with the intention of mistreating them. 2He ordered James (brother of John) to be executed by the sword, *the first of those appointed as emissaries to be martyred.* 3This move pleased Jewish public opinion, so he decided to arrest Peter also. During the holy festival of Unleavened Bread, 4he caught Peter and imprisoned him, assigning four squads of soldiers to guard him. He planned to bring him to trial publicly after the Passover holiday.

5During Peter's imprisonment, the church prayed constantly and intensely to God for his safety. 6*Their prayers were not answered,* until the night before Peter's execution.

Picture this event: Peter is sound asleep between two soldiers, double-chained, with still more guards outside the prison door watching for external intruders. 7Suddenly the cell fills with light: it is a messenger of the Lord manifesting himself. He taps Peter on the side, awakening him.

Messenger of the Lord: Get up, quickly.

The chains fall off Peter's wrists.

Messenger of the Lord: 8Come on! Put on your belt. Put on your sandals.

Peter puts them on *and just stands there.*

* 11:16 Literally, immersed, to show repentance * 11:16 Acts 1:5 * 11:18 Literally, repent

Messenger of the Lord: Pull your cloak over your shoulders. *Come on!* Follow me!

9Peter does so, but he is completely dazed. He doesn't think this is really happening—he assumes he is dreaming or having a vision. 10They pass the first guard. They pass the second guard. They come to the iron gate that opens to the city. The gate swings open for them on its own, and they walk into a lane. Suddenly the messenger disappears.

11Peter finally realized all that had really happened.

Peter: *Amazing!* The Lord has sent His messenger to rescue me from Herod and the public spectacle *of my execution* which the Jews fully expected.

12Peter immediately rushed over to the home of a woman named Mary. (Mary's son, John Mark, *would eventually become an important associate of the apostles.*) A large group had gathered there to pray *for Peter and his safety*. 13He knocked at the outer gate; and a maid, Rhoda, answered. 14She recognized Peter's voice, but she was so overcome with excitement that she left him standing on the street and ran inside to tell everyone.

Rhoda: *Our prayers were answered!* Peter is at the front gate!

Praying Believers: 15*Rhoda,* you're crazy!

Rhoda: *No! Peter's out there! I'm sure of it!*

Praying Believers: Well, maybe it's his *guardian* angel *or something.*

16All this time, Peter was still out in the street, knocking on the gate. *Finally* they came and let him in. *Of course,* the disciples were stunned, *and everyone was talking at once.* 17Peter motioned for them to quiet down and then told them the amazing story of how the Lord engineered his escape.

► On the night before his execution, Peter sleeps like a baby. Here he is, chained in a room full of soldiers while James's blood is still moist on the ground. Although he can only assume this is his one last night before his own torturous death, he is not afraid. So peacefully does he rest, in fact, that the heavenly messenger has to prod him to wake up; and while he is walking, he questions if he is dreaming. Does the thought that believers are on their knees all day appealing to God for him give him peace? Maybe. But certainly Peter trusts that God is in control. A church that started with a few people is now over 8,000, and God is redeeming the rest of the world through these people.

Peter: Could you please get word to James, *our Lord's brother*, and the other believers *that I'm all right*?

Then he left to find a safer place to stay.

18But when morning came and Peter was gone, there was a huge uproar among the soldiers. 19Herod *sent troops* to find Peter, but he was missing. Herod interrogated the guards and ordered their executions. Peter headed down toward the coast to Caesarea, and he remained there.

20*At this time there was major political upheaval.* Herod was at odds with the populace of neighboring Tyre and Sidon, so the two cities sent a large group of representatives to meet with him. They won over one of Herod's closest associates, Blastus, the director of the treasury; then they pressured Herod to drop his grudge. Cooperation was important to the two cities because they *were all major trading partners and* depended on Herod's territory for food. 21*They struck a deal, and* Herod came over *to ratify it.* Dressed in all his royal finery and seated high above them on a platform, he made a speech; 22and the people of Tyre and Sidon interrupted with cheers to flatter him.

The People: This is the voice of a god! This is no mere mortal!

23Herod should have given glory to the true God; *but since he vainly accepted their flattery,* that very day a messenger of the Lord struck him with an illness. *It was an ugly disease,* involving putrefaction and worms eating his flesh. Eventually he died.

24*Through all this upheaval,* God's message spread to new frontiers and

attracted more and more people. 25Meanwhile, the time Barnabas and Saul spent *in Jerusalem* came to an end, and they reported back *to Antioch*, bringing along John, who was also called Mark.

► After Barnabas and Saul help deliver the relief fund to Jerusalem (11:29-30), the three men return to Antioch. With this trip by Saul (who will shortly be renamed Paul) back to Antioch, Luke's emphasis for the rest of the book shifts away from Peter and the church in Jerusalem to focus on Paul and his mission to spread the good news to Jews and outsiders throughout the northern Mediterranean area.

13 The church in Antioch *had grown strong*, with many prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon (a dark man *from Central Africa*), Lucius (from Cyrene *in North Africa*), Manaen (a member of Herod's governing council), and Saul. 2Once they were engaged in a time of worship and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them, "Commission Barnabas and Saul to a project I have called them to accomplish." 3They fasted and prayed some more, laid their hands on the two selected men, and sent them off on their new mission. 4Having received special commissioning by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul went to nearby Seleucia *on the coast*. Then they caught a ship to the island of Cyprus.

5At the city of Salamis *on the east side of Cyprus*, they proclaimed the message of God in Jewish synagogues, assisted by John Mark. 6-7They went *westward from town to town,* finally reaching Paphos on the western shore. There the proconsul named Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, summoned Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear their message. At his side was an occult spiritualist and Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus 8or Elymas (which means "magician"). Elymas argued with Barnabas and Saul, trying to keep Sergius Paulus from coming to faith.

9Saul, who is also known as Paul, was suddenly full of the Holy Spirit. He stared directly into Elymas's face.

Paul: 10You're a son of the devil. You're an enemy of justice, you're full of lies, and you steal opportunities from others. Why do you insist on confusing and twisting the clear, straight paths of the Lord? 11Hear this, *Elymas*: the Lord's hand is against you, and you will be *as* blind *as a bat* for a period of time, *beginning right now*!

At that instant, *it was as if* a mist came over Elymas and then total darkness. He stumbled around, groping for a hand so he could be led *back home*. 12When Sergius Paulus saw this happen, he came to faith and was attracted to and amazed by the teaching about the Lord.

13Paul and his entourage *boarded a ship and* set sail from Paphos. They traveled *north* to Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark, however, abandoned the mission and returned to Jerusalem.

14Paul and Barnabas continued from Perga to Pisidian Antioch; and on the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15After the regular reading *of the Hebrew Scriptures—including* passages from the Law and the Prophets—the synagogue leaders sent a message to them: "Brothers, if you would like to give us some exhortation, please do so." 16Paul rose to his feet, offered a gesture of greeting, and began his message.

Paul: Israelites and other God-fearing people, please hear me. 17The God of the Israelites chose our ancestors and helped them become a large population while they were living in Egypt many years ago. He displayed His great power by leading them out *of that powerful nation*. 18For about 40 years, He endured their constant complaining in the wilderness. 19He opened up some land for them in Canaan by destroying the seven nations living there, and that land became their inheritance for about 450 years. 20They had tribal leaders* through the time of the prophet Samuel. 21Then they asked for a king, and God gave them one—Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin—who reigned for 40 years. 22After God moved Saul aside, He made David king in his place. God had this to say about David: "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after My own heart. He's the kind of king who will rule in ways that please Me."* 23God has

* 13:20 In the Hebrew Scriptures, these leaders were called "judges." * 13:22 1 Samuel 13:14

selected one of David's descendants as the long-promised Liberator of Israel. I am speaking of Jesus.

24*Before Jesus arrived on the scene, His cousin* John was hard at work, proclaiming to all the people of Israel a ceremonial washing through baptism* and pointing to a new direction in thought and life. 25John's ministry climaxed when he said, "Who do you assume me to be? I am not the One *you're looking for*. No, but One is coming after me, One whose sandal thong I am unworthy to untie."* 26My brothers, fellow descendants of our common father Abraham, and others here who fear God, we are the ones to whom God has sent this message of salvation.

27But you know the people of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus. They didn't understand the words of the prophets that are read *in the synagogues* on Sabbath after Sabbath. As a result, they fulfilled the ancient prophecies by condemning Jesus. 28Even though they could find no offense punishable by death, still they asked Pilate to execute Jesus. 29When they carried out everything that had been foretold by the prophets, they took His body down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 30But *that was not the end:* God raised Him from the dead, 31and over a period of many days, He appeared to those who had been His companions from *the beginning of their journey in* Galilee until *its end in* Jerusalem. They are now witnesses to everyone. 32We are here to bring you the good news of God's promise to our ancestors, 33which He has now fulfilled for our children by raising Jesus. *Consider the promises fulfilled in Jesus.* The psalmist says, "You are My Son; today I have become Your Father."*

34Elsewhere God promises that Jesus will rise and never return to death and corruption again: "I will make You the holy and faithful promises I made to David."* 35Similarly, another psalm says, "You will not abandon Me to experience death and the grave or leave Me to rot alone."* 36*We all know* David died and was reduced to dust after he served God's purpose in his generation; 37these words *obviously* apply *not to David but* to the One God raised from death before suffering decay. 38So you must realize, my brothers, that through this *resurrected* man forgiveness of sins is assured to you. 39Through Jesus, everyone who believes is set free from all sins—sins which the law of Moses could not release you from. 40In light of all this, be careful that you do not fulfill these words of the prophet *Habakkuk*:

41Look, you scoffers!
Be shocked to death.
For in your days I am doing a work,
a work you will never believe, even
if someone tells you plainly!*

42Paul and Barnabas prepared to leave *the synagogue*, but the people wanted to hear more and urged them to return the following Sabbath. 43As the people dispersed after the meeting, many Jews and converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas. *Privately* Paul and Barnabas continued teaching them and urged them to remain steadfast in the grace of God. 44The next Sabbath, it seemed the whole city had gathered to hear the message of the Lord. 45But some of the Jewish leaders were jealous when they saw these huge crowds. They began to *argue with and* contradict Paul's message, as well as slander him. 46Paul and Barnabas together responded with great confidence.

Paul and Barnabas: *OK, then.* It was only right that we should bring God's message to you *Jewish people* first. But now, since you are rejecting our message and identifying yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the outsiders. 47The Lord has commanded us to do this. *Remember His words:*

I have appointed you a light to the
nations beyond Israel,
so you can bring redemption to
every corner of the earth.*

48*These words created two strong reactions.* The outsiders were thrilled and praised God's message, and all those who had been appointed for eternal life became believers. 49*Through them* the Lord's message spread through the whole region. 50But the Jewish leaders united the aristocratic religious women and the city's leading men in opposition to Paul and Barnabas, and soon they were persecuted and driven out of the region. 51They simply shook the dust off their feet in protest

* 13:24 Literally, immersion, an act to show repentance * 13:25 Luke 3:16 * 13:33 Psalm 2:7 * 13:34 Isaiah 55:3
* 13:35 Psalm 16:10 * 13:41 Habakkuk 1:5 * 13:47 Isaiah 49:6

and moved on to Iconium. 52The disciples *weren't intimidated at all; rather,* they were full of joy and the Holy Spirit.

► Paul never forsakes the Jews, the ones to whom the covenants were given. He shares with them first the good news about how God has fulfilled His promises through Jesus. Only when he faces opposition does he turn to the outsiders, because this hope is for them too.

14 *The results* in Iconium *were similar*. Paul and Barnabas began in the Jewish synagogue, bringing a great number of ethnic Jews and Greek converts to faith in Jesus. 2But the other Jews who wouldn't believe agitated the outsiders and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium for a long time, speaking with great confidence for the Lord. He confirmed the message of His grace by granting them the power to do signs and wonders. 4But *over time* the people were divided, some siding with the *unbelieving* Jews and some siding with the apostles. 5Finally the Jews and outsiders who opposed them joined forces and enlisted the political leaders in their plan to beat and stone Paul and Barnabas. 6They learned of the plan and escaped to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia, and the surrounding countryside, 7where they continued proclaiming the good news.

8In Lystra they met a man who had been crippled since birth; his feet were completely useless. 9He listened to Paul speak, and Paul could see in this man's face that he had faith to be healed.

Paul *(shouting)***:** 10Stand up on your own two feet, man!

The man jumped up and walked! 11When the crowds saw this, they started shouting in Lycaonian.

Crowd: The gods have come down to us! They've come in human form!

12They decided that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes (since he was the main speaker). 13*Before they knew it,* the priest of Zeus, whose temple was prominent in that city, came to the city gates with oxen and garlands of flowers so the Lycaonians could offer sacrifices in worship *to Paul and Barnabas*! 14When they heard of this, Paul and Barnabas were beside themselves with frustration—they ripped their tunics *as an expression of disapproval* and rushed out into the crowd.

Paul and Barnabas *(shouting)***:** 15Friends! No! No! Don't do this! We're just humans like all of you! *We're not here to be worshiped!* We're here to bring you good news—good news that you should turn from these worthless forms of worship and instead serve the living God, the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that they contain. 16Through all previous generations, God has allowed all the nations to follow their own customs and religions, 17but even then God revealed Himself by doing good to you—giving you rain for your crops and fruitful harvests season after season, filling your stomachs with food and your hearts with joy.

18In spite of these words, they were barely able to keep the crowds from making sacrifices to them.

► When God uses men to bless the world, many mistakenly exalt those men to the place of God. This inevitably leads to pain and disappointment. Paul and Barnabas did the right thing by shouting as loudly as possible, "We are only men!" It is time for many leaders and celebrities to follow their example, root out the religious hero worship, claim our humanity, and start sharing our own struggles—sin, depression, despair—to remind people we are all alike. Then we can focus on the one true God instead of His messengers.

19Then *unbelieving* Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and *incited the crowds against the Lord's emissaries.* The crowds turned on Paul, stoned him, dragged him out of the city, and left him there, thinking he was dead. 20As the

disciples gathered around him, he suddenly rose to his feet and returned to the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. 21After they proclaimed the good news there and taught many disciples, they returned to *some of the cities they had recently visited*—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch *in Pisidia*. 22In each place, they brought strength to the disciples, encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

Paul and Barnabas: We must go through many persecutions as we enter the kingdom of God.

23In each church, they would appoint leaders, pray and fast together, and entrust them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

24They then passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25They preached their message in Perga and then went to the port of Attalia. 26There they set sail for Antioch, where they were first entrusted to the grace of God for the mission they had now completed. 27They called the church together when they arrived and reported all God had done with *and through* them, how God had welcomed outsiders through the doorway of faith. 28They stayed with the disciples *in Antioch* for quite a while.

15 *Their peace was disturbed, however,* when certain Judeans came with this teaching: "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic custom, you cannot be saved." 2Paul and Barnabas argued against this teaching and debated with the Judeans vehemently, so the church selected several people—including Paul and Barnabas—to travel to Jerusalem to dialogue about this issue with the apostles and elders there. 3The church sent them on their way. They passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, stopping to report to the groups of believers there that outsiders were now being converted. This brought great joy to them all. 4Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders welcomed them warmly; and they reported all they had seen God do. 5But there were some believers present who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. They stood up and asserted,

Pharisees: *No, this is not acceptable.* These people must be circumcised, and we must require them to keep the whole Mosaic law.

6The apostles and elders met privately to discuss how this issue should be resolved. 7There was a lot of debate, and finally Peter stood up.

► These debates give a glimpse of the cultural tensions present between Jewish and Gentile believers throughout the New Testament writings. The early Jewish believers still follow the traditional Jewish practices of Sabbath rest and kosher food. This is fine, until Jewish and Gentile Christians must share a table. How can they be truly unified as one church without being able to sit down together for a meal? This council affirms—under the influence of the Spirit's work—that the outsiders may become Christians without becoming Jews first; but the outsiders should respect their Jewish brothers' beliefs so they can fellowship together. The decision is a model for church unity: artificial hurdles should not be imposed for inclusion, but groups should willingly sacrifice their freedoms to promote unity in the church.

Peter: My brothers, you all know that in the early days *of our movement,* God decided that I should be the one through whom the first outsiders would hear the good news and become believers. 8God knows the human heart, and He showed approval of their hearts by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did for us. 9In cleansing their hearts by faith, God has made no distinction between them and us. 10So it makes no sense to me that some of you are testing God by burdening His disciples with a load that neither our forefathers nor we have been able to carry. 11No, we all believe that we will be liberated through the grace of the Lord Jesus—they also will be rescued in the same way.

12There was silence among them while Barnabas and Paul reported all the miraculous signs and wonders God had done

through them among outsiders. 13When
they finished, James spoke.

James: My brothers, hear me. 14Simon
Peter reminded us how God first
included outsiders in His favor, taking
people from among them for His name.
15This resonates with the words of the
prophets:

16"After this, I will return
and rebuild the house of David,
which has fallen into ruins.
From its wreckage I will rebuild it;
17So all the nations may seek the Eternal
One—
including every person among the
outsiders who has been called
by My name."*
This is the word of the Lord, 18who
has been revealing these things
since ancient times.*

19So here is my counsel: we should
not burden these outsiders who are turn-
ing to God. 20We should instead write a
letter, instructing them to abstain from
four things: first, things associated with
idol worship; second, sexual immoral-
ity; third, food killed by strangling; and
fourth, blood. 21My reason for these four
exceptions is that in every city there are
Jewish communities where, for genera-
tions, the laws of Moses have been pro-
claimed; and on every Sabbath, Moses is
read in synagogues everywhere.

22This seemed like a good idea to the
apostles, the elders, and the entire church.
They commissioned men from among
them and sent them to Antioch with Paul
and Barnabas. They sent two prominent
men among the believers, Judas (also
known as Barsabbas) and Silas, 23to deliver
this letter:

The brotherhood, including the apostles
and elders in Jerusalem, send greetings
to the outsider believers in Antioch,
Syria, and Cilicia. 24We have heard that
certain people from among us—without
authorization from us—have said things
that, in turn, upset you and unsettle your
minds. 25We have decided unanimously
to choose and send two representatives,
along with our beloved Barnabas and
Paul 26who, *as you know,* have risked their
lives for our Lord Jesus the Anointed.
27These representatives, Judas and Silas,
will confirm verbally what you will read
in this letter. 28It has seemed good to the
Holy Spirit and to us to keep you free
from all burdens except these four:
29abstain from anything sacrificed to
idols, from blood, from food killed by
strangling, and from sexual immorality.
Avoid these things, and you will be just
fine. Farewell.

30So the men were sent to Antioch.
When they arrived, they gathered the
community together and read the letter.
31The community rejoiced at the resolu-
tion to the controversy. 32Judas and Silas,
being prophets themselves, offered lengthy
encouragements to strengthen the believ-
ers. 33After some time there, *their mission
was complete; so* the leaders in Antioch
released Judas and Silas to return *to Jeru-
salem* with a blessing of peace. [34But after
some thought, Silas decided to remain
behind.]* 35Paul and Barnabas stayed in
Antioch, where they teamed with many
others to teach and preach the message of
the Lord.

36Some days later, Paul proposed
another journey to Barnabas.

Paul: Let's return and visit the believers in
each city where we preached the Lord's
message last time to see how they're
doing.

37Barnabas agreed and wanted to bring
John Mark along, 38but Paul felt that was a
mistake since John Mark had abandoned
them in Pamphylia and hadn't finished
the previous mission. 39Their difference of
opinion was so heated that they decided
not to work together anymore. Barnabas
took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus,
40while Paul chose Silas *as his companion.*
The believers *in Antioch* commissioned
him for this work, entrusting him to
the grace of the Lord. 41They traveled
through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the
churches there.

16 1-3When Paul reached Derbe
and Lystra, he invited a disciple
named Timothy *to join him
and Silas.* Timothy had a good reputation
among the believers in Lystra and Ico-
nium, *but there was a problem*: although
Timothy's mother was a believing Jew, his
father was Greek, *which meant Timothy*

* 15:16-17 Amos 9:11-12 * 15:17-18 Isaiah 45:21 * 15:34 The earliest manuscripts omit verse 34.

was uncircumcised. Because the Jewish people of those cities knew he was the son of a Greek man, Paul felt it would be best for Timothy to be circumcised before proceeding.

4Leaving there, *now accompanied by Timothy*, they delivered to the churches in each town the decisions and instructions given by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. 5The churches were strengthened in the faith by their visit and kept growing in numbers on a daily basis.

6They sensed the Holy Spirit telling them not to preach their message in Asia at this time, so they traveled through Phrygia and Galatia. 7They came near Mysia and planned to go into Bithynia, but again they felt restrained from doing so by the Spirit of Jesus. 8So they bypassed Mysia and went down to Troas. 9That night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was pleading with him.

Macedonian Man: Come over to Macedonia! Come help us!

Luke now shifts his narration from impersonal observation to a first-person account of events because he has joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

10This vision convinced us all that God was calling us to bring the good news to that region.

11We set sail from the port city of Troas, first stopping in Samothrace, then the next day in Neapolis, 12finally arriving in Philippi, a Roman colony and one of Macedonia's leading cities. We stayed in Philippi for several days. 13On the Sabbath day, we went outside the city walls to the nearby river, assuming that *some Jewish* people might be gathering for prayer. We found a group of women there, so we sat down and spoke to them. 14One of them, Lydia, was *a business woman* originally from Thyatira. She made a living *buying and* selling fine purple fabric. She was a true worshiper of God and listened to Paul *with special interest*. The Lord opened her heart to take in the message with enthusiasm. 15She and her whole household were ceremonially washed through baptism.*

Lydia: If you believe I'm truly faithful to the Lord, please, you must come and stay at my home.

We couldn't turn down her invitation.

16One day, as we were going to the place set aside for prayer, we encountered a slave girl. She made a lot of money for her owners as a fortune-teller, assisted by some sort of occult spirit. 17She began following us.

Slave Girl *(shouting)***:** These men are slaves like me, but slaves of the Most High God! They will proclaim to you the way of liberation!

18The next day as we passed by, she did the same thing—and again on the following days. One day Paul was really annoyed, so he turned and spoke to the spirit that was enslaving her.

Paul: I order you in the name of Jesus, God's Anointed: Come out of her!

It came right out. 19But when her owners realized she would be worthless now as a fortune-teller, they grabbed Paul and Silas, dragged them into the open market area, and presented them to the authorities.

Slave Owners: 20These men are troublemakers, disturbing the peace of our great city. They are from some Jewish sect, 21and they promote foreign customs that violate our Roman standards of conduct.

22The crowd joined in with insults and insinuations, prompting the city officials to strip them naked *in the public square* so they could be beaten with rods. 23They were flogged mercilessly and then were thrown into a prison cell. The jailer was ordered to keep them under the strictest supervision. 24The jailer complied, first restraining them in ankle chains, then locking them in the most secure cell in the center of the jail.

25*Picture this:* It's midnight. *In the darkness of their cell,* Paul and Silas—*after surviving the severe beating—aren't moaning and groaning*; they're praying and singing hymns to God. The prisoners *in adjoining cells are wide awake*, listening to them pray and sing. 26Suddenly the ground begins to shake, and the prison foundations begin to crack. You can hear the sound of jangling chains and the squeak of cell doors opening. Every prisoner realizes that his chains have come unfastened.

* 16:15 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification

27The jailer wakes up and runs into the jail. His heart sinks as he sees the doors have all swung open. He is sure his prisoners have escaped, *and he knows this will mean death for him,* so he pulls out his sword to commit suicide. 28At that moment, Paul *sees what is happening and* shouts out at the top of his lungs,

Paul: *Wait, man!* Don't harm yourself! We're all here! *None of us has escaped.*

29The jailer sends his assistants to get some torches and rushes into the cell of Paul and Silas. He falls on his knees before them, trembling. 30Then he brings them outside.

Jailer: Gentlemen, please tell me, what must I do to be liberated?

Paul and Silas: 31Just believe—believe in the ultimate King, Jesus, and not only will you be rescued, but your whole household will as well.

32-34The jailer brings them to his home, and they have a long conversation with the man and his family. Paul and Silas explain the message of Jesus to them all. The man washes their wounds and *feeds them*, then they baptize* the man and his family. The night ends with Paul and Silas in the jailer's home, sharing a meal together, the whole family rejoicing that they have come to faith in God.

35At dawn the city officials send the police *to the jailer's home* with a command: "Let those men go free."

Jailer: 36The city officials have ordered me to release you, so you may go now in peace.

Paul *(loud enough that the police can hear)***:** 37Just a minute. This is unjust. We've been *stripped naked*, beaten in public, and thrown into jail, all without a trial of any kind. Now they want to release us secretly as if nothing happened? No way: we're Roman citizens—*we shouldn't be treated like this*! If the city officials want to release us, then they can come and tell us to our faces.

38The police report back to the city officials; and when they come to the part about Paul and Silas being Roman citizens, the officials turn pale with fear. 39They rush to the jail in person and apologize. They personally escort Paul and Silas from their cell and politely ask them to leave the city. 40Paul and Silas oblige—after stopping at Lydia's home to gather with the brothers and sisters there and give them parting words of encouragement.

► Paul and Silas are keeping a low profile in order to advance the cause of Jesus. Paul's first miracle in the area is to cast out an evil spirit from a girl. This sets off an unexpected chain of events bringing the men into the city court to be beaten before the crowds. This sounds like the start of a very bad day. Silas must wonder, "Paul, what were you doing? Is your aggravation with this wandering girl worth all this trouble?" But they neither fight nor despair; instead, they sing, pray to God, and love their captors. Paul and Silas demonstrate that believers are not easily distracted or depressed as long as serving God is their priority.

17 After *leaving Philippi and* passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica. There was a Jewish synagogue there. 2-3As he had done in other cities, Paul attended the synagogue and presented arguments, based on the Hebrew Scriptures, that the Anointed had to suffer and rise from the dead.

Paul: Who is this suffering and rising Anointed One I am proclaiming to you? He is Jesus.

He came back the next two Sabbaths—repeating the same pattern. 4Some of the *ethnically Jewish* people *from the synagogue* were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. Even more devout Greeks *who had affiliated with Judaism* came to believe—along with quite a few of the city's leading women. 5-6*Seeing this movement growing*, the unconvinced Jewish people became protective and angry. They found some ruffians hanging out in the marketplaces and convinced them to help start a riot. Soon a mob formed, *and the whole city*

* 16:32-34 Literally, immerse, in a rite of initiation and purification

was seething with tension. The mob was *going street by street,* looking for Paul and Silas—who were nowhere to be found. Frustrated, when the mob came to the house of a man named Jason, *now known as a believer*, they grabbed him and some other believers they found there and dragged them to the city officials.

Mob: These people—they're *political agitators* turning the world upside down! They've come here to our fine city, [7]and this man, Jason, has given them sanctuary *and made his house a base for their operations. We want to expose their real intent:* they are trying to overturn Caesar's sensible decrees. They're saying that Jesus is king, *not Caesar!*

[8]Of course, this disturbed the crowd at large and the city officials especially, [9]so they demanded bail from Jason and the others before releasing them.

[10]The believers waited until dark and then sent Paul and Silas off to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue.

Though Paul is known as the Emissary to the Gentiles, wherever he goes he proclaims Jesus to the Jews in the synagogue from the Hebrew Scriptures first.

[11]The Jewish people here were more receptive than they had been in Thessalonica. They warmly and enthusiastically welcomed the message and then, day by day, would check for themselves to see if what they heard *from Paul and Silas* was truly in harmony with the Hebrew Scriptures. [12]Many of them were convinced, and the new believers included—*as in Thessalonica*—quite a few of the city's leading Greek women and important men also. [13]Reports got back to Thessalonica that Paul and Silas were now spreading God's message in Berea; the Jewish people who had incited the riot in Thessalonica quickly came to Berea to do the same once again. [14-15]The believers sent Paul away. A small group escorted him, first to the coast, and then all the way to Athens. Silas and Timothy, however, remained in Berea. Later they received instructions from Paul to join him in Athens as soon as possible.

[16]So Paul found himself alone for some time in Athens. He would walk through the city, feeling deeply frustrated about the abundance of idols there. [17]*As in the previous cities*, he went to the synagogue. Once again, he engaged in debate *about Jesus* with both ethnic Jews and devout *Greek-born* converts *to Judaism.* He would even wander around in the marketplace, speaking with anyone he happened to meet. [18]Eventually he got into a debate with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Some were dismissive from the start.

Philosophers: What's this fast-talker trying to pitch?

Others: He seems to be advocating the gods of distant lands.

They said this because of what Paul had been preaching about Jesus and the resurrection.

The philosophers misunderstand Paul's message. They think he is talking about two deities: Jesus and Anastasis (the Greek word for "resurrection").

[19-21]This stirred their curiosity, because the favorite pastime of Athenians (including foreigners who had settled there) was conversation about new and unusual ideas. So they brought him to the *rock outcropping known as the* Areopagus, *where Athens' intellectuals regularly gathered for debate*, and they invited him to speak.

Athenians: May we understand this new teaching of yours? It is intriguingly unusual. We would love to know its meaning.

Paul: [22]Athenians, *as I have walked your streets*, I have observed your strong and diverse religious ethos. You truly are a religious people. [23]I have stopped again and again to examine carefully the religious statues and inscriptions that fill your city. On one such altar, I read this inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." I am not here to tell you about a strange foreign deity, but about this One whom you already worship, though without full knowledge. [24]This is the God who made the universe and all it contains, the God who is the King of all heaven and all earth. It would be illogical to assume that a God of this magnitude could possibly be contained in any man-made structure, no matter how majestic. [25]Nor would it be logical to think that this God would need human beings to provide

Him with food and shelter—after all, He Himself would have given to humans everything they need—life, breath, *food, shelter, and so on.*

This is the only universal God, the One who makes all people whatever their nationality or culture or religion.

26This God made us in all our diversity from one original person, allowing each culture to have its own time to develop, giving each its own place to live and thrive in its distinct ways. 27*His purpose in all this was* that people *of every culture and religion* would search for this ultimate God, grope for Him *in the darkness, as it were*, hoping to find Him. Yet, in truth, God is not far from any of us. 28For *you know the saying*, "We live in God; we move in God; we exist in God." And still another said, "We are indeed God's children." 29*Since this is true,* since we are indeed offspring of God's creative act, we shouldn't think of the Deity as our own artifact, something made by our own hands—as if this great, universal, ultimate Creator were simply a combination of elements like gold, silver, and stone. 30No, God has patiently tolerated this kind of ignorance in the past, but now God says it is time to rethink our lives *and reject these unenlightened assumptions.* 31He has fixed a day of accountability, when the whole world will be justly evaluated by a new, higher standard: *not by a statue*, but by a living man. God selected this man and made Him credible to all by raising Him from the dead.

32When they heard that last phrase about resurrection from the dead, some shook their heads and scoffed, but others were even more curious.

Others: We would like you to come and speak to us again.

33Paul left at that point, 34but some people followed him and came to faith, including one from Areopagus named Dionysius, a *prominent* woman named Damaris, and others.

► This exchange is the most potent example of cross-cultural evangelism in the Bible. Paul provokes his audience to think and invites them to pursue God, but he does not attempt to summarize the gospel in simple propositions or acronyms. He connects their culture with the truth of the gospel and the beauty of the person who is Jesus. After that, it's the job of the Holy Spirit.

18 From Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth *alone.* 2He found a Jewish man there named Aquila, originally from Pontus. Aquila and his wife Priscilla had recently come to Corinth from Italy because Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome. Paul visited them *in their home* 3and discovered they shared the same trade of tent making. He then became their long-term guest and joined them in their tentmaking business. 4Each Sabbath he would engage both Jews and Greeks in debate in the synagogue in an attempt to persuade them of his message. 5Eventually Silas and Timothy left Macedonia and joined him in Corinth. They found him fully occupied by proclaiming the message, testifying to the Jewish people that Jesus was God's Anointed, *the Liberating King.* 6Eventually, though, some of them stopped listening and began insulting him. He shook the dust off his garments in protest.

Paul: OK. I've done all I can for you. You are responsible for your own destiny before God. From now on, I will bring the good news to the outsiders!

7He walked out of the synagogue and went next door to the home of *an outsider*, Titius Justus, who worshiped God. 8*Paul formed a gathering of believers there that included* Crispus (the synagogue leader) and his whole household and many other Corinthians who heard Paul, believed, and were ceremonially washed through baptism. 9One night Paul had a vision in which he heard the Lord's voice.

The Lord: Do not be afraid, Paul. Speak! Don't be silent! 10I am with you, and no one will lay a finger on you to harm you. I have many in this city who are already My people.

11*After such turmoil in previous cities*, these words encouraged Paul to extend his stay

in Corinth, teaching the message of God among them for a year and six months.

► Paul is no machine. He needs encouragement to faithfully pursue his calling in the face of persecution. While God allows Paul to experience serious persecution in many other cities, He spares him that trouble in Corinth even though the Jewish leaders still try to stir up the government officials against him. Paul knows that the greatest joys in life are found in passionately pursuing the dangerous mission of Jesus, and that God sustains His followers in good times and bad.

12During this time, some Jews organized an attack on Paul and made formal charges against him to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.

Jews: 13This man is convincing people to worship God in ways that contradict our Hebrew Scriptures.

Paul was about to speak, but Gallio spoke first.

Gallio: 14Look, if this were some serious crime, I would accept your complaint as a legitimate legal case, 15but this is just more of your typical Jewish squabbling about trivialities in your sacred literature. I have no interest in getting dragged into this kind of thing.

16So he *threw out their case and* drove them away from his bench. 17They *were furious and* seized Sosthenes, the synagogue official; then they beat him in front of the tribunal. Gallio just ignored them.

18At the end of 18 months, Paul said good-bye to the believers in Corinth. He wanted to travel *to the east and south* to Syria by ship; so, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, he went to the nearby port city of Cenchrea, where he fulfilled a vow he had made by cutting his hair. 19The three of them sailed east to Ephesus where Paul would leave Priscilla and Aquila. Paul again went to the synagogue where he dialogued with the Jews. 20They were receptive and invited him to stay longer. But he *politely* declined.

Paul: 21-22If God wills, I'll return at some point.

He caught a ship bound *south and east* for Caesarea by the sea. There he went up for a brief visit with the believers in the church at Jerusalem; then he headed north to Antioch. 23He spent considerable time there and then left again, visiting city after city throughout Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples in each place.

24Meanwhile, back in Ephesus, a Jew named Apollos *made contact with the community of believers*. He had been raised in Alexandria.

In Alexandria, Egyptian Jews such as Philo are known for seeking to integrate Greek philosophy with their faith.

Apollos was eloquent and well educated in the Hebrew Scriptures. 25He was partially instructed in the way of the Lord, and he added to his native eloquence a burning enthusiasm to teach about Jesus. He taught accurately what he knew; *but he had only understood part of the good news*, specifically the ritual cleansing through baptism* preached by John, *the forerunner of Jesus*. 26So, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak boldly in the synagogue, *they discerned both his gift and his lack of full understanding*. They took him aside and in private explained the way of God to him more accurately and fully. 27He wanted to head west into Achaia, *where Paul had recently been*, to preach there. The believers encouraged him to do so and sent a letter instructing the *Greek* disciples to welcome him. Upon his arrival, he was of great help to all in Achaia who had, by the grace of God, become believers. 28This gifted speaker publicly demonstrated, based on the Hebrew Scriptures, that the promised Anointed One is Jesus. Then, when the Jews there raised counterarguments, he refuted them with great power.

19 1,7While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul's overland journey brought him back to Ephesus. He encountered a group of about a dozen disciples there.*

* 18:25 Literally, immersion, an act to show repentance * 19:1, 7 Verses 1 and 7 have been combined to help the reader understand the continuity of the passage.

Paul: [2]Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?

John's Disciples: We've never heard about the Holy Spirit.

Paul: [3]Well then, what kind of ceremonial washing through baptism* did you receive?

John's Disciples: We received the ritual cleansing of baptism* that John taught.

Paul: [4]John taught the truth—that people should be baptized with renewed thinking and turn toward God. But he also taught that the people should believe in the One whose way he was preparing, that is, Jesus the Anointed.

[5]As soon as they heard this, they were baptized, this time in the name of our Lord Jesus. [6]When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them *in the same way the original disciples experienced at Pentecost*: they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

► Both Apollos and this small band of John's disciples hear an incomplete gospel. The church is called not only to bring the gospel to those who have never heard, but also to expand the truth to those who understand only partial truth. All people are on a journey to know God—no one has "arrived." Everyone has something more to learn because the truth constantly reveals itself.

[8]For three months, Paul continued his standard practice: he went *week by week* to the synagogue, speaking with great confidence, arguing with great persuasiveness, proclaiming the kingdom of God. [9-10]*Once again*, some members of the synagogue refused to believe and insulted the Way* publicly before the whole synagogue community. Paul withdrew and took those with him who had become disciples. For the next two years, he used the public lecture hall of Tyrannus, presenting the Word of the Lord every day, debating with all who would come. As a result, everyone in the region, whether Jews or Greeks, heard the message. [11]Meanwhile, God did amazing miracles through Paul. [12]People would take a handkerchief or article of clothing that had touched Paul's skin and bring it to their sick *friends or relatives*, and the patients would be cured of their diseases or released from the evil spirits that oppressed them.

[13-14]Some itinerant Jewish exorcists *noticed Paul's success in this regard, so they* tried to use the name of Jesus, the King, in an exorcism they were performing.

Imagine this: There are seven of them, all sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva, *gathered around a demonized man in a house.*

One of the Jewish Exorcists: I command you to depart, by the Jesus proclaimed by Paul!

Evil Spirit: [15]Jesus I know. Paul I know. But who are you?

[16]Then the man leaps up, attacks them all, rips off their clothing, and beats them so badly that they run out of the house stark naked and covered in bruises.

[17]Word of this strange event spread throughout Ephesus among both Jews and Greeks. Everyone was shocked and realized that the name of Jesus was indeed powerful and praiseworthy. [18]As a result, a number of people involved *in various occult practices* came to faith. They confessed their secret practices and rituals. [19]Some of them had considerable libraries about their magic arts; they piled up their books and burned them publicly. Someone estimated the value of the books to be 50,000 silver coins. [20]Again, word spread, and the message of the Lord overcame resistance and spread powerfully.

[21]Eventually Paul felt he should move on again. The Holy Spirit confirmed that he should first travel through Macedonia and Achaia and then return to Jerusalem.

Paul: I must eventually see Rome.

[22]So he sent Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, ahead to Macedonia while he stayed a while longer in Asia. [23]It was during this time that a major incident occurred involving the Way.

* 19:3 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification
* 19:9-10 The Christian movement (9:2)
* 19:3 Literally, immersion, an act to show repentance

In most cities, the Jews stand in opposition to the Way; but in this instance, the outsiders cause the disturbance.

24An idol maker named Demetrius had
a profitable business, for himself and for
others, making silver shrines for Artemis
(also known as Diana by the Romans), one
of the deities worshiped in Ephesus.

25*Picture this:* Demetrius calls a meeting of all the artisans who are similarly employed in idol making. *Everyone in the idol industry comes together.*

Demetrius: Men, we are all colleagues in this fine line of work. We're making a good living doing what we're doing. But we'd better wake up, or we're all going to go broke.

26You've heard about this fellow Paul. Here in Ephesus, he's already convinced a large number of people to give up using idols. He tells them that our products are worthless. He's been doing this same kind of thing almost everywhere in Asia. 27It's bad enough that he is slandering our fine and honorable profession, *but do you see where this will lead?* If his lies catch on, the temple of Artemis itself will be called a fraud. The great goddess of our region, the majestic deity who is revered here in Asia and around the world, will be disgraced.

28The crowd goes wild with rage. They start chanting.

Crowd: Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! *Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*

29Soon the whole city is filled with confusion, and a mob forms. They find Paul's Macedonian travel companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and drag them to the theater. 30Paul wants to go confront the crowd *and protect his friends*, but the disciples hold him back. 31Even some provincial officials of Asia who are friendly to Paul send him an urgent message, warning him to stay away from the theater.

32Enraged voices are shouting *on top of each other*, some saying one thing, some saying something else. The crowd is completely out of control. Most of the people don't even know what caused the commotion in the first place. 33Some of the Jewish people push a man named Alexander to the front of the crowd, hoping he can calm the disturbance. He raises his hands to silence the crowd and gets a few sentences out; 34but then the crowd realizes he's a Jew, and once again they start chanting.

Crowd: Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

For two solid hours they keep the chant going.

35Finally the town clerk manages to calm the crowd.

Town Clerk: My fellow citizens of Ephesus, everyone in the world knows that our great city is the caretaker of the temple of Artemis! Everyone knows that we are the home of the great statue that fell from heaven! 36Our status as the economic center of the idolmaking industry is not in danger, so please, calm down. Don't do anything rash. 37The men whom you have seized aren't temple robbers, nor have they blasphemed our great goddess. 38If Demetrius and the artisans who share his important trade have a legal complaint, don't bring it here to the theater; take it to the courts—they're open today. 39If you need to charge someone with a crime or launch an inquiry, take the matter to the regional judges. 40We need to do this according to regulations, or we'll all be charged with rioting. This kind of behavior can't be justified.

41So he succeeds in dispersing the crowd.

► The message of Jesus not only has the power to annihilate economic supremacy, but also turns the world upside down in the process. In the kingdom of God, a worker is always paid a wage worthy of his work: anyone who works has enough to eat, and no one is left out of the profitable bounty of God. No longer do businesses profit from dishonesty, manipulation, or selfishness.

20 As soon as the uproar ended, Paul gathered the disciples together, encouraged them once more, said farewell, and left *on foot*. He decided to pass through Macedonia,

2encouraging believers wherever he found them, and came to Greece. 3He spent three months there, and then he planned to set sail once again for Syria. But he learned that a group of Jewish opponents was plotting to kill him, so he decided to travel through Macedonia.

4-5*There was a large group of us traveling with him at this time, and we decided it was best, in light of the plot, to split up and then* reunite in the city of Troas. This group included Paul, a Berean named Sopater (son of Pyrrhus), two Thessalonians named Aristarchus and Secundus, a Derbean named Gaius, two Asians named Tychicus and Trophimus, and Timothy. 6Some of us waited until the Days of Unleavened Bread were over; then we went to Philippi where we boarded a ship for Troas. The other group left immediately *on foot, passing through Macedonia.* When my group landed in Troas five days later, Paul's group had already arrived. We stayed in Troas another week.

7-8The Sunday night before our Monday departure, we gathered to celebrate the breaking of bread.

Many wondrous events happen as Paul travels, ministering among the churches. One evening a most unusual event occurs.

Imagine you are celebrating with them:

We are in an upstairs room, with *the gentle light and shadows cast by* several lamps. Paul is carrying on an extended dialogue with the believers, taking advantage of every moment since we plan to leave at first light. The conversation stretches on until midnight. 9A young fellow named Eutychus, *seeking some fresh air*, moves to an open window. Paul keeps on talking. Eutychus perches in the open window itself. *Paul keeps talking.* Eutychus drifts off to sleep. *Paul continues talking* until Eutychus, now overcome by deep sleep, drops out of the window and falls three stories to the ground, where he is found dead. 10Paul joins us downstairs, bends over, and takes Eutychus in his arms.

Paul: It's OK. He's alive again.

11Then Paul goes back upstairs, celebrates the breaking of bread, and—*just as you might guess*—keeps on conversing until first light. Then he leaves. 12(I should add that Eutychus had been taken home *long before,* his friends more than a little relieved that the boy was alive!)

► This may be one of the strangest stories ever told. Paul was talking about faith while one young man dozed off and fell out the window. Many a pastor has secretly prayed that slumbering congregants would fall out of their chairs. It might have been funny had he not died; instead, it was a scene of great horror. That is, until God used Paul to turn horror into celebration with a death-defying miracle. But the people were so enamored with Paul's teaching about Jesus that they returned to their conversations, which continued until sunrise.

13Again Paul wanted us to split up. He wanted to go by land by himself while we went by ship to Assos. 14There he came on board with us, and we sailed on to Mitylene. 15From there we sailed near Chios, passing by it the next day, docking briefly at Samos the day after that, then arriving at Miletus the following day. 16This route kept us safely out of Ephesus and didn't require Paul to spend any time at all in Asia, since he wanted to arrive in Jerusalem quickly—before Pentecost, he hoped.

17In Miletus he sent word to the church in Ephesus, asking the elders to come down to meet with him. 18When they arrived, he talked with them.

Paul: We will have many memories of our time together in Ephesus; *but of all the memories, most of all I want you to remember my way of life.* From the first day I arrived in Asia, 19I served the Lord with humility and tears, patiently enduring the many trials that came my way through the plots of my Jewish opponents. 20I did everything I could to help you; I held nothing back. I taught you publicly, and I taught you in your homes. 21I told everyone the same message—Jews and Greeks alike—that we must turn toward God and have faith in our Lord Jesus the Anointed. 22Now I feel that the Holy Spirit has taken me captive. I am being led to Jerusalem. My future is uncertain, 23but I know—the

Holy Spirit has told me—that everywhere I go from now on, I will find imprisonment and persecution waiting for me. 24*But that's OK. That's no tragedy for me because* I don't cling to my life for my own sake. The only value I place on my life is that I may finish my race, that I may fulfill the ministry that Jesus our King has given me, that I may gladly tell the good news of God's grace. 25I now realize that this is our last good-bye. *You have been like family* in all my travels to proclaim the kingdom of God, but after today none of you will see my face again. 26So I want to make this clear: I am not responsible for your destiny from this point on 27because I have not held back from telling you the purpose of God in all its dimensions.

28*Here are my instructions:* diligently guard yourselves, and diligently guard the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has given you oversight. Shepherd the church of God, this precious church which He made His own through the blood of His own Son. 29I know that after I've gone, dangerous wolves will sneak in among you, savaging the flock. 30Some of you here today will begin twisting the truth, enticing disciples to go your way, to follow you. 31You must be on guard, and you must remember *my way of life among you.* For three years, I have kept on, persistently warning everyone, day and night, with tears.

32So now I put you in God's hands. I entrust you to the message of God's grace, a message that has the power to build you up and to give you rich heritage among all who are set apart for God's holy purposes. 33*Remember my example:* I never once coveted a single coin of silver or gold. I never looked twice at someone's fine clothing. 34No, you know this: I worked with my own two hands *making tents*, and I paid my own expenses and my companions' expenses as well. 35This is my last gift to you, this example of a way of life: a life of hard work, a life of helping the weak, a life that echoes every day those words of Jesus our King, who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

36*Once again, imagine this scene:*

As Paul finishes speaking, he kneels down; and we all join him, kneeling. He prays, and we all join him, praying.

37There's the sound of weeping, and then more weeping, and then more still. One by one, we embrace Paul and kiss him, 38our sadness multiplied because of his words about this being our last good-bye. We walk with him to the ship, *and he sets sail.*

► The last words of Paul to his Ephesian disciples are emotional, inspiring, but unbelievably arrogant. Who would place himself on a pedestal and encourage everyone to be more like him? It sounds like a cult of personality, but it is not. Paul understands that the gospel must be incarnate; it is more than a set of ideas, so someone must demonstrate how to walk the path of faith. He calls them to watch him carefully and emulate his behavior: watch how I treat people, how I eat, what I say, the way I give; and do likewise. If all believers could possess the same boldness to say, "do as I do," then the world would be a better place. Believers would not just speak the good news; they would live the good news.

21 Cos was our next stop, and the next day, Rhodes, and the next, Patara. 2We found another ship in Patara that would take us *south and east* toward Phoenicia. 3We saw Cyprus to our left and sailed on to Syria, landing at Tyre where the ship had cargo to unload. 4We found the disciples there and stayed with them for seven days. The Spirit moved them to tell Paul not to go on to Jerusalem; 5but the day came for our departure, and the whole community of disciples, including wives and children, escorted us outside the city. We knelt down together on the beach, prayed together, said farewell, and then parted company—6the disciples returning to their homes, we sailing on. 7From Tyre we docked at Ptolemais where we met with the believers and spent a day with them. 8Then we moved on to Caesarea. In Caesarea we stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven.* 9His four virgin daughters lived with him, each having the gift

* 21:8 Acts 6:1-6; 8:4-40

Paul is a man of great mystery. This persecutor-turned-preacher seems more like a character from pages of fiction than the instigator of the spread of Christianity. He becomes what he once despised and willingly suffers on behalf of his new Savior. Paul is accused of many things, but he is no fool. He fully understands what is waiting for him in Jerusalem: persecution, suffering, and ultimately death. His friends beg him not to return to this holy city, but Paul is called to live in the footsteps of the One who was crucified—He who was destined to suffer yet called for no drugs. His suffering served a greater purpose, and Paul never loses sight of this spiritual reality because he is living in the kingdom of God.

The masses hope for a gospel that makes them happy, healthy, and wealthy. Jesus said the way of life is a hard road, with only a few on it. Ironically this hard road ends in life. The easy, broad street—which may be paved with good intentions—always leads to death and destruction.

of prophecy. 10While we were with them, another gifted prophet named Agabus came *north* from Judea. 11He took Paul's belt and used it to bind his own feet and hands.

Agabus: This is a message from the Holy Spirit: *unbelieving* Jews in Jerusalem will in this way bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the outsiders.

12Now we all joined in imploring Paul—we, *his companions, and Philip and his daughters,* everyone present—begging him not to go one step closer to the city.

Paul: 13Please, you're breaking my heart with your tears! *I know exactly what I'm doing.* I'm fully prepared to be bound, and more—to die for the name of Jesus, the King.

14We realized our persuasion was fruitless, so we stopped pleading with him and simply said, "The Lord's will be done."

15So we knew what we were getting into as we prepared to ascend the foothills toward Jerusalem. 16Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and led us to the home of Mnason, a Cypriot and one of the first disciples, with whom we stayed. 17We continued on to Jerusalem and were welcomed warmly by the brothers there. 18The next day, we went together to visit James, and all the elders were there with him. 19Paul greeted them and then reported account after account of what God had done through him among the outsiders. 20When they heard his story, they praised God.

James and the Elders: Brother, *we have a problem.* You can see that we have thousands of Jewish believers here, and all of them are zealous law keepers. 21They've heard all kinds of rumors about you—that you teach all the Jews living among the outside nations to forget about Moses entirely, that you tell believers not to circumcise their sons, that you teach them to abandon all our customs. 22We need to deal with this situation, since word will spread that you're here in the city. 23So here's what we would like you to do. We have four men here who are fulfilling a vow. 24Join them. Go through the rituals of purification with them. Pay for their heads to be shaved *according to our ritual.* That will show that the rumors are false and that you are still observing and upholding the law. 25For the outside believers, we've already written in a letter our judgment on their situation: they should not eat food that has been sacrificed to idols, they should not eat meat with blood in it or meat from animals killed by strangulation, and they should abstain from all sexual misconduct.

26Paul complied with their request. The very next day, he publicly joined the four men, completed the initial purification rites, entered the temple with them, and began the *seven-day* ritual purification process, after which a sacrifice would be made for each of them.

27The seven days of purification were almost completed when some Jews from Asia recognized Paul in the temple. They grabbed him.

Asian Jews *(shouting)***:** 28Help! Fellow Israelites! This man is an enemy of our people, *our religion,* our law, and this temple! He travels around the world

subverting our holiest customs! He is at this moment desecrating this holy temple by bringing outsiders into this sacred place.

29*In this accusation, they were confused—* they had seen Paul elsewhere in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian, and they assumed that one of his current companions was Trophimus. 30*It was too late to clarify, though, because* word spread and soon a huge crowd rushed to the temple. They held Paul and dragged him from the temple and shut the doors behind them. 31*They beat Paul,* and it was clear they intended to kill him. By this time, word of the uproar reached the commandant of the Roman guard assigned to Jerusalem.

32He led a group of soldiers and officers to the scene. When the mob looked up and saw the soldiers running toward them, they stopped beating Paul. 33The commandant took him into custody and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He conducted a preliminary interrogation—asking Paul's name, what he had done. 34Members of the crowd were shouting over each other, and the tribune couldn't hear a thing, so he ordered Paul to be taken back to the barracks. 35When they came to the steps leading down from the temple, the crowd was seething with such violence *toward Paul* that the soldiers had to pick him up and carry him. 36Then the crowd followed.

Crowd: Away with him! *Away with him!*

37They were just leaving the temple area when Paul asked the commandant,

Paul: May I say something to you?

Commandant: Do you speak Greek? 38We thought you were that Egyptian who recently stirred a rebellion and led 4,000 assassins out into the desert. *But if you speak Greek, then obviously you're not the person we supposed.*

Paul: 39No, I'm a Jew, originally from Tarsus in Cilicia. I'm a citizen from an important city. Please, I beg you, let me speak to the people.

40The commandant agreed, and Paul stood there on the steps, motioning for the people to be silent. The crowd settled down, and Paul spoke in their native tongue, Aramaic.

22 **Paul:** Brothers and fathers, please let me defend myself against these charges.

2When they heard him speaking Aramaic, a hush came over the crowd.

Paul: 3I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia. I was raised here in Jerusalem and was tutored in the great school of Gamaliel. My education trained me in the strict interpretation of the law of our ancestors, and I grew zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4I encountered a movement known as the Way, *and I considered it a threat to our religion*, so I persecuted it violently. I put both men and women in chains, had them imprisoned, and would have killed them—5as the high priest and the entire council of elders will tell you. I received documentation from them to go to Damascus and work with the brothers there to arrest followers of the Way and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains so they could be properly punished. 6I was on my way to Damascus. It was about noon. Suddenly a powerful light shone around me, 7and I fell to the ground. A voice spoke: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" 8I answered, "Who are You, Lord?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, the One you persecute."

9My companions saw the light, but they didn't hear the voice. 10I asked, "What do You want me to do, Lord?" The Lord replied, "Get up and go to Damascus; you will be given your instructions there." 11Since the intense light had blinded me, my companions led me by the hand into Damascus. 12I was visited there by a devout man named Ananias, a law-keeping Jew who was well spoken of by all the Jews living in Damascus. 13He said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" I could immediately see again, beginning with Ananias standing before me. 14Then he said, "You have been chosen by the God of our ancestors to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the voice of God. 15You will tell the story of what you have seen and heard to the whole world. 16So now, don't delay. Get up, be ceremonially cleansed through baptism,* and have your sins washed away, as you call on His name *in prayer*."

* 22:16 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification

These Jewish leaders are prepared to squabble with Paul about the law. But in his wisdom, Paul disarms them with his story. He is one of them; and on his journey to defend Judaism against these Christian heretics, he encountered the living God. How can anyone dispute his experience? He was trained by trustworthy Jews and lived his life according to their strict interpretation of the law. When Paul invites his audience into his experience with the supernatural, it makes debating the finer points of the law seem ridiculous. It would be like antagonizing Moses while he reiterated God's message heard through the burning bush. But prejudice is apparently stronger than any divine message. Paul has them hanging on to every word from his mouth, until he speaks of the outsiders. The crowd immediately rises from their silence into a furious rage. The message is clear—if your revelation extends beyond our people, we will hear nothing of it. How could all of these students of the Hebrew Scriptures have been so ignorant about God's intentions to rescue all people? The prophets declared God's plan to offer grace to Jews and non-Jews, but no one in this crowd considered that good news.

17I returned to Jerusalem, and I was
praying here in the temple one day. I
slipped into a trance 18and had a vision
in which Jesus said to me, "Hurry! Get
out of Jerusalem fast! The people here
will not receive your testimony about
Me." 19I replied, "But Lord, they all know
that I went from synagogue to synagogue
imprisoning and beating everyone who
believed in You. 20They know *what I was
like and* how I stood in approval of the
execution of Stephen, Your witness, when
he was stoned. I even held the coats of
those who actually stoned him." 21Jesus
replied, "Go, for I am going to send you to
distant lands to teach the outsiders."

22They were listening quietly up until he mentioned *the outsiders.*

Crowd *(shouting)***:** Away with him! Such a man can't be allowed to remain here. Kill him! He must die!

23*Chaos broke out again.* People were shouting, slamming their coats down on the ground, and throwing fistfuls of dust up in the air. 24The commandant ordered the soldiers to bring Paul to the barracks and flog him until he confessed to whatever he had done to stir up this outrage.

25Back at the barracks, as they tied him up with leather thongs, Paul spoke to a nearby officer.

Paul: Is this legal—for you to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?

26The officer went and spoke to the commandant.

Officer: What can you do about this? Did you know this fellow is a Roman citizen?

Commandant *(rushing to Paul's side)***:** 27What's this? Are you really a Roman citizen?

Paul: Yes.

Commandant: 28I paid a small fortune for my citizenship.

Paul: I was born a citizen.

29Hearing this, those who were about to start the flogging pulled back, and the commandant was concerned because he had arrested and bound a citizen *without cause.* 30He still needed to conduct an investigation to uncover the Jews' accusations against Paul. So the next day, he removed the ties on Paul and called a meeting with the chief priests and council of elders. He brought Paul in and had him stand before the group.

23 Paul stared at the council and spoke.

Paul: Brothers, I have always lived my life to this very day with a clear conscience before God.

2Ananias the high priest signaled those standing near Paul to hit him on the mouth.

Paul: 3You hypocrite! God will slap you! How dare you sit in judgment and claim to represent the law, while you violate the law by ordering me to be struck *for no reason*?

Paul is brilliant. Accused by a group of religious intellectuals, he gets them fighting with one another. Paul understands the axiom, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," so he picks a fight with the Sadducees knowing the rest of the room will defend him. The thing society opposes often defines it, so manipulation is easy. (Consider some of the conservative political pundits who have never espoused any inclination toward Christianity. They gain millions of Christian followers by opposing the political enemies of conservative Christians.) Paul embraces a similar strategy here—if he can get these guys to fight, they will forget why they are actually convening. In many ways, the culture war is equally distracting to the early church. In the middle of the Jews vs. Gentiles battle, the church is realizing believers are not here to fight about morality and culture, but to bring the kingdom of God to earth. His kingdom will not come by debate, but by the working of the Holy Spirit within the church.

Bystanders: 4The nerve of you insulting the high priest of God!

Paul: 5I'm sorry, my brothers. I didn't realize this was the high priest. The law warns us to not curse the ruler of the people.*

6Paul noticed that some members of the council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he quickly spoke to the council.

Paul: Brothers, I am a Pharisee, born to a Pharisee. I am on trial because I have hope that the dead are raised!

7That got the two parties arguing with one another 8because the Sadducees say there is no such thing as resurrection, heavenly messengers, or spirits, and the Pharisees believe in all three.

9Soon these leaders were shouting, and some of the scholars from the party of the Pharisees rose to their feet.

Pharisees: There is nothing wrong with this man. Maybe he really has encountered a spirit or a heavenly messenger.

10The two parties were about to start throwing punches, and the commandant was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces, so he sent in his soldiers to intervene. They took Paul back into custody and returned him to their barracks. 11That night the Lord came near and spoke to him.

The Lord: Keep up your courage, Paul! You have successfully told your story about Me in Jerusalem, and soon you will do the same in Rome.

12-13That morning a group of more than 40 Jewish opponents conspired to kill Paul. They bound themselves by an oath that they wouldn't eat or drink until he was dead. 14They told the chief priests and elders about their plan.

Jewish Opponents: We've made an oath not to eat or drink until this man is dead. 15So you and the council must ask the commandant to bring Paul to meet with you. Tell him that you want to further investigate Paul's case. We'll get rid of the troublemaker on his way here.

16Now Paul had a nephew who heard about the planned ambush; he managed to gain entry into the barracks and alerted Paul. 17Paul called one of the officers.

Paul: Take this young man to the commandant. He has news the commandant needs to hear.

18The officer took him to the commandant.

Officer: The prisoner named Paul asked me to bring this man to you. He has some kind of information.

19The commandant led him away so they could speak in private.

Commandant: What do you want to tell me?

Young Man: 20The Jewish council is going to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow under the pretext that there will be a thorough examination.

* 23:5 Exodus 22:28

21But don't agree to do it, because 40
assassins have bound themselves to an
oath not to eat or drink until they've
killed Paul. Their plan is in motion, and
they're simply waiting for you to play
your part.

22The commandant sent the young man
home with these instructions: "Don't tell a
soul that you've spoken with me." 23Then
he called for two officers.

Commandant: At nine o'clock tonight,
you will leave for Caesarea with 200 sol-
diers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen.
24Have a mount for Paul to ride, and
conduct him safely to Felix the governor.

25He wrote the following letter:

26*Commandant* Claudius Lysias
greets his excellency, Felix, Governor.
27The accompanying prisoner was seized
by Jews who were about to kill him. I
learned he was a Roman citizen and
intervened with the guard here to
protect him. 28I arranged for a hearing
before their council 29and learned that he
was accused for reasons relating to their
religious law, but that he has done
nothing deserving imprisonment or
execution. 30I was informed that a group
was planning to assassinate him, so I
sent him to you immediately. I will
require his accusers to present their
complaint before you.

31So the soldiers followed their orders
and safely conducted Paul as far as Anti-
patris that night. 32-33The next day, the
horsemen conducted him on to Caesarea
as the foot soldiers returned to the bar-
racks. The horsemen delivered the letter
and the prisoner to Felix who read the
letter. 34The only question Felix asked con-
cerned the province of Paul's birth. When
he learned Paul was from Cilicia, 35he said,

Felix: As soon as your accusers arrive I
will hear your case.

He placed Paul under guard within
Herod's headquarters.

24 The high priest Ananias came
north *to Caesarea* five days
later, accompanied by some
elders and an attorney named Tertullus.
They explained their case to Felix *without
Paul present*. 2When Paul was brought in,
Tertullus launched into an accusation.

Tertullus: Most Excellent Felix, through
your esteemed leadership we have
enjoyed a long and happy peace. Your
foresight in governance has brought
many reforms for the people I represent.
3We always and everywhere welcome
every thought of you with high and deep
gratitude. 4But knowing how busy you
are and how limited your time must be,
I beg you to hear us briefly present our
case to you with the legendary gracious-
ness for which you are known every-
where.

5Here are the facts: this man is a dis-
ease to the body politic. He agitates trou-
ble in Jewish communities throughout
our empire as a ringleader of the *hereti-
cal* sect known as the Nazarenes. 6He
even tried to desecrate the temple, so we
seized him. [Our aim was to try him by
the Jewish law, 7but Commandant Lysias
interfered and removed this man from
our control. 8Because of his meddling,
you are now forced to hear those making
the accusation.]* You will find, through
your own examination, that everything
we say of Paul is true.

9The Jewish opponents present added
their vigorous testimony in support of the
lawyer's opening statement. 10The gover-
nor *didn't say anything, but he* motioned
for Paul to speak.

Paul: I am happy now to make my defense
to you, sir, knowing that you have been
a judge over this nation for many years.
11Just 12 days ago, I went up to Jerusa-
lem to worship, as you can easily verify.
12I wasn't arguing with anyone in the
temple. I wasn't stirring up a crowd in
any of the synagogues. I wasn't disturb-
ing the peace of the city in any way.
They did not find me doing these things
in Jerusalem, 13nor can they prove that
I have done any of the things of which
they have accused me. 14But I can make
this confession: I believe everything
established by the Law and written in
the Prophets, and I worship the God
of our ancestors according to the Way,
which they call a *heretical* sect.

15*Here is my crime:* I have a hope in
God that there will be a resurrection of

* 24:6-8 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

both the just and unjust, which my opponents also share. 16Because of this hope, I always do my best to live with a clear conscience toward God and all people. 17I have been away for several years, so recently I brought gifts for the poor of my nation and offered sacrifices. 18When they found me, I was not disturbing anyone, nor was I gathering a crowd. No, I was quietly completing the rite of purification. Some Jews from Asia *are the ones who started the disturbance*—19and if they have an accusation, they should be here to make it. 20If these men here have some crime they have found me guilty of when I stood before their council, they should present it. 21Perhaps my crime is that I spoke this one sentence in my testimony before them: "I am on trial here today because I have hope that the dead are raised."

22Felix was quite knowledgeable about the Way. He adjourned the preliminary hearing.

Felix: When Lysias the commandant comes *to Caesarea*, I will decide your case.

23He then ordered the officer to keep Paul in custody, but to permit him some freedom and to allow any of his friends to take care of his needs.

24A few days later, Felix sent for Paul and gave him an opportunity to speak about faith in the Anointed One. Felix was accompanied by his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. 25As Paul spoke of justice, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became fearful.

Felix: That's enough for now. When I have time, I will send for you again.

26They had a number of conversations of this sort; *but Felix* actually was hoping that, by having frequent contact with him, Paul might offer him a bribe. 27As a favor to the Jews, he did nothing to resolve the case and left Paul in prison for two years. Then Felix completed his assignment as governor, and Porcius Festus succeeded him.

► There are rumors that a large sum of money is at Paul's disposal—that is, the relief offering for the church in Jerusalem. But Paul does not choose to buy his freedom. Despite the corruption of the government, Paul understands that ultimately his justice is in the hands of God. In the near future, he will appear before the government of Rome, and that encounter will likely lead to his death.

25 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus traveled south from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2-3The chief priests and Jewish leaders still had a plan to kill Paul and gave a report to Festus about their unresolved grievances against Paul. They suggested that as a favor to them, Festus should move Paul to Jerusalem. Of course, this was part of the plan to set an ambush for Paul and kill him en route. 4Festus *instead offered to reopen the case*. He would be going back to Caesarea soon.

Festus: 5So let your leaders accompany me, and bring your accusations against the man.

6Eight or ten days later, Festus returned to Caesarea, and the next day he took his seat in court. He ordered Paul to be brought before him. 7The Jewish opponents from Jerusalem immediately surrounded Paul and from all directions bombarded him with all sorts of serious charges, none of which could be proven.

Paul *(quietly and simply)***:** 8In no way have I committed any offense against Jewish law, against the Jewish temple and all it represents, or against the emperor.

9Here Festus saw an opportunity to do just the favor Paul's Jewish opponents had requested.

Festus: Would you like to have your trial in Jerusalem? I'd be willing to try your case there.

Paul: 10-11If I had committed a capital offense, I would accept my punishment. But I'm sure it's clear to you that I have done no wrong to the Jews. Since their charges against me are completely empty, it would be wrong to turn me over to them. *No, I do not wish to go to Jerusalem.* I am appealing to the court of the emperor in Rome.

12Festus conferred privately with his council and returned with this decision:

Festus: You have appealed to the emperor, so to the emperor you will go.

13Several days later, the provincial king Agrippa arrived in Caesarea with *his wife* Bernice to welcome the new governor. 14Their visit lasted several days, which gave Festus the chance to describe Paul's case to the king.

Festus: Felix left me some unfinished business involving a prisoner *named Paul*. 15When I was in Jerusalem, I got an earful about him from the chief priests and Jewish elders. They wanted me simply to decide against him, 16but I informed them that we Romans don't work that way. We don't condemn a person accused of a crime unless the accusers present their case in person so the accused has ample opportunity to defend himself against the charge. 17I arranged for them to come here for a proper hearing. In fact, the first day after I returned *to Caesarea*, I took my seat in court and heard his case without delay. 18Contrary to my expectations, the accusers brought no substantial charges against him at all. 19Instead, they were bickering about their own religious beliefs related to a fellow named Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul claimed was raised to life again. 20I had no idea how to handle a religious squabble pretending to be a legal case, so I suggested Paul be taken to Jerusalem so he could be tried on Jewish turf, so to speak. 21But Paul refused, and instead he appealed to be kept in custody so the case could be referred to his Imperial Majesty. So I have held him until we can arrange to send him to the emperor.

Agrippa: 22This sounds interesting. I'd like to hear this fellow in person.

Festus: You will, then. We'll bring him in tomorrow.

23The next day, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the great hall with great formality, accompanied by the military commanders and the city's leading men. Festus ordered Paul to be brought before them.

Festus: 24King Agrippa and all our honored guests, here is the man who has been charged with wrongdoing by the Jewish community—both in Jerusalem and here. They yelled for his execution, 25but I found him guilty of no capital offense. Then he appealed to our Imperial Majesty, so I have agreed that he will be sent *to Rome*. 26-27*Here is where I need your help.* I can't send a man to our emperor without a letter logically detailing the charges against him, but I have no idea what to write. So, King Agrippa, and all of you honored guests, I'm requesting your help in determining what to write in my letter to the emperor.

26 **Agrippa** *(to Paul)***:** Go ahead. You may speak for yourself.

Paul *(extending his hand)***:** 2I am indeed fortunate to be standing before you, King Agrippa, to humbly defend myself against accusations from my Jewish opponents. 3You are extraordinarily familiar with Jewish customs and controversies, so I beg your patience as I begin. 4My way of life is well known to the whole Jewish community, how I have lived in the Jewish community abroad and in Jerusalem. 5If they are willing to speak, they themselves will tell you something they have long known—that I was a member of the strictest sect of our religion and lived *for many years* as a Pharisee. 6But now I am on trial here *for this simple reason:* I have hope. I have hope rooted in a promise God made to our ancestors. 7All our twelve tribes have hope in this promise—they express their hope as they worship day and night. How strange it is, then, Your Excellency, that I am accused by the Jews of having hope! 8Why would any of you think it is absurd to have hope that God raises the dead? 9As you know, *we're talking specifically* about Jesus of Nazareth. For a long time, I was convinced that I should work against that name. 10I opposed it in Jerusalem. I received authorization from the chief priests to lock many of His followers in prison. When they were threatened with execution, I voted against them. 11I would find them in synagogues across Jerusalem and try to force them to blaspheme. My fury drove me to pursue them to foreign cities as well.

The importance of Paul's conversion experience on the way to Damascus is highlighted as he recounts it in his defense.

12On one occasion, I was traveling
to Damascus, authorized and commissioned by the chief priests *to find and imprison more of His followers.* 13It was about midday, Your Excellency, when I saw a light from heaven—brighter than the noonday sun—shining around my companions and me. 14We all fell to the ground *in fear*, and I then heard a voice. The words were in Aramaic: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? When you kick against the cattle prods, you're only hurting yourself." 15I asked, "Lord, who are You?" and the Lord answered, "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting. 16Get up now, and stand upright on your feet. I have appeared to you for a reason. I am appointing you to serve Me. You are to tell My story and how you have now seen Me, and you are to continue to tell the story in the future. 17I will rescue you from your Jewish opponents and from the outsiders—for it is to the outsiders I am sending you. 18It will be your mission to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God. This is so that they may receive forgiveness of all their sins and have a place among those who are set apart for a holy purpose through having faith in Me."

19King Agrippa, I did not disobey this vision from heaven. 20I began in Damascus, then continued in Jerusalem, then throughout the Judean countryside, then among the outsiders—telling everyone they must turn from their past and toward God and align their deeds and way of life with this new direction. 21So then, this is my crime. This is why my Jewish opponents seized me that day in the temple and tried to kill me. 22God has helped me right up to this very moment, so I can stand here telling my story to both the humble and the powerful alike. I only say what the prophets and Moses said would happen—23that the Anointed One must suffer, and then, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light to both Jews and outsiders.

Festus *(interrupting)*: 24You've gone crazy, Paul! You've read one book too many and have gone insane!

Paul: 25No, most excellent Festus, I am not insane. I am telling the sane and sober truth. 26The king understands what I'm talking about, which is why I could speak so freely to him. None of these things have been covered up and hidden away in a corner, so I'm sure none of these things have escaped his notice. 27King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you must believe.

Agrippa: 28Paul, have you so quickly moved on from defending yourself to trying to persuade me to become a Christian?

Paul: 29Whether I have done so quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also everyone who is listening to me today might become what I am—minus these chains.

30The king stood to leave at this point, along with Festus, Bernice, and all those who had been seated; 31and as they left, everyone was saying the same thing: "This man isn't doing anything deserving death—he shouldn't even be in prison."

Agrippa *(to Festus)*: 32This man could have been released completely if he had not appealed to the emperor.

► At different points in Acts, Luke shows how the good news of Jesus challenges Greco-Roman culture and religion, but he also shows that Christianity is not subversive to the Roman government. These direct statements by Roman officials about Paul's innocence support this message. However, a challenge to culture and religion always ends up becoming a challenge to the government, as later Christians will learn.

27 The date was set for us to depart for Rome, and Paul and some other prisoners were transferred to the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a member of the Augustan Division. 2*I, Luke, was permitted to join Paul for his journey to Rome*, along with Aristarchus, a Macedonian brother from Thessalonica. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium that was stopping in ports along the coast of Asia. 3We stopped the next day at Sidon, and Julius

kindly allowed Paul to visit friends and be taken care of by them. 4We sailed from there north of Cyprus because the winds were unfavorable. 5We passed Cilicia and Pamphylia *on our right* and then came to Myra in Lycia. 6There Julius found a ship from Alexandria heading directly to Italy, to which we transferred. 7The winds were still contrary, so we made slow progress for a number of days and with difficulty passed Cnidus and sailed south toward Crete and past Cape Salmone *on its eastern end.* 8Sailing conditions were adverse to say the least. Finally we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea *on the south coast of Crete.* 9We had lost a lot of time already—it was *late in the year for sailing*—following the Day of Atonement, and conditions had deteriorated from adverse to dangerous. Paul tried to warn those in charge.

Paul: 10Sirs, if we proceed, I can see that our voyage will be dangerous and will involve heavy loss, not only of cargo, but of the ship itself; not only of the ship, but also of our lives.

11But the officer ignored Paul and instead trusted the ship's pilot and owner who felt they could proceed.

12*We had two choices.* We could anchor in the harbor at Fair Havens and spend the winter, or we could proceed *west along the coastline*, hoping to reach Phoenix and wait there for calmer spring weather. *Fair Havens* was not a good option, though, being vulnerable to winter storms; so most of us agreed we should try to reach Phoenix, whose harbor was more protected. 13One day a moderate south wind began to blow, which made an attempt possible. We weighed anchor and sailed *west*, staying near shore. 14*Then things got scary.* A violent northeaster, the Euraquilo, blew down across Crete. 15We were caught. We couldn't turn and sail into this fierce wind, so we had no choice but to let it drive us. 16We briefly found a bit of shelter from the wind near the island of Clauda. We had been having trouble securing the ship's lifeboat; 17but we were able there to hoist it up and send down cables to brace the hull, *which was in danger of breaking apart under the strain of the storm. The wind was relentless, and* soon we were again being driven *southwest at the mercy of the storm.* We feared it would drive us all the way to the Syrtis Banks, *down near the North African coast*, so we threw out the sea anchor to slow us down. 18All through the night, the storm pounded us violently. The next day, the crew threw the ship's cargo overboard; 19and the day after that, they discarded any of the ship's equipment they could do without. 20Days passed without relief from the furious winds, without a single break in the clouds to see sun or stars, even for a moment. Despair set in, as if all hope of rescue had been cast overboard as well. 21On top of all of this, the crew had been unable to eat anything *because of the turmoil. Paul saw the crew had reached a critical moment.* He gathered them.

Paul: Men, if you had listened to my warning, we would still be safe in Crete and would have avoided this damage and loss. 22*I was correct in my warning*, so I urge you to believe me now: none of you will die. We will lose the ship, but we will not lose one life. So keep up your courage, men! 23The God I belong to, the God I worship, sent a heavenly messenger to me this night. 24He said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. *I'm not finished with you yet.* You are going to stand before the emperor! You can be certain that God has granted safety to you and all your companions." 25So listen, men: *you must not give up hope!* Keep up your courage! I have faith in God that things will turn out exactly as I was told last night. 26*Here's what I foresee:* we will run aground on some island.

27-28*Imagine what happened:* It's the 14th night *of our nightmare voyage*; we're being driven by the storm somewhere in the Adriatic Sea. It's about midnight, and the sailors are taking soundings, fearing we might run aground. "Twenty fathoms," somebody calls out in the darkness, then a little later, "Fifteen fathoms." We're nearing land! 29But hope quickly gives way to a new fear. At any moment in this darkness, they realize, we could be smashed onto unseen rocks. So they drop four anchors from the stern and pray for first light.

30Then some of the crew decide to make a run for it on their own. They say they need to let out more anchors from the bow, and this will require lowering the ship's lifeboat. *They actually plan to abandon us; we realize what's going on.* 31Paul quickly speaks to the officer and soldiers.

Paul: Unless these men stay on board, you won't survive.

[32]So the soldiers intervene, cut away the lifeboat, and let it drift away. [33,37]*We wait.* Just before dawn, Paul again gathers everyone on the ship—all 276 of us. He urges everyone to eat *and encourages us not to lose hope.**

Paul: *Listen, men,* we've all been under incredible stress for 14 days. You haven't eaten anything during this whole time. [34]I urge you to take some food now because it will help you survive what we're about to face. And I want to assure you—not one of you will lose a single hair from your head. *We're all going to make it—all 276 of us!*

[35]Then Paul takes a loaf of bread and gives thanks to God in front of all of them. He breaks it, takes a piece, and begins to eat. [36]A fresh surge of courage seems to fill their hearts as they also begin to eat. [38]After satisfying their hunger, the crew lightens the ship by throwing the remaining wheat overboard. [39]Day finally breaks. They survey the coastline and don't recognize it, but they do notice a bay with a beach—the best place to try to run ashore.

[40]So they cut the anchor ropes, untie the steering oars, hoist the foresail to the wind, and make for the beach. [41]But *then there's a horrible sound, and* we realize we've struck a reef; the bow is jammed solid, and the waves are smashing the stern to pieces. [42]The soldiers start talking about killing the prisoners so they won't swim away and escape; [43]but the officer wants to save Paul, so he stops them. He tells those who can swim to jump overboard and swim to the shore, [44]and those who can't, he tells to hold on to planks and other pieces of the ship when it breaks apart. *Some hours later*, we reassemble on the beach, each one safe and sound.

28 We quickly learned that we were on the island of Malta. [2]The Maltese people found us and were extraordinarily kind to us. They kindled a bonfire and welcomed us around it, *which we greatly appreciated* because it was raining and cold. [3]Paul was gathering firewood and helping build the fire. A viper had been hiding in some of the wood, and as it tried to escape the heat, it bit Paul on the hand. It sank its fangs in and wouldn't let go. [4]The natives saw it dangling from his hand.

Natives: This man must be a murderer. He escaped the sea, but now justice has caught up with him.

[5]Paul simply shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm. [6]The natives knew what to expect—rapid swelling followed by death—but when they waited a long time and saw that Paul suffered no ill effects of the bite, they changed their minds and concluded that he was a god.

[7]The leading man of the island, Publius, owned large amounts of land near this beach. Publius received us and hosted us for three days. [8]Publius's father was sick, bedridden with fever and dysentery. Paul visited the invalid and prayed for him, placing his hands on Publius's father. The man was cured. [9]Soon people from all over the island who had diseases came, and they were cured as well.

[10-11]We stayed on Malta for the next three months and were treated with great honor. *When spring arrived,* we prepared to continue our journey on a ship that had wintered there—an Alexandrian vessel with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. The Maltese people showed us a final kindness as we departed: they came with all the provisions we needed for our journey and put them on board.

[12]We *set sail from Malta and* stopped first at Syracuse. After three days, [13]we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. We waited there a day, and then a south wind sprang up and sped us to Puteoli. [14]We found some believers there, and they invited us to stay with them for seven days. Then we reached Rome. [15]The believers from Rome heard we were coming, so they traveled out to meet us at the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. Paul thanked God and felt encouraged to see them. [16]Once inside the city, Paul lived under house arrest by himself, with only one soldier to guard him.

[17]Three days after his arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders.

Paul: Brothers, although I committed no wrong against our Jewish people or our ancestral customs, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. [18]The Romans examined me and wanted to set me free because I had committed no capital offense. [19]But my Jewish opponents objected, so I had to appeal to the emperor—even though I had no charges against me and had filed no charges

* 27:33, 37 Verses 33 and 37 have been combined to help the reader understand the continuity of the passage.

Luke's account of the early church ends abruptly: one of the story's heroes, Paul, is under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial. Other sources will recount how Paul is later martyred in Rome, a victim of Nero's paranoia and cruelty. But Luke's story isn't a biography of Paul; it is a narration about "the Way" as it moved geographically and culturally from Jerusalem (at the edge of the empire) to Rome (the celebrated center of the world). Therefore, Luke's story finishes once the message of Jesus is spreading without hindrance.

As it moves geographically, "the Way," as Jesus' followers preferred to call it, crosses cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries. At each and every point, Luke assures, the Spirit is there demonstrating God's blessing on and approval of the emissaries who walk in the footsteps of Jesus and in fulfillment of prophecies. Clearly what happened in those early decades was driven by the Spirit-wind of heaven; and God's purposes are realized through the faithful obedience of disciples such as Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul.

Luke's account has ended, but the story about the acts of God through the church continues into our day. We are the characters in the current volume of salvation history. Through our faithful obedience, also empowered by the Spirit-wind of heaven, our stories are part of the anthology of God's new creation.

against my nation. 20I wanted to gather
you together and explain all this to
you. I want you to understand that it is
because of Israel's hope that I am bound
with this chain.

Jewish Leaders: 21We haven't received
letters from Judea about you, and no
visiting brother has reported anything or
said anything negative about you. 22So
we are interested in hearing your viewpoint on the sect *you represent*. The only
thing we know about it is that people
everywhere speak against it.

23They scheduled a day to meet again, and a large number came to his lodging. From morning until evening, he explained his message to them—giving his account of the kingdom of God, trying to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets' writings. 24Some were convinced, but others refused to believe.

Paul *(adding as they left in disagreement)***:**
25The Holy Spirit rightly spoke to your
ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

26Go to this people and say,
"You certainly do hear, but you will
never understand;
you certainly do see, but you will
never have insight.
27Make their hearts hard,
their ears deaf, and their eyes
blind.
Otherwise, they would look and see,
listen and hear,
understand and repent,
and be healed."*

28So let it be known to you that God's
liberation, *God's healing*, has been sent to
the outsiders, and they will listen.

[29Then the local Jewish leaders left Paul to discuss all he had told them.]*

30For two full years, he lived there in Rome, paying all his own expenses, receiving all who came to him. 31With great confidence and with no hindrance, he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about *the ultimate authority*—the Lord Jesus, God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*.

* 28:26-27 Isaiah 6:9-10 * 28:29 Some early manuscripts omit verse 29.

ROMANS

Letter to the church in Rome

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Rome was the center of the known world; it was the cradle of civilization, commerce, culture—and home to a military machine under the command of Caesar, the most powerful man in the world. The most influential city on the planet was on the frontier of the Jesus movement, a place where God was bringing together Jews and non-Jews into one community to follow Jesus' teachings. A group of believers was gathering, and a church of great importance was forming from ragamuffin believers who had been touched by the power of the gospel. But they do not appear to have had the leadership of the Lord's emissaries—those who had walked with and had been handpicked by Jesus. This church would become the seedbed for the spread of the gospel across the known world, so Paul recognized the importance of articulating the whole gospel to this body of believers and preparing them for their missional calling in the world.

This letter from Paul, the emissary of Jesus, breaks all the previous molds. He is writing to many people he does not know, is instructing a church he did not plant, and is challenging them to embrace their role in bringing the gospel to the people of Italy and Spain, despite the fact that he has not been able to model the work of missions and church planting in Rome as he had in other places. What would Paul have to say to believers he had never met? How would he proclaim the gospel in a letter? In planting other churches, Paul surely told how the risen Jesus appeared to him. Paul must have preached to them for untold hours (he was known for being quite verbose) about sin, redemption, justification, the cross, adoption, grace, love, life in the Spirit, and the power of the Anointed One to redeem all things.

This letter set the church in Rome on a firm foundation and ultimately became one of the most important pieces of literature ever written. It has influenced some of the greatest minds and agents of change the world has known: Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu, just to name a few. It was one of the primary inspirations for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. But most importantly, this letter written to Christians in an ancient city penetrates our hearts and minds today with a beautiful and persuasive view of the power of the gospel!

According to Paul, in and by itself, the gospel is power—God's power. The simple message of Jesus brings healing and rescue to all people. It starts with God's people, the Jews, but does not end until all people hear and respond to its call.

The gospel reveals how right and faithful God has been all along. It begins with God's faithfulness to His creation and His covenant people. Then God acts, finally and decisively, in the cross of Jesus. For Paul the cross, more than any other event, displays Jesus' faithfulness to God the Father. As the Gospels tell us, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus entrusts Himself completely to God's will. As a result, this good news brings faith and hope to those who hear and respond to its elegant message. Because God is faithful, He acts in a most extraordinary way. Somehow in the scandal of the cross, He offers His own Son in order to redeem the fallen world.

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus the Anointed called by God to be His emissary* and appointed to tell the good news 2of the things promised long ago by God, spoken by prophets, and recorded in the Holy Scriptures. 3All of this good news is about His Son: who was (from a human perspective) born of David's royal line 4*and ultimately* designated to be the *true* Son of God with power upon His resurrection from the dead by the Spirit of holiness. I am speaking of Jesus, the Anointed One, our Lord.

► The prophets express God's mind and will in the world. Sometimes their messages are a word-on-target to the people and powers of their day; at other times, they see and speak about the future. Their words not only predict the future—they speak the word of the Lord, which creates reality and shapes the future.

Paul describes the gospel of Jesus by bringing in the good news on two levels: On a human level, the good news is about God's Son, David's descendant, entering the world to begin the task of restoring it from the damage sin and death have left behind. But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead takes Jesus' sonship to a new level. Now He is the Son-of-God-in-Power, the One called Lord and Master.

5*And here's what He's done:* He has graced us and sanctioned us as His emissaries* whose mission is to spread the *one true and* obedient faith to all people in the name of Jesus. 6This includes you: you have been called by Jesus, God's Anointed.

7To all those who are God's beloved saints in Rome:

May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, surround you.

8First, I thank my God through Jesus the Anointed for all of you because *we are joined by faith as family, and* your faith is spreading across the world. 9-10For *I call* God as my witness—whom I worship in my spirit and serve in making known the gospel—He alone knows how often I mention you in my prayers. I find myself constantly praying for you and hoping it's in God's will for me to be with you soon. 11I desperately want to see you so that I can share some gift of the Spirit to strengthen you. 12Plus I know that when we come together *something beautiful will happen as* we are encouraged by each other's faith.

13If, my brothers and sisters, you did not already know, my plans were set to meet you *in Rome*, but time and circumstances have forced every trip to be canceled until now. I have deeply desired to see some good fruit among you just as I have seen with so many non-Jewish believers. 14*You see,* I am in *tremendous* debt to those of various nationalities, from non-Jews to barbarians, from the wisest of the wise to the idle wanderer. 15So you can imagine how eager I am to join you and to teach the good news in *the mighty and diverse city of* Rome.

16For I am not *the least bit* embarrassed about the gospel. *I won't shy away from it*, because it is God's power to save every person who believes: first the Jew,

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:5 Literally, apostles

and then the non-Jew. 17You see, in the good news, God's restorative justice is revealed. *And as we will see,* it begins with and ends in faith. As the Scripture declares, "By faith the just will obtain life."*

18For the wrath of God is breaking through from heaven, opposing all *manifestations of* ungodliness and wickedness by the people who do wrong to keep God's truth in check. 19These people are not ignorant about what can be known of God, because He has shown it to them *with great clarity*. 20From the beginning, creation in its magnificence enlightens us to His nature. Creation itself makes His undying power and divine identity clear, even though they are invisible; and it voids the excuses *and ignorant claims* of these people 21because, despite the fact that they knew the one true God, they have failed to show the *love,* honor, and appreciation due to the One who created them! Instead, their lives are consumed by vain thoughts that poison their foolish hearts. 22They claim to be wise; but they have been exposed as fools*, frauds, and con artists*—23only a fool would trade the splendor and beauty of the immortal God to worship images of the common man or woman, bird or reptile, or *the next* beast *that tromps along*.

24So God gave them just what their lustful hearts desired. *As a result,* they violated their bodies and invited shame into their lives. 25*How?* By choosing a foolish lie over God's truth. They gave their lives and devotion to the creature rather than to the Creator Himself, who is blessed forever and ever. Amen. 26-27This is why God released them to their own vile pursuits, *and this is what happened*: they chose sexual counterfeits—women had sexual relations with other women and men committed unnatural, shameful acts because they burned with lust for other men. This sin was rife, and they suffered painful consequences.

28Since they had no mind to recognize God, He turned them loose to follow the unseemly designs of their depraved minds and to do things that should not be done. 29Their days are filled with all sorts of godless living, wicked schemes, greed, hatred, endless desire for more, murder, violence, deceit, and spitefulness. And, *as if that were not enough,* they are gossiping, 30slanderous, God-hating, rude, egotistical, smug people who are always coming up with even more dreadful ways to treat one another. They don't listen to their parents; 31they lack understanding *and character*. They are simple-minded, covenant-breaking, heartless, and unmerciful; *they are not to be trusted*. 32Despite the fact that they are fully aware that God's law says this way of life deserves death, they fail to stop. And *worse*—they applaud others on this destructive path.

► Paul sounds a sober warning. God's wrath is here; it is not some far-off future event. Paul says that God's wrath is already at work in the world in what is effectively God's "hands-off" policy. God, he says, steps aside and gives us over to idolatry, sexual sins, and depraved minds. Human sin and depravity are both its cause and effect. You see, we are not only punished for our sins, but we are punished by our sins. If God's salvation consists essentially of His presence with us, then His wrath consists of His absence or separation from us. The bad news is this: God's wrath is real. Without the good news of Jesus, no hope exists.

2 So you can see there are no excuses for any of us. If your eyes shift their focus from yourselves to others—to judge *how they are doing*—you have already condemned yourselves! *You don't realize that* you are pointing your fingers at others for the exact things you do as well. 2There's no doubt that the judgment of God will justly fall upon hypocrites who practice such things. 3*Here's what is happening:* you attack and criticize others and then turn around to commit the same offenses yourselves! Do you think you will somehow dodge God's judgment? 4Do you take the kindness of God for granted? Do you see His patience and tolerance as signs that He is a pushover *when it comes to sin*? How could you not know that His kindness is guiding our hearts to turn away from *distractions and habitual* sin to walk a new path?*

5But because your heart is obstinate and shameless, you're storing up wrath that will count against you. On the day of

* 1:17 Habakkuk 2:4 * 2:4 Literally, repentance

His choosing, God's wrath and judgment will be unleashed to make things right. 6As it goes, everyone will receive what his actions in life have cultivated. 7Whoever has labored diligently and patiently to do what is right—seeking glory, honor, and immortality—God will grant him *endless joy in* life eternal. 8But selfish individuals who *make trouble,* resist the truth, or sell out to wickedness *will meet a very different fate—they* will find fury and indignation *as the fruit of living in the wrong.* 9Suffering and pain await everyone whose life is marked by evil living (first for the Jew, and next for the non-Jew). 10But if you do what is right, you will receive glory, admiration, and peace (again, first for the Jew, then for the non-Jew). 11God has no favorites.

12If one lives life without knowledge of the law—*the teachings of the Torah*—he will sin and die apart from the law. If someone else lives life under the law, his sin will be judged by what the law teaches. 13*Here's my point:* just because a person hears the law *read or recited* does not mean he is right before the one True God; it is following the law that makes one right, *not just hearing it.* 14-15For instance, *some* outsiders who are not required to follow the law often live quite naturally by its teachings. Even though the law wasn't given to them, in themselves they have the law. *Here's the thing:* their lives demonstrate that God has inscribed the law's teachings on their hearts. *On judgment day,* their consciences will testify for them, and their thoughts will both accuse and defend them. 16This good news given to me declares that this *affirmation and accusation* will take place on that day when God, through Jesus, the Anointed One, judges every person's life secrets.

17Listen, if you claim to be a Jew, count on the law, and boast in *your relationship with* God; 18if you know His will and can determine what is essential (because you have been instructed in the law); and 19if you stand convinced that you are *chosen to be* a guide to the blind, a light to those who live in darkness, 20a teacher of foolish wanderers and children, and have in the law what is essentially the form of knowledge and truth—21then tell me, why don't you practice what you preach? If you are going to sermonize against stealing, then stop stealing. 22If you are going to teach others not to commit adultery, then be completely faithful to your spouse. If you hate idolatry, then stop robbing the temples! 23If you pride yourself in having God's law, then stop dishonoring God by failing to keep its teaching. 24Here's what it says: "Because of you, God's reputation is slandered by those outside the covenant."*

25You see, circumcision is of value only if you keep the law's teachings. But if you keep breaking God's rules, you are no different than those without the mark. 26So if an uncircumcised man abides by God's just precepts, doesn't that make his standing before God the same as one who is circumcised? 27The man who is physically uncircumcised but still keeps the law, he will stand in judgment over the person who is circumcised and yet continually breaks God's law. 28A mark that is evident doesn't necessarily make one a Jew, and circumcision that is evident only in the flesh is not true. 29But the true Jew is Jewish on the inside—*in secret places no one but God can see*—and true circumcision involves the heart; it comes from the Spirit, not from some written code. The praise *and reputation* of that kind of Jew come from God, not from man.

► When God's people—or people who claim to be God's people—are hypocrites, then God is the one who gets the bad name. How often do we say one thing and do another? How often have we set a standard for others only to break it ourselves? The saying is true: we practice every day what we believe; all the rest is religious talk. There is a lot of religious talk out there, a lot of smugness and self-satisfaction. But every day people readily violate their consciences and the Lord's reasonable teachings. For faith to matter, it has to get under your skin.

3 So then, do the Jews have an advantage *over the other nations*? Does circumcision do anything for you? 2The answer is yes, in every way. To begin with, God spoke to and through the Jewish people. 3But what if some *Jews* have been unfaithful? Does the fact that they abandoned their faith zero out God's

* 2:24 Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22

faithfulness? 4Absolutely not! If every person *on the planet* were a liar *and thief*, God would still be true. It stands written:

Whenever You speak, You are in the right.
When You come to judge, You will prevail.*

5If our perpetual injustice and corruption merely accentuate the purity of God's justice, what can we say? Is God unjust for unleashing His fury against us? (I am speaking from our limited human perspective.) 6Again, absolutely not! If this were so, how could God stand as Judge over the world? 7But if my lie serves only to point out God's truth and bring Him glory, then why am I being judged for my sin? 8There are slanderous charges out there that we are saying things like, "Let's be as wicked as possible so that something good will come from it." Those malicious gossips will get what they deserve.

9So what then? Are we Jews better off? Not at all. We have made it clear that people everywhere, Jews and non-Jews, are living under the power of sin. 10Here's what Scripture says:

No one is righteous—not even one.
11There is no one who understands *the truth*;
no one is seeking after the *one True* God.
12All have turned away; together they've become worthless.
No one does good, not even one.*
13What comes out of their mouths is as foul as a rotting corpse;
their words stink of flattery.*
Viper venom hides beneath their lips;*
14their mouths are full of curses, lies, and oppression.*
15Their feet race to *violence and* bloodshed;
16destruction and trouble line the roads of their lives,
17And they've never taken the road to peace.*
18You will never see the fear of God in their eyes.*

► Sin is more than just wrong choices, bad decisions, and willful acts of disobedience that violate God's Word and are contrary to His will. It is that and much more. Paul knows sin is missing the mark or deliberately stepping over the line, but he also knows that sin is a power at work in him and every child of Adam. As strange as it may sound, sin seems to have a will of its own. Like an addiction, sin takes hold of us and causes us to act in ways we never wanted. For Paul the cross of Jesus deals finally and definitively with the dual reality of sin. Not only are we forgiven of our sins—our willful acts of disobedience—but we are also liberated from the power of sin.

19We want to be clear that whatever the law says, it says to everyone who is under its authority. Its purpose is to muzzle every mouth, *to silence idle talk*, and to bring the whole world under the standard of God's justice. 20Therefore, doing what the law prescribes will not make anyone right in the eyes of God—*that's not its purpose*—but the law is capable of exposing the true nature of sin.

21But now *for the good news*: God's restorative justice has entered the world, independent of the law. Both the law and the prophets told us this day would come. 22This redeeming justice comes through the faithfulness of Jesus,* the Anointed One, *the Liberating King*, who makes salvation a reality for all who believe—without the slightest partiality. 23You see, all have sinned, and all their futile attempts to reach God in His glory fail. 24Yet they are now saved and set right by His free gift of grace through the redemption available only in Jesus the Anointed. 25When God set Him up to be the sacrifice—the seat of mercy where sins are atoned through faith—His blood became the demonstration of God's own restorative justice. All of this confirms His faithfulness *to the promise*, for over the course of human history God patiently held back as He dealt with the sins being committed. 26This expression of God's restorative justice displays in the present that He is just and righteous and that He makes right those who trust and commit themselves to Jesus.

* 3:4 Psalm 51:4 * 3:10-12 Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3 * 3:13 Psalm 5:9 * 3:13 Psalm 140:3 * 3:14 Psalm 10:7
* 3:15-17 Isaiah 59:7-8 * 3:18 Psalm 36:1 * 3:22 Often translated "faith in Jesus"

► In the incarnation and sacrificial death of Jesus, God is at work to extend salvation to those who fall under sin's addiction. They are liberated from its power, cleansed of its stain. By "God's restorative justice," Paul means first the justice that belongs to God and reflects His character. God is just, fair, or in a word, righteous. But character is dynamic, not static. This means that God's justice must express itself in some way. So it is in the nature of God's justice that He acts to restore and repair a world that is not the way it should be. Above all, it is God's saving actions through Jesus that constitute the gift of God's restorative justice.

27So is there any place left for boasting? No. It's been shut out completely. *And how?* By what sort of law? The law of works perhaps? No! By the law of faith. 28We hold that people are justified, *that is, made right with God* through faith, which has nothing to do with the deeds the law prescribes.

29Is God the God of the Jews only? *If He created all things, then doesn't that make Him* the God of all people? Jews and non-Jews, *insiders and outsiders alike*? Yes, He is also the God of all the outsiders. 30So since God is one, *there is one way for Jews and outsiders,* circumcised and uncircumcised, to be right with Him. That is the way of faith. 31So are we trying to use faith to abolish the law? Absolutely not! In fact, we *now are free to* uphold the law *as God intended.*

4 In light of all of this, what should we say about our ancestor Abraham? 2If Abraham was made right by performing certain works, then he would surely have something to brag about. Right? Not before *the Creator* God, 3because as the Scriptures say, "Abraham believed God *and trusted in His promises,* so God counted it to his favor as righteousness."* 4Now, when you work a job, do your wages come as a gift *or as compensation for your work*? It is *most certainly* not a gift—you are only paid what you have earned. 5So for the person who does not work, but instead trusts in the One who makes the ungodly right, his faith is counted for him as righteousness.

6*Remember the psalm where* David speaks about the benefits that come to the person whom God credits with righteousness apart from works? He said,

7Blessed are those whose wrongs have
been forgiven
and whose sins have been covered.
8Blessed is the person whose sin the
Lord will not take into account.*

9So is this blessing spoken only for the circumcised or for all uncircumcised people too? We remind *you what the Scripture has to say*: faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.*

10So when was the credit awarded *to Abraham*? Was it before or after his circumcision? Well, it certainly wasn't after—it was before he was circumcised. 11*Eventually* he was given circumcision as a sign of his right standing, indicating that he was credited on the basis of the faith he possessed before he was circumcised. It happened this way so that Abraham might become the spiritual father of all those who are not circumcised but are made right through their faith. 12In the same way, *God destined him to be* the spiritual father of all those who are circumcised as more than an outward sign, but who walk in our father Abraham's faithful footsteps—a faith he possessed while he was still uncircumcised.

13The promise given to Abraham and his children, that one day they would inherit the world, did not come because he followed the rules of the law. It came as a result of his right standing *before God, a standing he* obtained through faith. 14If this inheritance is available only to those who keep the law, then faith is a useless commodity and the promise is canceled. 15For the law brings God's wrath *against sin.* But where the law doesn't draw the line, there can be no crime.

16This is the reason that faith is the single source of the promise—so that grace would be offered to all Abraham's children, those whose lives are defined by the law and those who follow the path of faith charted by Abraham, our common father. 17As it is recorded *in the Scriptures,* "I have appointed you the father of many

* 4:3 Genesis 15:6 * 4:7-8 Psalm 32:1-2 * 4:9 Genesis 15:6

nations."* In the presence of the God who creates out of nothing and holds the power to bring to life what is dead, Abraham believed *and so became our father*.

18Against the odds, Abraham's hope grew into full-fledged faith that he would turn out to be the father of many nations, just as God had promised when He said, "That's how *many* your descendants will be."* 19His faith did not fail, although he was well aware that his impotent body, after nearly 100 years, was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb, too, was dead. 20In spite of all this, his faith in God's promise did not falter. In fact, his faith grew as he gave glory to God 21because he was supremely confident that God could deliver on His promise. 22This is why, *you see*, *God saw* his faith *and* counted him as righteous; *this is how he became* right with God.

23The story of how faith was credited to Abraham was not recorded for him and him alone, 24but was written for all of us who would one day be credited for having faith in God, the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the realm of the dead. 25He was delivered over to death for our trespasses and raised so that we might be made right *with God*.

► In God's plan to restore a fallen and disfigured world, Abraham became the father of all of us, the agent of blessing to everyone. Jesus completes what God started centuries before when He established Abraham's covenant family. Those who put faith in Jesus and call Him "Lord" become part of Abraham's faith family. Because God is gracious, loving, and merciful, men and women from every corner of the earth are not only declared right, but ultimately are made right as well. It happens through God's actions—not our efforts—in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus who was crucified for our misdeeds and raised to repair what has been wrong all along. So the promises of God made long years ago are being realized in men and women who hear the call of faith and answer "yes" to it.

5 Since we have been *acquitted and* made right through faith, we are able to experience *true and lasting* peace with God through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *the Liberating King*. 2Jesus leads us into a place of *radical* grace where we are able to celebrate the hope of experiencing God's glory. 3And that's not all. We also celebrate in seasons of suffering because we know that when we suffer we develop endurance, 4which shapes our characters. When our characters are refined, we learn what it means to hope *and anticipate God's goodness*. 5And hope will never fail to satisfy our deepest need because the Holy Spirit that was given to us has flooded our hearts with God's love.

6When the time was right, the Anointed One died for all of us who were far from God, powerless, and weak. 7Now it is rare to find someone willing to die for an upright person, although it's possible that someone may give up his life for one who is truly good. 8But *think about this:* while we were wasting our lives in sin, God revealed His powerful love to us *in a tangible display*—the Anointed One died for us. 9As a result, the blood of Jesus has made us right with God now, and certainly we will be rescued by Him from God's wrath *in the future*. 10If we were in the heat of combat with God when His Son reconciled us by laying down His life, then how much more will we be saved by Jesus' *resurrection* life? 11In fact, we stand now reconciled *and at peace* with God. That's why we celebrate in God through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed.

12Consider this: sin entered our world through one man, *Adam;* and through sin, death followed *in hot pursuit*. Death spread rapidly to infect all people on the earth as they engaged in sin.

► God's gift of grace and salvation is amazing. Paul struggles to find the words to describe it. He looks everywhere around him to find a metaphor, an image, a word to put into language one aspect of this awesome gift. One of those is "reconciliation." There is hardly anything more beautiful than to see two people who have been enemies or estranged or separated coming back together. When Paul reflects

* 4:17 Genesis 17:5 * 4:18 Genesis 15:5

on what God has done through Jesus, he thinks about reconciliation. Before we receive God's blessing through His Son, we are enemies of God, sinners of the worst sort. But God makes the first move to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

13Before God gave the law, sin existed, *but there was no way to account for it.* Outside the law, how could anyone be charged and found guilty of sin? 14Still, death plagued all humanity from Adam to Moses, even those whose sin was of a different sort than Adam's. *You see, in God's plan,* Adam was a prototype of the One who comes *to usher in a new day.* 15But the free gift of grace bears no resemblance to Adam's crime *that brings a death sentence to all of humanity; in fact, it is quite the opposite.* For if the one man's sin brings death to so many, how much more does the gift of God's *radical* grace extend to humanity since Jesus the Anointed offered His generous gift. 16His free gift is nothing like the scourge of the first man's sin. The judgment that fell because of one false step brought condemnation, but the free gift following countless offenses results in a favorable verdict—not guilty. 17If one man's sin brought a reign of death—*that's Adam's legacy*—how much more will those who receive grace in abundance and the free gift of redeeming justice reign in life by means of one other man—Jesus the Anointed.

18So here is the result: as one man's sin brought about condemnation *and punishment* for all people, so one man's act of faithfulness makes all of us right with God and brings us to new life. 19Just as through one man's *defiant* disobedience every one of us were made sinners, so through the *willing* obedience of the one man many of us will be made right.

20When the law came into the picture, sin grew and grew; but wherever sin grew and spread, God's grace was there in fuller, greater measure. *No matter how much sin crept in, there was always more grace.* 21In the same way that sin reigned in the sphere of death, now grace reigns through God's restorative justice, *eclipsing death and* leading to eternal life through the Anointed One, Jesus our Lord, *the Liberating King.*

► We arrive here, children of a common ancestor, Adam. As such, we have inherited his traits, physically and spiritually. Although our sin may be of a different sort than his, we sin no less than Adam. The proof of that is death. Adam opens the way for sin and death to pursue us and run rampant across the earth. But from the beginning, God has a plan to reverse the curse. At just the right moment in human history, Jesus arrives, a son of Adam and the Son of God. Through His faithful obedience to His Father, He challenges the twin powers of sin and death and defeats them. Sin no longer reigns unchecked. Death no longer has the last word.

6 How should we respond to all of this? Is it good to persist in a life of sin so that grace may multiply even more? 2Absolutely not! How can we die to a life where sin ruled over us and then invite sin back into our lives? 3Did someone forget to tell you that when we were initiated into Jesus the Anointed through baptism's ceremonial washing,* we entered into His death? 4Therefore, we were buried with Him through this baptism into death so that just as God the Father, in all His glory, resurrected the Anointed One, we, too, might walk *confidently out of the grave* into a new life. 5*To put it another way:* if we have been united with Him to share in a death like His, don't you understand that we will also share in His resurrection? 6We know this: whatever we used to be with our old sinful ways has been nailed to His cross. So our entire record of sin has been canceled, and we no longer have to bow down to sin's power. 7A dead man, you see, cannot be bound by sin. 8But if we have died with the Anointed One, we believe that we shall also live together with Him. 9So we stand firm in the conviction that death holds no power over God's Anointed, because He was resurrected from the dead never to face death again. 10When He died, He died to whatever power sin had, once and for all, and now He lives completely to God. 11So here is how to

* 6:3 Literally, immersion, in a rite of initiation and purification

picture yourself now that you have been initiated into Jesus the Anointed: you are dead to sin's power and influence, but you are alive to God's rule.

12Don't invite *that insufferable tyrant of* sin back into your mortal body so you won't become obedient to its *destructive* desires. 13Don't offer your bodily members to sin's service as tools of wickedness; instead, offer your body to God as those who are alive from the dead, and devote the parts of your body to God as tools for justice *and goodness in this world.* 14For sin is no longer a tyrant over you; indeed you are under grace and not the law.

Now sin and death no longer define us, but grace does: God's favor has been given freely to us through His Son, Jesus, who liberates us from sin's power.

15So what do we do now? Throw ourselves into lives of sin because we are cloaked in grace and don't have to answer to the law? Absolutely not! 16Doesn't it make sense that if you sign yourself over as a slave, you will have to obey your master? The question *before you is, What will be your master?* Will it be sin—which will lead to certain death—or obedience—which will lead to a right *and reconciled* life? 17Thank God that your slavery to sin has ended and that *in your new freedom* you pledged your heartfelt obedience to that teaching which was passed on to you. 18*The beauty of your new situation is this*: now that you are free from sin, you are free to serve *a different master, God's redeeming* justice.

19Forgive me for using casual language to compensate for your natural weakness of human understanding. *I want to be perfectly clear*. In the same way you gave your bodily members away as slaves to corrupt and lawless living and found yourselves deeper in your unruly lives, now devote your members as slaves to right *and reconciled* lives so you will find yourselves deeper in holy living. 20In the days when you lived as slaves to sin, you had no obligation to do the right thing. *In that regard, you were free.* 21But what do you have to show from your former lives besides shame? The outcome of that life is death, *guaranteed.* 22But now that you have been emancipated from the death grip of sin and are God's slave, you have *a different sort of life,* a growing holiness. The outcome of that life is eternal life. 23The payoff for a life of sin is death, but God is offering us a free gift—eternal life through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.*

► Grace is no license to sin. As creatures, we are made to serve our Creator. In the absence of truth, we will serve somebody or something. It's an essential part of our nature. Our only choice is this: whom will we serve? At one time, we all served sin and grew weak under its deadly power over us. Now, through God's grace, we have become servants of obedience that sets us right with God, each other, and ourselves. We must daily decide whose servant we are and offer Him our hands, our feet, our hearts, our eyes.

7 My brothers and sisters who are well versed in the law, don't you realize that a person is subject to the law only as long as he is alive? 2So, for example, a wife is obligated by the law to her husband until his death; if the husband dies, she is freed from the parts of the law that relate to her marriage. 3If she is sleeping with another man while her husband is alive, she is rightly labeled an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law and can marry another man. In such a case, she is not an adulteress.

4My brothers and sisters, in the same way, you have died when it comes to the law because of *your connection with* the body of the Anointed One. His death—*and your death with Him*—frees you to belong to the One who was raised from the dead so we can bear fruit for God. 5As we were living in the flesh, the law *could not solve the problem of sin; it* only awakened our lust for more and cultivated the fruit of death in our bodily members. 6But now that we have died to those chains that imprisoned us, we have been released from the law to serve in a new Spirit-empowered life, not the old written code.

7So what is the story? Is the law itself sin? Absolutely not! *It is the exact opposite.* I would never have known what sin is if it were not for the law. *For example,* I would not have known that desiring something that belongs to my neighbor is sin if the

law had not said, "You are not to covet."* 8Sin took advantage of the commandment to create a constant stream of greed and desire within me; *I began to want everything.* You see, apart from the law, sin lies dormant. 9There was a time when I was living without the law, but the commandment came *and changed everything*: sin came to life, and I died. 10This commandment was supposed to bring life; but in my experience, it brought death. 11Sin took advantage of the commandment, tricked me, and exploited it in order to kill me. 12So *hear me out:* the law is holy; and its commandments are holy, right, and good.

13So did the good *law* bring about my death? Absolutely not! It was sin that killed me, *not the law.* It's the nature of sin to produce death through what is good and exploit the commandments to multiply sin's vile effects. 14This is what we know: the law comes from the spiritual realm. *My problem is that* I am of the fallen human realm, owned by sin, *which tries to keep me in its service.*

► God gives Israel the law as part of His covenant promises. The law does a great deal for His people; mainly it sets them apart from all other nations of the world and gives them a blueprint for God's will. But, according to Paul, the law cannot fix everything that is wrong with this broken world. Although the law is perfectly suited for bringing sin to the surface and exposing it, the law cannot free people from the power of sin and its evil twin, death.

15*Listen,* I can't explain my actions. Here's why: I am not able to do the things I want; and at the same time, I do the things I despise. 16If I am doing the things I have already decided not to do, I am agreeing with the law regarding what is good. 17But now I am no longer the one acting—*I've lost control*—sin has taken up residence in me *and is wreaking havoc.* 18I know that in me, that is, in my fallen human nature, there is nothing good. I can will myself to do something good, but that does not help me carry it out. 19I can determine that I am going to do good, but I don't do it; instead, I end up living out the evil that I decided not to do. 20If I end up doing the exact thing I pledged not to do, I am no longer doing it because sin has taken up residence in me.

21Here's an *important* principle I've discovered: regardless of my desire to do the right thing, *it is clear that* evil is never far away. 22For deep down I am in happy agreement with God's law; 23but the rest of me does not concur. I see a very different principle at work in my bodily members, and it is at war with my mind; I have become a prisoner in this war to the rule of sin in my body. 24I am absolutely miserable! Is there anyone who can free me from this body where *sin and* death reign *so supremely*? 25I am thankful to God *for the freedom that comes* through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So on the one hand, I devotedly serve God's law with my mind; but on the other hand, with my flesh, I serve the principle of sin.

8 Therefore, now no condemnation awaits those who are living in Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* 2because when you live in the Anointed One, Jesus, *a new law takes effect.* The law of the Spirit of life *breathes into you and* liberates you from the law of sin and death. 3God did something the law could never do. *You see, human flesh took its toll on God's law. In and of itself, the law is not weak; but* the flesh weakens it. So to condemn the sin that was *ruling* in the flesh, God sent His own Son, bearing the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sin offering. 4Now we are able to live up to the justice demanded by the law. But that ability has not come from living by our fallen human nature; it has come because we walk according to the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

5If you live your life animated by the flesh—*namely, your fallen, corrupt nature*—then your mind is focused on the matters of the flesh. But if you live your life animated by the Spirit—*namely, God's indwelling presence*—then your focus is on the work of the Spirit. 6A mind focused on the flesh is doomed to death, but a mind focused on the Spirit will find full life and complete peace. 7You see, a mind focused on the flesh is declaring war against God; it defies the authority of God's law and is

* 7:7 Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21

incapable of following His path. 8*So it is clear that* God takes no pleasure in those who live oriented to the flesh.

► The power of sin and death has been eclipsed by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit breathes life into our mortal, sin-infested bodies—thanks to what Jesus has done for us. By sending His Son in "the likeness of sinful flesh," God judges sin finally and completely. The sins of the world are concentrated and condemned in the flesh of Jesus as He hangs on the cross. So now there is no condemnation remaining for those who've entered into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

9But you do not live in the flesh. You live in the Spirit, assuming, of course, that the Spirit of God lives inside of you. *The truth is that* anyone who does not have the Spirit of the Anointed living within does not belong to God. 10If the Anointed One lives within you, even though the body is *as good as* dead because of *the effects of* sin, the Spirit is infusing you with life now that you are right with God. 11If the Spirit of the One who resurrected Jesus from the dead lives inside of you, then *you can be sure that* He who raised Him will cast *the light of* life into your mortal bodies through the life-giving power of the Spirit residing in you.

► As Paul ponders the story of redemption, he finds in the family unit a beautiful image of what salvation means. Those who enter into God's salvation are adopted into God's family. Before we receive the gift of God's grace, we are homeless orphans searching for some place to belong. But now all that has changed. The Father reaches out through His Son to all those orphaned by sin and death, and He brings them into His family. We are adopted into His forever family and fully enfranchised as His heirs.

12So, my brothers and sisters, you owe the flesh nothing! You do not need to live according to its ways, *so abandon its oppressive regime.* 13For if your life is just about satisfying the impulses of your sinful nature, then prepare to die. But if you have invited the Spirit to destroy these selfish desires, you will experience life. 14If the Spirit of God is leading you, then *take comfort in knowing* you are His children. 15You see, you have not received a spirit that returns you to slavery, so you have nothing to fear. The Spirit you have received adopts you *and welcomes you* into God's own family. That's why we call out to Him, "Abba! Father!" *as we would address a loving daddy.* 16*Through that prayer,* God's Spirit confirms in our spirits that we are His children. 17If we are God's children, that means we are His heirs along with the Anointed, set to inherit everything that is His. If we share His sufferings, *we know that* we will ultimately share in His glory.

18Now I'm sure of this: the sufferings we endure now are not even worth comparing to the glory that is coming and will be revealed in us. 19For all of creation is waiting, yearning for the time when the children of God will be revealed. 20You see, all of creation has collapsed into emptiness, not by its own choosing, but by God's. Still He placed within it a *deep and abiding* hope 21that creation would one day be liberated from its slavery to corruption and experience the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22For we know that all creation groans *in unison* with birthing pains up until now. 23*And there is more;* it's not just creation—all of us are groaning together too. Though we have already tasted the firstfruits of the Spirit, we are longing for the total redemption of our bodies that comes when our adoption as children *of God* is complete—24for we have been saved in this hope *and for this future.* But hope does not involve what we already *have or* see. For who goes around hoping for what he already has? 25But if we wait expectantly for things we have never seen, then we hope with true perseverance and eager anticipation.

26A similar thing happens *when we pray*. We are weak and do not know how to pray, so the Spirit steps in and articulates prayers for us with groaning too profound for words. 27*Don't you know that* He who pursues and explores the human heart *intimately* knows the Spirit's mind because He pleads to God for His saints

to align their lives with the will of God? 28We are confident that God is able to orchestrate everything to work toward something good *and beautiful* when we love Him and accept His invitation to live according to His plan. 29-30*From the distant past, His eternal love reached into the future.* You see, He knew those who would be His one day, and He chose them beforehand to be conformed to the image of His Son so that Jesus would be the firstborn of a new family of believers, all brothers and sisters. As for those He chose beforehand, He called them to a different destiny so that they would experience what it means to be made right with God and share in His glory.

31So what should we say about all of this? If God is on our side, *then tell me:* whom should we fear? 32If He did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over on our account, then *don't you think that* He will graciously give us all things with Him? 33Can anyone be so bold as to level a charge against God's chosen? *Especially since* God's *"not guilty"* verdict is already declared. 34Who has the authority to condemn? Jesus the Anointed who died, but *more importantly, conquered death when He* was raised to sit at the right hand of God where He pleads on our behalf. 35So who can separate us? What can come between us and the love of God's Anointed? Can troubles, hardships, persecution, hunger, poverty, danger, or even death? *The answer is, absolutely nothing.* 36As the psalm says,

> On Your behalf, our lives are
> endangered constantly;
> we are like sheep awaiting
> slaughter.*

37But no matter what comes, we will always taste victory through Him who loved us. 38For I have every confidence that nothing—not death, life, heavenly messengers, *dark* spirits, the present, the future, spiritual powers, 39height, depth, nor any created thing—can come between us and the love of God revealed in the Anointed, Jesus our Lord.

► In all of Paul's letters, there is no more triumphant note than in this declaration. He has reached the climax of what it means to live empowered by God's Spirit. We are champions, one and all. We will taste victory and sweet success made possible by His love and gifts to us. We may fear the harsh judgment of the majority. We may bristle under the scowls of others. We may even be unsettled by thoughts of death, persecution, and dark spiritual powers. But Paul celebrates the absolute assurance that no one and nothing can come between us and the love of God.

9 Now let me speak the truth *as plainly as I know it* in the Anointed One. I am not lying when I say that my conscience and the Holy Spirit are witnesses 2to my state of constant grief. 3*It may sound extreme;* but I wish that I were lost, cursed, and totally separated from the Anointed—if that would change *the eternal destination of* my brothers and sisters, my flesh *and countrymen.* 4They are, *after all,* Israelites who have been adopted into God's family; the glory, the covenants, the *gift of the* law, the temple service, and God's promises are their rightful heritage. 5The patriarchs are theirs, too; and from their bloodline comes the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* who reigns supreme over all things, God blessed forever. Amen.

The tone changes abruptly. One minute Paul is celebrating the power of Jesus' love; the next he is grieving because they are not pressing their way into the Kingdom.

6Clearly it is not that God's word has failed. The truth is that not everyone descended from Israel is truly Israel. 7Just because people can claim Abraham as their father does not make them his true children. But *in the Scriptures, it says,* "Through Isaac your *covenant* children will be named."* 8The proper interpretation is this: Abraham's children by natural descent are not *necessarily* God's covenant people; what matters is that His children receive and live the promise. 9For this is the word God promised: "In due time, I will come, and Sarah will give birth to a son."* 10But the story didn't stop there. Remember when Rebekah conceived her

* 8:36 Psalm 44:22 * 9:7 Genesis 21:12 * 9:9 Genesis 18:10, 14

twin boys by our father Isaac? 11-12The twins were in Rebekah's womb when God said to her, "The older will serve the younger."* *This was not based on merit or actions;* the twins had not done anything to please or displease God. This was God's call on each son and His desired purposes. 13Just as the Scriptures say, "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."*

14So how do we talk about that? Are God's dealings unjust? Absolutely not! 15Because He said to Moses, "I will show mercy to whomever I choose to show mercy, and I will demonstrate compassion on whomever I choose to have compassion."* 16The point is that God's mercy has nothing to do with our will or the things we pursue. It is completely up to God. 17The Scriptures even speak to the Pharaoh himself: "I have given you a position of power so that I might show My *greater* power through you and so that My name might be declared throughout every land upon the earth."* 18So when and where God decides to show mercy is completely up to Him. Likewise, when He chooses to harden one's heart, how can we argue?

19I can hear one of you asking, "Then how can He blame us *if He is the one in complete control*? How can we do anything He has not chosen for us?" 20*Here's my answer:* Who are you, a mere human, to argue with God? If God takes the time to shape us from the dust, is it right to point a finger at Him and ask, "Why have You made me this way?" 21Doesn't the potter have the right to shape the clay in any way he chooses? Can't he make one lump into an elegant vase, and another into a common jug? *Absolutely.* 22Even though God desires to demonstrate His anger and to reveal His power, He has shown tremendous restraint toward those vessels of wrath that are doomed to be cracked and shattered. 23And why is that? To make the wealth of His glory known to vessels of mercy that are prepared for great beauty. 24*These vessels of mercy* include all of us. God has invited Jews and non-Jews, *insiders and outsiders*; it makes no difference. 25The prophet Hosea says:

I will give a new name to those who are
not My people; I'll call them "My people,"
and to the one who has not been
loved, I'll rename her "beloved."*

26And it shall turn out that in the very
place where it was said to them,
"You are not My people,"
they will be called "children of the
living God."*

27And *this is what* Isaiah cries out when he speaks of Israel, "Even though the number of the children of Israel had once been like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of My people will be rescued and remain. 28For the Lord will waste no time in carrying out every detail of His sentence upon the earth."* 29It is as Isaiah predicts:

Except for the fraction of us who hang
on by *the grace of* the Lord,
Commander of *heavenly* armies,
we'd be *destroyed and deserted* like
Sodom
and Gomorrah, *utterly done in.**

► For Paul, the astonishing truth of the gospel has to do with what God is now doing with the non-Jews. Apparently God's plan all along is to make those who are not His people into His people. All those who never experienced God's love are now experiencing it as they enter into the life of the Spirit through faith. But what does this mean for Israel? Israel, too, is included in the people of God; but again, this does not mean all of Israel. Pedigree is not what counts; faith is. As it was in the days of the prophets, so it is again. Divine judgment is falling on disobedience, but a remnant of faithful Jews—a fraction of the whole—is being saved.

30So what does all of this mean? Did the non-Jews stumble into a right standing with God without chasing after it? Yes, they found it through faith. 31And has Israel, who pursued the law to secure a right standing *with God,* failed to keep the law? Yes again. 32And why is that? Because Israel did not follow the path of faith. They thought that whatever they needed *to be right with God* could be accomplished by doing the works of the law; they tripped

* 9:11-12 Genesis 25:23 * 9:13 Malachi 1:2-3 * 9:15 Exodus 33:19 * 9:17 Exodus 9:16 * 9:25 Hosea 2:23
* 9:26 Hosea 1:10 * 9:27-28 Isaiah 10:22-23 * 9:29 Isaiah 1:9

over the stumbling stone. 33As the Scriptures say,

> Look *what I am going to do* in Zion.
> I'll put in place a stone that makes
> them stumble, a rock that trips
> them up,
> and those who trust in it will not be
> disgraced.*

10 My brothers and sisters, I pray *constantly* to God for the salvation of my people; it is the deep desire of my heart. 2What I can say about them is that they are enthusiastic about God, but *that won't lead them to Him because* their zeal is not based on true knowledge. 3In their ignorance about how God is working to make things right, they have been trying to establish their own right standing with God *through the law*. But they are not operating under God's saving, restorative justice. 4You see, God's purpose for the law reaches its climax when the Anointed One arrives; now all who trust *in Him* can have their lives made right with God.

► God's plan to restore the world disfigured by sin and death reaches its climax with the resurrection of Jesus. When the King enters, all the prophecies, all the hopes, all the longings find in Him their true fulfillment. There may have been earlier fulfillments; but these are only partial fulfillments, signposts along the way to God's true goal. The goal has been the restoration of people to a holy God. With Jesus, we find the only perfect man with right standing before God. He comes to blaze a path defined by God's justice, not by our own sense of right and wrong. All men, women, and children who commit their lives to Him will be made right with God and will begin new lives defined by faith and God's new covenant.

5Moses *made this clear long ago when he* wrote about *what it takes to have* a right relationship with God based on the law: "The person devoted to the law's commands will live by them."* 6But a right relationship based on faith sounds like this: "Do not say to yourselves, 'Who will go up into heaven?' "* (that is, to bring down the Anointed One), 7"or, 'Who will go down into the abyss?' "* (that is, to bring the Anointed One up from the dead). 8But what does it actually say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"* (that is, the good news we *have been called to* preach to you). 9So if you believe deep in your heart that God raised Jesus from the *pit of* death and if you voice your allegiance by confessing *the truth* that "Jesus is Lord," then you will be saved! 10Belief begins in the heart and leads to *a life that's* right with God; confession departs from our lips and brings *eternal* salvation. 11Because what Isaiah said *was true*: "The one who trusts in Him will not be disgraced."* 12Remember that the Lord draws no distinction between Jew and non-Jew—He is Lord over all things, and He pours out His treasures on all who invoke His name 13because *as Scripture says,* "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Faith is not something we do. It is a response to what God has done already on our behalf, the response of a spirit restless in a fragmented world.

14How can people invoke His name when they do not believe? How can they believe in Him when they have not heard? How can they hear if there is no one proclaiming Him? 15How can some give voice to the truth if they are not sent *by God*? As *Isaiah* said, "Ah, how beautiful the feet of those who declare the good news *of victory, of peace and liberation*."* 16But some will hear the good news and refuse to submit to the truth they hear. Isaiah *the prophet also* says, "Lord, who would ever believe it? Who would possibly accept what we've been told?"* 17So faith proceeds from hearing, as we listen to the message about God's Anointed.

18But let me ask this: have my people ever heard? Indeed, they have:

> Yet from here to the ends of the earth,
> their voice has gone out;
> the whole world has heard what
> they have to say.*

* 9:33 Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 * 10:5 Leviticus 18:5 * 10:6 Deuteronomy 30:12 * 10:7 Deuteronomy 30:13 * 10:8 Deuteronomy 30:14 * 10:11 Isaiah 28:16 * 10:13 Joel 2:32 * 10:15 Isaiah 52:7 * 10:16 Isaiah 53:1 * 10:18 Psalm 19:4

19But again let me ask: did Israel *perhaps hear and* not understand all of this? *Well,* Moses was the first to say,

I will make you jealous with a people
who are not a nation.
With a senseless people I will anger
you.*

20Then Isaiah the fearless *prophet* says it this way:

I was found by people who did not
seek Me;
I showed My face to those who
never asked for Me.*

21And as to *the fate of* Israel, God says,

All day long I opened My hands
to a rebellious people, who
constantly work against Me.*

11 Now I ask you, has God rejected His people? Absolutely not! *I'm living proof that God is faithful.* I am an Israelite, Abraham's my father, and Benjamin's my tribe. 2God has not, *and will not,* abandon His covenant people; He always knew they would belong to Him. Don't you remember the story of what happens when Elijah pleads with God to deal with Israel? The Scripture tells us *his protest*: 3"Lord, they have murdered Your prophets, they have demolished Your altars, and I alone am left *faithful to You*; now they are seeking to kill me."* 4How does God answer his pleas for help? He says, "I have held back 7,000 men who are faithful to Me; none have bowed a knee to worship Baal."* 5The same thing is happening now. God has preserved a remnant, elected by grace. 6Grace *is central in God's action here, and it* has nothing to do with deeds prescribed by the law. If it did, grace would not be grace.

► In every generation, God makes sure a few survive the onslaught of judgment. The prophets call these the "remnant." Paul sees himself living in a critical moment as fewer and fewer Jews pledge obedience to Jesus. But the Anointed's emissary finds comfort in realizing how God's faithfulness is playing out in his day. If you ever think that you alone are faithful to God, that somehow God has forgotten His covenant promises, think again. He always has a remnant.

7Now what does all this mean? Israel has chased an end it has never reached. Yet those chosen by God *through grace* have reached it while all others were made hard *as stones.* 8The Scriptures continue to say *it best*:

God has confounded them so they are
not able to think,
given them eyes that do not see,
and ears that do not hear,
Down to this very day.*

9David says *it this way*:

Let their table be turned into a snare
and a trap,
an obstacle *to peace* and payback
for their hostility.
10Let their *bright* eyes become cloudy,
darkened so they cannot see,
and bend their *proud* backs through
it all.*

11So I ask: did God's people stumble and fall *off the deep end*? Absolutely not! *They are not lost forever;* but through their misconduct, the door has been opened for salvation to extend even to the outsiders. *This has been part of God's plan all along, and* so is the jealousy that comes when they realize *the outsiders have been welcomed into God's new covenant.* 12So if their misconduct leads ultimately to God's riches coming to the world and if their failure turns into the blessing *of salvation* to all people, then how much greater will be the riches and blessing when they are included fully?

13But I have this to say to all of you who are not ethnic Jews: I am God's emissary* to you, and I honor this call by focusing on what God is doing *with and through you.* 14I do this so that somehow my own blood brothers and sisters will be made jealous; and that, *I trust,* will bring some to salvation. 15If the fact that they are currently set aside resolves the hostility between God and the rest of the world, what will their acceptance bring if not life

* 10:19 Deuteronomy 32:21 * 10:20 Isaiah 65:1 * 10:21 Isaiah 65:2 * 11:3 1 Kings 19:10, 14 * 11:4 1 Kings 19:18. Baal is the name for a Canaanite god. * 11:8 Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10 * 11:9-10 Psalm 69:22-23 * 11:13 Literally, apostle

from the dead? 16If the first and best of the dough you offer is sacred, the entire loaf will be as well. If the root *of the tree* is sacred, the branches will be also.

17Imagine some branches are cut off *of the cultivated olive tree* and other branches of a wild olive (which represents all of you *outsiders*) are grafted in their place. You are nourished by the root of the *cultivated* olive tree. 18It doesn't give you license to become proud and self-righteous about the fact that you've been grafted in. If you do boast, remember that the branches do not sustain the root—it is the system of roots that *nourishes and* supports you.

19I can almost hear some of you saying, "Branches had to be pruned to make room for me." 20Yes, they were. They were removed because they did not believe; and you will stay attached, be strong, *and be productive* only through faith. So don't think too highly of yourselves; instead, stand in awe *of God's mercy*. 21Besides *we know that* God did not spare the natural branches, so there is no reason to think He will spare you. 22Witness the simultaneous balance of the kindness and severity of our God. Severity is directed at the fallen *branches withering without faith.* Yet kindness is directed at you. So live in the kindness of God or else prepare to be cut off yourselves. 23If those *branches that have been cut from the tree* do not stay in unbelief, then God will carefully graft them back *onto the tree* because He has the power to do that. 24So if it is possible for you to be taken from a wild olive tree and become part of a cultivated olive tree, imagine how much easier it would be to reconnect branches that originally grew on that olive tree.

► The cultivated olive tree provides Paul with a beautiful image of how believing Jews and non-Jews were organically connected in the plan of God. Life flows from the earth to the branches—some natural, some grafted in—through the rootstock. Paul wants to make sure the grafted branches know they have not arrived on their own; their spiritual life and vitality flow from the root, Israel. God is the Farmer who has tenderly grafted them into the sturdy stock on the basis of faith. So pride and arrogance are completely out of place for those grafted branches. They will bear fruit only as they remain connected by faith to the stock.

25My brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be in the dark about this mystery—*I am going to let you in on the plan* so that you will not think too highly of yourselves. A part of Israel has been hardened *to the good news* until the full number of those outside the Jewish family have entered in. 26This is the way that all of Israel will be saved. As it was written, *so it also stands*:

> The Deliverer will come from Zion;
> He will drive away wickedness from Jacob.
> 27And this is My covenant promise to them,
> *on the day* when I take away their sins.*

28*It may seem strange.* When it comes to *the work of* the gospel, the fact that they oppose it is actually for your benefit. But when you factor in God's election, they are truly loved because they descended from faithful forefathers. 29You see, when God gives a *grace* gift and issues a call *to a people*, He does not change His mind and take it back. 30There was a time when you *outsiders* were disobedient to God *and at odds with His purpose*, but now you have experienced mercy as a result of their disobedience. 31In the same way, their disobedience now will make a way for them to receive mercy as a result of the mercy shown to you. 32For God has assigned all of us together—*Jews and non-Jews, insiders and outsiders*—to disobedience so He can show His mercy to all.

► Paul says that God's mysterious plan for the ages is being revealed as the number of outsiders swells in the churches and as a part of Israel is hardened, at least for a time. But let's not forget that hardening is not God's unilateral action. Whatever hardening

* 11:26-27 Isaiah 27:9; 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:33-34

takes place happens first on our side before God reluctantly agrees. That part of Israel now hardened has already rejected God's Anointed. Yet when the full complement of non-Jewish outsiders enters God's kingdom, "all Israel will be saved." But clearly "all Israel" can't mean every last Jew, because Paul has already shown that not every son or daughter of Abraham is an heir to the promise.

33 *We cannot wrap our minds around* God's
wisdom and knowledge! Its depths can
never be measured! We cannot under-
stand His judgments or explain the mys-
terious ways that He works! For,

34 Who can fathom the mind of the Lord?
Or who can claim to be His
advisor?*

35 Or,

Who can give to God in advance
so that God must pay him back?*

36 For all that exists originates in Him,
comes through Him, and is moving toward
Him; so give Him the glory forever. Amen.

12 Brothers and sisters, in light of *all I have shared with you about* God's mercies, I urge you to offer your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice *to God*, a sacred offering that brings Him pleasure; this is your reasonable, essential worship. 2 Do not allow this world to mold you in its own image. Instead, be transformed *from the inside out* by renewing your mind. As a result, you will be able to discern what God wills and whatever God finds good, pleasing, and complete.

► Paul urges those who read and hear his letter to respond to the good news by offering their bodies—eyes, ears, mouths, hands, feet—to God as a "living sacrifice." Paul knows well enough that sacrifices end in death, not life. But the sacrifice of Jesus changes everything. His resurrection steals life from death and makes it possible for those who trust in Him to become a sacrifice and yet live. But how do we live? We do not live as before, wrapping ourselves in the world and its bankrupt values. We live in constant renewal and transformation of our minds.

3 Because of the grace allotted to me, I can *respectfully* tell you not to think of yourselves as being more important than you are; devote your minds to sound judgment since God has assigned to each of us a measure of faith. 4 For in the same way that one body has so many different parts, each with different functions; 5 we, too—the many—are different parts that form one body in the Anointed One. Each one of us is joined with one another, *and we become together what we could not be alone.* 6 Since our gifts vary depending on the grace poured out on each of us, *it is important that* we exercise the gifts *we have been given*. If prophecy is your gift, then speak as a prophet according to your proportion of faith. 7 If service is your gift, then serve well. If teaching is your gift, then teach well. 8 If you have been given a voice of encouragement, then use it *often*. If giving is your gift, then be generous. If leading, then be eager to get started. If sharing God's mercy, then be cheerful in sharing it.

9 Love others *well, and* don't hide behind a mask; love authentically. Despise evil; pursue what is good *as if your life depends on it.* 10 Live in true devotion to one another, loving each other as sisters and brothers. Be first to honor others *by putting them first.* 11 Do not slack in your faithfulness and hard work. Let your spirit be on fire, bubbling up and boiling over, as you serve the Lord. 12 *Do not forget to* rejoice, for hope is always just around the corner. Hold up through the hard times that are coming, and devote yourselves to prayer. 13 Share what you have with the saints, so they lack nothing; take every opportunity to open your *life and* home to others.

14 If people mistreat or malign you, bless them. Always speak blessings, not curses. 15 If some have cause to celebrate, join in the celebration. And if others are weeping, join in that as well. 16 Work toward unity, and live in harmony with

* 11:34 Isaiah 40:13 * 11:35 Job 41:11

one another. Avoid thinking you are better than others or wiser than the rest; instead, embrace common people *and ordinary tasks.* 17Do not retaliate with evil, regardless of the evil brought against you. Try to do what is good *and right and honorable* as agreed upon by all people. 18If it is within your power, make peace with all people. 19*Again,* my loved ones, do not seek revenge; instead, allow God's wrath *to make sure justice is served. Turn it over to Him.* For the Scriptures say, "Revenge is Mine. I will settle all scores."* 20But *consider this bit of wisdom:* "If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink; because if you treat him kindly, it will be like heaping hot coals on top of his head."* 21Never let evil get the best of you; instead, overpower evil with the good.

13 It is important that all of us submit to the authorities who have charge over us because God establishes all authority *in heaven and on the earth.* 2Therefore, a person who rebels against authority rebels against the order He established, and people like that can expect to face certain judgment. 3You see, if you do the right thing, you have nothing to be worried about from the rulers; but if you do what you know is wrong, the rulers will make sure you pay a price. Would you not rather live with a clear conscience than always have to be looking over your shoulder? Then keep doing what you know to be good and right, and they will publicly honor you.

4*Look at it this way*: The ruler is a servant of God called to serve and benefit you. But he is also a servant of God executing wrath upon those who practice evil. If you do what is wrong, then you'd better be afraid because he wields the power of the sword and doesn't make empty threats.

► At the time, Christians are a tiny minority within Judaism, a minor religion in the largest empire the world has ever seen. Minorities are often the subjects of rumors, suspicions, and innuendos. Christians don't need to add to the problem by developing a reputation as lawbreakers and rebels. So Kingdom citizens are not to dodge taxes or cheat on fees imposed by legitimate governing authorities. They are to show the proper respect for officials in power. Ultimately those who follow the truth of the gospel under the banner of the Anointed One may find themselves at odds with the powers that be. But Paul's counsel here is not a blanket approval of any and every government that may arise in a broken world.

5So submission is not optional; it's required. But don't just submit for the sake of avoiding punishment; submit *and abide by the laws* because your conscience leads you to do the right thing. 6Pay your taxes for the same reason because the authorities are servants of God, giving their full attention to take care of these things. 7Pay all of them what you owe. If you owe taxes, then pay. If you owe fees, then pay. In the same way, give honor and respect to those who deserve it.

8Don't owe anyone anything, with the exception of love to one another—*that is a debt which never ends*—because the person who loves others has fulfilled the law. 9The commands *given to you in the Scriptures*—do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not take what is not yours, do not covet—and any other command *you have heard* are summarized in God's instruction: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* 10Does love hurt anyone? Absolutely not. In fact, love achieves everything the law requires.

► Believers are not to have any obligation of any kind. Borrowed money and granted favors always come with strings attached. How many lives and families have been ruined by debts and deals made in haste! There is only one obligation Paul allows, and that is love. When we share God's care and compassion with others, we fulfill His law whether we realize it or not. Fundamentally, God's law has always been about love.

* 12:19 Deuteronomy 32:35 * 12:20 Proverbs 25:21-22 * 13:9 Leviticus 19:18

11And *now consider* this. You know well
the times *you are living in*. It is time for
you to wake up *and see what is right before
your eyes*: for salvation is nearer to us now
than when we first believed. 12The dark-
ness of night is dissolving as dawn's light
draws near, so walk out on your old dark
life and put on the armor of light. 13May
we all act as good and respectable people,
living today the same way as we will in the
day *of His coming*. Do not fall into patterns
of dark living: wild partying, drunken-
ness, sexual depravity, decadent gratifica-
tion, quarreling, and jealousy. 14Instead,
wrap yourselves in the Lord Jesus, God's
Anointed, and do not fuel your sinful
imagination by indulging *your self-seeking
desire* for the pleasures of the flesh.

14 *It's high time that you* welcome
all people weak in the faith
without debating and disputing
their opinions.

2*Here's the issue:* One person believes
that nothing's off the menu; *he'll eat any
food put before him.* But there's another
believer—*we'll call him* the weaker—who
eats only vegetables *because the meat is
tainted through contact with an idol*. 3If
you are an eater of all things, do not be
condescending to your vegetarian brother
or sister. In turn, those who abstain *from
certain foods on religious principles* should
not judge your brothers and sisters who
eat meat—if God has accepted them, *you
have no reason to reject them*. 4How could
you think for a moment that you have the
right to judge another person's servant?
Each *servant* answers to his own Master,
and he will either stand or fall in His pres-
ence. *The good news is that* he will stand
because the Master is able to make it so.

5There may be a believer who regards
one day as more sacred than any other,
while another views every day as sacred
as the next. *In these matters,* all must reach
their own conclusions *and satisfy their
own minds*. 6If someone observes a day *as
holy*, he observes it in honor of the Lord.
If another eats *a particular diet*, he eats
in honor of the Lord since he begins by
giving thanks! If yet another abstains *from
that same food*, he abstains out of respect
for the Lord and begins his meal by thank-
ing God too. 7*The truth is that* none of us
live for ourselves, and none die for our-
selves. 8For if we live, we live for the Lord.
If we die, we die for the Lord. So in both
life and death, we belong to the Lord. 9The
Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* died
and returned to life to make this a reality:
through His death and resurrection, He
became Lord of the living and the dead.

10So how is it that you continue to
judge your brother? How is it possible for
you to look down on a sister? We will all
stand before the judgment seat of God.
11For it is written,

"As I live, *so I promise,*" says the Lord,
"every knee will bow down to Me.
Every tongue will confess to God."*

12So every one of us, *regardless of our
eating habits,* should expect to give an
account for our own lives to God.

13In light of this, we must resolve
never to judge others and never to place
an obstacle or impediment in their paths
that could cause them to trip and fall.
14Personally I have been completely con-
vinced that in Jesus, our Lord, no object
in and of itself is unclean; but if my fellow
believers are convinced that something
is unclean, then it is unclean to them.
15If the food you eat harms your brother,
then you have failed to love him. Do not
let what you eat tear down your brother;
after all, the Anointed laid down His life
for him. 16Do not allow people to slander
something you find to be good 17because
the kingdom of God is not about eating
and drinking. *When God reigns, the order
of the day is* redeeming justice, true peace,
and joy made possible by the Holy Spirit.
18You see, those who serve the Anointed
in this way will be welcomed into the
whole acceptance of God and valued by
all men. 19Join us, and pursue a life that
creates peace and builds up our brothers
and sisters.

20Do not sacrifice God's work for
the sake of certain foods. *It is true that*
all things are clean, but it's wrong to
eat if you know that eating something
will cause offense. 21It is right for you to
abstain from certain meats and wine (or
anything else for that matter) if it pre-
vents your brother from falling *in his faith*.
22Hold on to what you believe *about these
issues,* but keep them between you and
God. A happy man does not judge himself
by the lifestyle he endorses. 23But a man
who decides for himself what to eat is
condemned because he is not living by his
faith. Any action not consistent with faith
is sin.

* 14:11 Isaiah 45:23

► Paul says he is free to eat, but he is not free to injure another in what he eats. Personal freedom must always give way to corporate responsibility. To put it another way, the gospel of love demands that we surrender individual liberties for the sake of our brothers and sisters. We see this demonstrated powerfully in the example of Jesus who gave up His life and freedom for the sake of the world. When we live by this ethic, we create a community marked by warmth and hospitality. Food, drink, and holidays may well be personal options within the Kingdom. But justice, peace, and joy are communal essentials for life in the Kingdom.

15 *So now what?* We who are strong are not just to satisfy our own desires. We are called to carry the weaknesses of those who are not strong. 2Each of us must strive to please our neighbors, pursuing their welfare so they will become strong. 3The Anointed One Himself *is our model for this kind of living*, for He did not live to please Himself. And as the Scriptures declared, "When they insult You, they insult me."* 4You see, everything written in the days of old was recorded to give us instructions *for living*. We find encouragement through the Scriptures and a call to perseverance that will produce hopeful living. 5I pray that our God, who calls you and gives you perseverance and encouragement, will join all of you together to share one mind according to Jesus the Anointed. 6In this unity, you will share one voice as you glorify *the one True* God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *our Liberating King*.

7So accept one another in the same way the Anointed has accepted you so that God will get the praise He is due. 8For, as I am *fond of* saying, the Anointed One has become a servant of the Jews* in order to demonstrate God's truth. Effectively this confirms the promises He made to our ancestors 9and causes the non-Jewish nations to glorify God for His mercy. As the Scriptures say,

For this I will praise You among the nations
and sing praises to Your name.*

10Again the Scriptures say,

Nations, celebrate with His *covenant* people.*

11And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations.
Raise your voices, all people; let your praises flow to God.*

12Again Isaiah says,

Then, the root of Jesse will emerge—
He rises to rule all the peoples of the world
who come to Him for guidance and direction.
In Him they place their hope.*

13I pray that God, the source of all hope, will infuse your lives with an abundance of joy and peace in the midst of your faith so that your hope will overflow through the power of the Holy Spirit.

14My brothers and sisters, I am ultimately confident that you are full of goodness, knowledge, and the ability to *help and* instruct one another. 15I have written to you with unflinching honesty on many topics because I do not want you to ever lose sight of the *tremendous* grace God has given me. 16*His grace makes me who* I am, a minister of the Anointed One, Jesus, called to serve the nations.

Though Paul's churches are made up of Jews and non-Jews, Paul's special calling is to be God's emissary to the nations beyond Israel, known as the Gentiles.

The good news of God is the focus of my priestly work. In effect, these nations have become an offering to God, totally acceptable, indeed made holy by the work of the Holy Spirit. 17So in Jesus, the Anointed One, I have reason to celebrate the things I do for God. 18I don't want to be presumptuous, so I will restrict myself to what the Anointed has accomplished through my words and actions, which has culminated in the obedience of the nations. 19*My words and actions have been rooted* in

* 15:3 Psalm 69:9 * 15:8 Literally, "the circumcision" * 15:9 Psalm 18:49 * 15:10 Deuteronomy 32:43 * 15:11 Psalm 117:1
* 15:12 Isaiah 11:10

Spirit-empowered signs and miracles. *The upshot is this:* I have been able to preach the good news of the Anointed One *in city after city* from Jerusalem all the way *around the Mediterranean* to Illyricum. 20I have dreamed of preaching the gospel in places where no one has ever heard of the Anointed so that I do not build on a foundation laid by anyone else. 21But as the Scriptures say,

> They will see Him even though they've never been told about Him;
> they will understand even though they never heard of Him.*

22Because of many issues, I have not been able to visit you *in the city of Rome.* 23But *my time to serve those here is coming to an end*, there's no room left for me in this region, and I have longed to come to you for many years. So I plan to visit you 24on my journey to Spain. I am hoping that I will not only see you face-to-face, but that you will assist me in the journey *west* after I have enjoyed our time together. 25But right now I must make the journey to Jerusalem to serve the saints there. 26Those in Macedonia and Achaia decided it was a good idea to share their funds to help the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27*I must tell you that* they were thrilled to be able to help. *They realize that* they are indebted to the believers in Jerusalem. If the nations share in the Jews' spiritual goods, then it's only right that they minister back to them in material goods. 28When this work is complete and the funds we've collected are delivered, I will make my way to Spain through your *grand* city *of Rome and enjoy some of your hospitality*. 29I'm sure that when I come to you I will come as a blessing and as one fully blessed by the Anointed One.

30My brothers and sisters, I urgently plead with you by the name of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed, and by the love of the Spirit to join together with me in your prayers to God for my success *in these next endeavors.* 31Pray that I will be rescued from those who deny *and persecute* the faith in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem will meet the approval of all the saints there. 32If that happens, then my journey to you will be filled with joy; and, if God wills, I can *rest and* be refreshed in your presence. 33*I pray* the God of all peace will be with you all. Amen.

* 15:21 Isaiah 52:15 * 16:7 Literally, apostles

► Before Paul treks west to Rome, he must complete an important mission he started years earlier. He must carry to Jerusalem an offering for the poor collected from the outsider churches. Paul, the emissary, hopes not only that the offering will alleviate the human need and suffering brought on by years of famine, but that it will also build a bridge between his mainly non-Jewish churches and the Jewish mother church in Jerusalem. But when he arrives in Jerusalem, Paul's enemies trump up charges against him that ultimately land him in jail. So Paul makes it to Rome, but not as he planned. Several years later, after a lengthy confinement in Caesarea and a perilous journey at sea, he is led into Rome as a prisoner of the empire.

16 I commend to you our *beloved* sister Phoebe; she serves the church in Cenchrea as a *faithful* deacon. 2*It is important* that you welcome her in the Lord in a manner befitting your saintly status. *Join in her work,* and assist her in any way she needs you. She has spent her energy and resources helping others, and *I am blessed to have her* as my benefactor as well.

3Give my best to Prisca and Aquila; *they are not only my colleagues in my profession of tent making, but more importantly* they are my fellow servants of Jesus the Anointed. 4They put their lives on the line to keep me safe. Not only do I owe them my thanks, so do all the churches of the non-Jews. 5Send my regards to the church that meets in their house.

Send greetings to Epaenetus. I love him dearly *and celebrate his journey to faith because* he was the first to believe in the Anointed One in all of Asia.

6Salute Mary for me; she has worked hard for all of you.

7Give my regards to Andronicus and Junias, who are part of my own family and served time in prison with me. They are well known among the emissaries* and have been in the Anointed longer than I.

8Give my best to Ampliatus whom I love in the Lord, 9and greet Urbanus (our

fellow worker in service to the Anointed One) and my beloved Stachys.

10Send greetings to Apelles, a tried and true *believer* in the Anointed, and to the entire family of Aristobulus.

11*Do not forget to* greet Herodion, another of my relatives, and everyone in the family of Narcissus who belong to the Lord.

12Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, *faithful* laborers in the Lord, and our beloved Persis, who also has accomplished a great deal in the Lord.

13Give my best to Rufus, clearly one of the Lord's chosen, and also his mother. She's like a mother to me.

14My regards also go to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and all the brothers and sisters who are along with them.

15Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and *let me not forget* Olympas and all the saints who journey with them.

16Greet each other with a holy kiss. All of the churches of the Anointed *under my care* send their greetings to all of you.

17I am pleading with all of you, brothers and sisters, to keep up your guard against anyone who is causing conflicts and enticing others with teachings contrary to what you have already learned. *If there are people like that in your churches,* stay away from them. 18These kinds of people are not truly serving our Lord Jesus the Anointed; they have devoted their lives to satisfying their own appetites. With smooth talking and a *well-rehearsed* blessing, they lead a lot of unsuspecting people down the wrong path. 19The stories about the way you are living in obedience to God have traveled to all *the churches.* So celebrate *your faithfulness to God* that is being displayed in your lives—seek wisdom about the good life, and remain innocent when it comes to evil. 20*If you do this,* the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet soon. May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* be ever present with you.

21Timothy, my coworker *in the spreading of the gospel*, also sends his greeting to all of you, as do my kinsmen, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater.

22I, Tertius, the one who wrote this letter *for Paul,* greet you in *the name of* the Lord. 23Gaius, my host here as well as patron for the whole church, sends his* best to all of you. Erastus, the city administrator, sends his greetings along with brother Quartus. [24May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, touch you all. Amen.]*

25So to the One who is able to strengthen you to live consistently with my good news and the preaching of Jesus, the Anointed, with the revelation of the ancient mystery that has been kept secret since the earliest days, 26this mystery is revealed through the prophetic voices passed down in the Scriptures, as they have been commanded by the Eternal God. *In this time,* this mystery is being made known to the nations so that all may be led to faith-filled obedience.

27To the one *true and* wise God, we offer glory for all times through Jesus, the Anointed One. Amen.

* 16:23 Some early manuscripts read "their." * 16:24 Some early manuscripts omit this verse.

1 CORINTHIANS

Letter to the church in Corinth

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Jesus invested His life in twelve unlikely characters, a ragtag group of common Jews, and used them as the foundation of His church. Then He miraculously revealed Himself to Saul (also known as Paul), who had previously devoted his life to the destruction of Jewish Christians. Not only was Paul an unlikely emissary, but he also planted churches in unlikely places. Corinth was the last place one would imagine starting one of the first churches. This small strip of land in Achaia (southern Greece) served as a seaport on two seas and was home to sailors and merchants. It was known primarily as a place of sin, decadence, and corruption. If someone was looking for prostitutes, orgies, pagan festivals, or abundant alcohol, then Corinth was the place. However, if a person was looking for a faithful church, then this would seem an impossible location—but not with God.

Paul stayed in Corinth for almost two years. In that time, he led many people to faith in Jesus. Some of these people were transients who boarded ships and carried the good news to distant shores, but others stayed in Corinth as members of this early Christian community. Once Paul left to plant churches elsewhere, the situation in Corinth began to deteriorate. This first generation of believers struggled with what it meant to live the gospel faithfully in this challenging and immoral city. When Paul heard reports that the church was deeply divided and immorality was rampant, he had no trouble believing it. He addresses those issues in the first part of this letter (chapters 1–6). But Paul also received a letter from the church posing to him a number of questions about celibacy, food offered to idols, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection. He deals with their questions in the last part of his letter (chapters 7–15).

Although this letter is known today as 1 Corinthians, it is clear Paul wrote this church an earlier letter which apparently some misunderstood (see 1 Corinthians 5:9). So 1 Corinthians is at least Paul's second letter to them. But the situation becomes more complex, as we see in 2 Corinthians, when Paul speaks of another tearful letter written between 1 and 2 Corinthians. In all, we know of four letters Paul writes to this community, but there may have been more. Of all the churches Paul established, the Corinthian church was the most troubled; so it received more visits, more letters, and more instruction than any other. Paul's letters to the Corinthians exhibit his deep, pastoral concern for these urban believers who live in a truly secular city. His teachings continue to speak today to our own troubled times.

1 Paul, called out by God's will to be an emissary* for Jesus the Anointed, along with brother Sosthenes, 2to God's church gathering in the city of Corinth. As people who are united with Jesus, the Anointed One, you have been set apart for service. You are all called into community to live as saints with all who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed

3I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, will shower you with grace and peace.

4I am continuously thanking my God for you when I think about the grace God has offered you in Jesus the Anointed. 5*In this grace,* God is enriching every aspect of your lives by gifting you with the right words to say and everything you need to know. 6In this way, your life story confirms the life story of the Anointed One, 7so you are not ill-equipped or slighted on any necessary gifts as you patiently anticipate the day when our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, is revealed. 8Until that final day, He will preserve you; and on that day, He will consider you faultless. 9*Count on this:* God is faithful and in His faithfulness called you out into an intimate relationship with His Son, our Lord Jesus the Anointed.

10My brothers and sisters, I urge you by the name of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed, to come together in agreement. Do not allow anything *or anyone* to create division among you. Instead, be restored, completely fastened together with one mind and shared judgment. 11I have heard *troubling* reports from Chloe's people that you, my siblings, are consumed by fighting *and petty disagreements.* 12What I have heard is that each of you is taking sides, saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with the Anointed One." 13Has the Anointed One been split up *into many small pieces*? Do you think Paul was crucified for you? Were you ceremonially washed through baptism* into the name of Paul? *Absolutely not!*

► Paul knows that if the work of Jesus' gospel degenerates into a cult of personality, it will hardly resemble true Christianity. If the focus is on Paul, Cephas, Apollos, or any famous religious leader, then that distracts from the person and central message of Jesus. Any cult of personality is intoxicating, and it is often easier to claim to follow a person who can be seen and touched. But Christianity is founded upon the belief that Jesus is the head of the church and that all of His followers serve His will as a part of the royal priesthood.

14Now I am thankful that I baptized* only Crispus and Gaius, 15so none of you can *falsely* declare you were baptized in my name. 16*Now wait, as I think about it,* I also baptized the household of Stephanas; if there are others in your community whom I baptized, I cannot recall at this moment. 17The mission given to me by the Anointed One is not about baptism, but about preaching good news. The point is not *to impress others by* spinning an eloquent, intellectual argument; that *type of rhetorical showboating* would only nullify the cross of the Anointed.

18For people who are stumbling toward ruin, the message of the cross is nothing but a tall tale for fools by a fool. But for those of us who are already experiencing the reality of being rescued *and made right*, it is nothing short of God's power. 19This is why the Scripture says:

> I will put an end to the wisdom of the
> *so-called* wise,
> and I will invalidate the insight of
> your *so-called* experts.*

20*So now,* where is the philosopher? Where is the scholar? Where is the skilled debater, the best of your time? *Step up, if you dare.* Hasn't God made fools out of *those who count on* the wisdom of this *rebellious, broken* world? 21For in God's *deep* wisdom, *He made it so that* the world could not even begin to comprehend Him through its own style of wisdom; in fact, God took immense pleasure in rescuing people of faith through the foolishness of the message we preach. 22It seems the Jews are always asking for signs and the Greeks are always on the prowl for wisdom. 23*But we tell a different story.* We proclaim a crucified Jesus, God's Anointed. For Jews this is scandalous, for outsiders* this is moronic, 24but for those of us living out God's call—regardless

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:13 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification * 1:14 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification * 1:19 Isaiah 29:14 * 1:23 Literally, Gentiles

of our Jewish or Greek heritage—we know the Anointed embodies God's *dynamic* power and God's *deep* wisdom. 25*You can count on this:* God's foolishness will always be wiser than mere human wisdom, and God's weakness will always be stronger than mere human strength.

► The cross challenges human values because no one expects to find freedom through capital punishment. Unlike most of the thousands who faced crucifixion before and after Jesus, He was clearly not a criminal. God uses this contradiction to reveal His power and wisdom: Jesus has offered Himself to death and has been raised to life to bring liberation to others. Those who truly follow this crucified king do not seek power and authority through the normal patterns of the world; they offer themselves in loving sacrifice for others. That is where God's transforming power is truly revealed in the church.

26Look carefully at your call, brothers and sisters. By human standards, not many of you are deemed to be wise. Not many are considered powerful. Not many of you come from royalty, right? 27But *celebrate this*: God selected the world's foolish to bring shame upon *those who think they are* wise; likewise, He selected the world's weak to bring disgrace upon *those who think they are* strong. 28God selected the common and the castoff, whatever lacks status, so He could invalidate the claims of those who think those things are significant. 29So it makes no sense for any person to boast in God's presence. 30Instead, credit God with your new situation: you are united with Jesus the Anointed. He is God's wisdom for us and more. He is our righteousness and holiness and redemption. 31As the Scripture says: "If someone wants to boast, he should boast in the Lord."*

2 My brothers and sisters, I did not pose *as an expert with all the answers.* I did not pretend to explain the mystery of God with eloquent speech and *human* wisdom. 2I claimed to know nothing *with certainty* other than *the reality that* Jesus is the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* who was crucified on our behalf. 3I was moved to utter despair during my time with you. I would find myself trembling in *dread and* fear. 4The sermons I preached were not delivered with *the kind of* persuasive elegance *some have come to expect,* but they were effective because I relied on God's Spirit to demonstrate God's power. 5If this were not so, your faith would be based on human wisdom and not the power of God.

► Christianity is not merely a set of ideas and propositions. One can agree with all the truths in the Bible and still miss the power of God. Paul knows the brothers and sisters in Corinth might attempt to reduce Christianity to a new philosophy based on human understanding, but the power of God cannot be fully grasped by our eight-pound brains. We must approach God humbly as creations, not as those aspiring to fully explain the Creator of the universe.

6However, in the presence of mature believers, we do impart *true* wisdom—not the *phony* wisdom typical of this *rebellious* age or of the *hostile* powers who rule this age. *Despite what you may think,* these ruling spirits are losing their grip on this world. 7But we do impart God's mysterious and hidden wisdom. Before the ages began, God graciously decided to use His wisdom for our glory. 8This wisdom has not been grasped by the ruling powers of this age; if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. 9But as the Scriptures say,

> No eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard
> and it has never occurred to the human heart
> All the things God prepared for those who love Him.*

10God has shown us these *profound and startling* realities through His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep

* 1:31 Jeremiah 9:23-24 * 2:9 Isaiah 64:4

mysteries of God. 11Who can see into a man's heart and know his thoughts? Only the spirit that dwells within the man. In the same way, the thoughts of God are known only by His Spirit. 12*You must know that* we have not received the spirit of this *rebellious and broken* world but the Spirit that comes from God, so that we may experience and comprehend the gifts that come from God. 13We do not speak of these *gifts of God* in words shaped by human wisdom; we speak in words crafted by the Spirit because our collective judgment on spiritual matters is accessible to those who have the Spirit. 14But a person who denies spiritual realities will not accept the things that come through the Spirit of God; they all sound like foolishness to him. He is incapable of grasping them because they are *disseminated,* discerned, *and valued* by the Spirit. 15A person who walks by the Spirit examines everything*, sizing it up and seeking out truth.* But no one is able to examine or size up that *kind of* spiritual person, 16for *the Scripture asks,* "Does anyone know the mind of the Lord well enough to become His advisor?"* But we do possess the mind of the Anointed One.

3 My brothers and sisters, I cannot address you as people who walk by the Spirit; I have to speak to you as people who tend to think in merely human terms, as spiritual infants in the Anointed One. 2I nursed you with milk, *as a mother would feed her baby*, because you were not, and still are not, developed enough to digest complex spiritual food. 3*And here's why:* you are still living in the flesh, *not in the Spirit. How do I know?* Are you fighting with one another? Are you *comparing yourselves to others and* becoming consumed with jealousy? Then it sounds like you are living in the flesh, no different from the rest *who live by the standards of this rebellious and broken world.* 4If one of you is saying, "I am with Paul," and the other says, "I am with Apollos," aren't you like everybody else? 5So who is Apollos really? Or Paul for that matter? *We are only* servants, agents who led you to faith, and the Lord commissioned each of us to do a particular job.

Paul's test for spiritually immaturity: Do you argue? Do you compare yourself to others? Are you jealous? Answer "yes" to any of these, then you are spiritually immature.

6My job was to plant *the seed,* and Apollos was called to water it. Any growth comes from God, 7so the ones who water and plant have nothing *to brag about.* God, who causes the growth, is the only One who matters. 8The one who plants is no greater than the one who waters; both will be rewarded based on their work. 9We are *gardeners and field* workers laboring with God. You are *the vineyard,* the garden, the house where God dwells. 10Like a *skilled architect and* master builder, I laid a foundation based upon God's grace given to me. Now others will come along to build on the foundation. Each *serves in a different way and* is to build upon it with great care. 11There is, in fact, only one foundation, and no one can lay any foundation other than Jesus the Anointed. 12As others build on the foundation (whether with gold, silver, gemstones, wood, hay, or straw), 13the quality of each person's work will be revealed in time as it is tested by fire. 14If a man's work stands *the test of fire,* he will be rewarded. 15If a man's work is consumed by the fire, his reward will be lost but he will be spared, rescued from the fire. 16Don't you understand that together you form a temple to *the living* God and His Spirit lives among you? 17If someone comes along to *corrupt, vandalize, and* destroy the temple of God, *you can be sure that* God will see to it that he meets destruction because the temple of God is sacred. You, *together,* are His temple.

18Don't let anyone deceive himself. If any one of you thinks he is wise in matters pertaining to this world, *he is going to be really disappointed.* In fact, one must be deemed a fool *by worldly standards* in order to become truly wise 19because the wisdom of this *rebellious and broken* world looks like foolishness when put next to God. So it stands in Scripture, "He catches the wise in their deceitful plotting."* 20And the Scriptures add, "The Lord knows the *highest* thoughts of the wise, and they are worthless."* 21So there is no reason for anyone to boast in human leaders. You already have it all. 22So whether it is Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life or death, the present or the future—it all belongs to you. 23You belong to the Anointed One, and the Anointed One belongs to God.

4 *Rather than power brokers,* think of us as servants of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* caretakers of the

* 2:16 Isaiah 40:13 * 3:19 Job 5:13 * 3:20 Psalm 94:11

mysteries of God. 2Because we are in this particular role, it is especially important that we are people of fidelity and integrity. 3It makes little difference to me how you or any human court passes judgment on me. I even resist the temptation to compare myself *to the ever-changing human standard*. 4Although I am not aware of any flaw that might exclude me *from this divine service,* that's not the reason I stand acquitted—*the only supreme judge,* our Lord, will examine me in the proper time. 5So resist the temptation to act as judges before all the evidence is in. When the Lord comes, He will draw our buried motives, thoughts, and deeds *(even things we don't know or admit to ourselves)* out of the dark shadows of our hearts into His light. When this happens, the voice of God will speak to each of us the *only* praise *that will ever matter*.

6Right now, brothers and sisters, the best thing I can do for you is to apply these principles to the situation with Apollos and me. Maybe we can show you the meaning of the saying, "not beyond the things written." If you learn that, perhaps none of you will swell with pride because you fall into the seductive trap of pitting one against the other. 7Is there any reason to consider yourselves better than others? What do you have that you didn't receive? If you received it as a gift, why do you boast like it is something you achieved on your own?

8*Now let's see if I have it straight.* You *suppose that you* already have all you need. You already are rich *and prosperous*. And without us you've already begun to reign like kings. To be honest, I wish you did reign so that we could reign with you 9because it seems to me that God has put His emissaries* at the end of the line, like convicts in their final walk to certain death. We have become a spectacle to the rest of the world—to all people and heaven's messengers. 10We are nothing but fools for the cause of the Anointed One while you are wise in Him. *Am I right?* We are feeble *and tired* while you are mighty *and full of life*. You are well respected by others while we're treated as contemptuous creatures *by pretty much everyone everywhere*. 11Up to this very minute, we are famished, we are thirsty, and our clothes are shabby, *practically rotted to pieces*. We are homeless, *hapless wanderers*. 12But still we labor, working with our hands *to meet our needs because, despite all of this*, when a fist is raised against us, we respond with a blessing; when we face *violence and* persecution, we stay on mission; and 13when others choose *taunts and* slander against us, we speak words of encouragement and reconciliation. We're treated as the scum of the earth—*and I am not talking in the past tense;* I mean today! We're the scraps of society, *nothing more than the foulest human rubbish.*

► Paul explains and exemplifies the goals of a mature believer in a way that may be easily contrasted with the desires of an immature believer. He is seeking love and truth more than popularity, embracing suffering rather than comfort. In fact, he disregards popularity and comfort completely so that he isn't distracted from the love and truth of Jesus. This could be a powerful force in the world if believers embraced this kind of maturity.

14I am not telling you all this so that you'll *feel guilty or* be ashamed of how you have acted. I am only trying to warn you, just as a father would warn his children. 15You may have 10,000 instructors in the *faith of the* Anointed One, but you have only one father. In Jesus the Anointed I have become your father through *my efforts in spreading* the good news. 16So as your father in the faith, *I want to encourage you to live as I have lived*. Imitate my life. 17This is one of the reasons I sent Timothy to be with you. He is my dearly loved and faithful child in the Lord. His mission is to remind you of the way I experience life in the Anointed. In all the churches everywhere I go, I teach the same lessons the same way, *and I live out those lessons*. 18But the reality is, some of you *have put yourselves on pedestals and* live like you are high above the rest—it's as if you assumed I would not return *to confront your misguided pride*. 19But I am coming. Lord willing, I will be with you soon. Then I will know what power is backing those arrogant folks and their words. 20The kingdom of God is not a realm of grandiose talk; it is a realm of power. 21So tell me what you

* 4:9 Literally, apostles

want. Should I visit you, rod in hand *ready to discipline a crew of self-important people*; or should I *embrace you,* love you, and gently teach you *as we celebrate the blessings of God together*?

5 *Because of my deep love for you, I must express my concern about* the report brought to me regarding the *lewd and* immoral behavior exhibited in your community. This scandal has come to my attention because this kind of thing is unheard of even among the outsiders around us: I understand a man is having sexual relations with his father's wife. 2You have turned into an arrogant lot who refuse to *see the tragedy right in front of your eyes and* mourn for it. If you would face these hard realities, the one living in this sin would be removed from the community.

3Despite the fact that I am not physically present with you, I am there in spirit and already have spoken judgment against the man who has engaged in this conduct. 4When you gather in the name of the Lord Jesus and I am present with you in spirit, and the infinite power of our Lord Jesus is present also, 5I direct you to release this man over to Satan so his rebellious nature will be destroyed and his spirit might be rescued in the day the Lord Jesus returns.

6Your proud boasting *in this matter* is terrible. *Don't you understand that the tiniest infraction can bring about an unwelcome chain of events?* That just a little yeast causes all the dough to rise? 7Get rid of all the old yeast; then you'll become new dough, just as you are already a people without *sin's* leavening influence. You see, the Anointed One is our Passover lamb; He has been sacrificed for us. 8So let the real feast begin. Get rid of all the old yeast, the yeast of hatred and evil. *Throw it out* so we can feast on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

► Sexual sin is always painful, but incest decimates families and communities, and it leaves people isolated and angry. The danger for believers who understand the reality of sin is that they may lose sight of redemption and become complacent in their brokenness. In Corinth the believers have become so complacent that they are ignoring the incest in their community. The church's reputation is beginning to suffer among outsiders.

Church discipline if properly done accomplishes two things: first, it protects the community from harm caused by the sin; second, it can lead to a restoration of the sinner to God and the community. Ignoring the sin actually makes the lives of the sinners worse. Real love confronts the sin and leads the sinners toward redemption and wholeness.

9In the letter I wrote to you *previously, I made it clear* that you are not to band together with those who have embraced immoral lives. 10Don't misunderstand; *I'm not telling you to hole up and hunker down from the rest of the world. That's impossible.* The world is filled with immoral people consumed by their desire for more; they steal *from one another without hesitation* and will worship man-made idols *with no shame at all.* If you attempted to avoid these people, you would have to leave the world itself. 11What I was saying is that you should not associate with someone who calls himself a brother or sister but lives *contrary to all we stand for:* committing immoral sexual acts, consumed with desire for more, worshiping tangible lifeless things, using profanity, drinking into oblivion, swindling and cheating others. Do not even sit at the table with a person like this. 12Why would I ever attempt to judge those outside *the church*? Aren't we *called* to judge those within *the church?* 13God judges the outsiders. *Your job is this:* "Expel the wicked from your own community."*

6 *Here's another troubling issue.* If you have a grievance against another *follower of Jesus*, do you have the audacity to bring that brother or sister into the civil courts rather than submitting yourselves to the authority of God's people? 2Don't you know that His people are destined to judge the world? If you have the authority to judge the world, can't you handle these small matters *and render a better judgment than the civil courts*? 3Further, don't you know that we

* 5:13 Deuteronomy 17:7

are destined to judge the heavenly messengers? *So if we are to exercise authority in the heavenly realms,* can't we take care of the conflicts that arise in this life? 4To put it another way, if you are asking the courts to adjudicate your mundane conflicts, aren't you placing your problems under the authority of judges who have no standing within the church? 5My words should embarrass you. Is it possible that you have no one among you with the wisdom to mediate between two siblings? 6So one brother sues another brother *in public and drags the dispute* before outsiders who have no allegiance to Jesus?

7The truth is that these *public* lawsuits cause all of you to lose and lose big. Wouldn't it be better to be ripped off or defrauded? 8In fact, you are guilty of ripping off and defrauding your own brothers and sisters*, not the other way around.*

9-10Do you need reminding that the unjust have no share in the blessings of the kingdom of God? Do not be misled. A lot of people stand to inherit nothing of God's coming kingdom, including those whose lives are defined by sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, sexual deviancy, theft, greed, drunkenness, slander, and swindling. 11Some of you used to live in these ways, but *you are different* now; you have been washed clean, set apart, restored, *and set on the right path* in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Anointed, by the Spirit of our living God.

► In the same way that some seek to reduce Christianity to a philosophy or a set of ideas, others seek to reduce it to a set of rules for living. If true faith is only about eating certain foods, abstaining from others, and avoiding certain practices, then willpower must be more important than the Spirit of God. But following stringent rules is not that easy. Actually, living by willpower is hard—some might say impossible. Paul is preaching about an alternative to a life governed by rules and restrictions, and that's a life of faith that embraces grace. What Paul is about to describe is a life of freedom that surpasses a life of rule keeping.

12*I can hear some of you saying,* "For me, all things are permitted." But *face the facts:* all things are not beneficial. *So you say,* "For me, all things are permitted." *Here's my response:* I will not allow anything to control me. 13*Another chimes in:* "Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." *I suppose so, but a day will come when* God will dispense with both food and the stomach. The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord; the Lord *is over all, and He* cares about your body. 14God has raised the Lord *Jesus from death*, but He won't stop there. His dynamic power will raise us up *from the grips of death* as well. 15Don't you realize that your bodies are members of the Anointed One? So should I take the members of the Anointed One and unite them to a prostitute? This *illicit union* should never take place! 16Don't you understand that when your body is joined with a prostitute, the two of you have become one body? For as it says, "The two come together as one flesh."* 17But when you are joined with the Lord, you become one spirit with Him. 18Run from immoral behavior. All other sins are disconnected from the body, but sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. 19Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who comes from God and dwells inside of you? You do not own yourself. 20You have been purchased at a great price, so use your body to bring glory to God!

Salvation is a costly proposition. You and your body belong to God, so use your body for the work of God, not for selfish pursuits.

7 Now to the topics you raised *in your last letter. Some have said*, "It is better for a man to abstain from having sex with his wife." 2Well, *I disagree.* Because of our tendency to embrace immoralities, each man should feel free to join together in sexual intimacy with his own wife, and each woman should join with her own husband. 3*Husbands and wives have reciprocal duties.* Each husband has the responsibility to meet his wife's *sexual* desires, and each wife should do the same for her husband. 4In marriage neither the husband nor the wife should act as if his or her body is private property—your bodies now belong to one another, *and together they are whole.* 5So do not withhold *sex* from one another,

* 6:16 Genesis 2:24

Paul's teaching to the Corinthians about marriage stands in contrast to the message in Genesis 2, where God declares that it is not good to be alone. There He sculpts woman from the rib of the man: she was molded so that man and woman fit perfectly together. And God blesses marriage as a good and beautiful thing.

So is Paul contradicting the declaration of the Creator God when he suggests that it might be better for some people to choose an unmarried life? Absolutely not! Marriage is a sacred union, but it is possible that many will be able to serve God more fully if they do not have the limitations that come with marriage and family. Paul shares his advice humbly based on his own experience. The tension between the beauty of marriage and the freedom from marital obligations is one we should all explore. As we come to our own conclusions, we must also carry them humbly, remembering that one is not better than the other.

unless both of you have agreed to devote a certain period of time to prayer. When the agreed time is over, come together again so that Satan will not tempt you when you are short on self-control. 6I am trying to encourage you and give you some wise counsel, so don't take this advice as a command. 7I wish that all of you could live as I do, *unmarried.* But the truth is all people are different, each gifted by God in various and dissimilar ways.

8To those who are unmarried or widowed, here's my advice: it is a good thing to stay *single* as I do. 9If they do not have self-control, they should go ahead and get married. It is much better to marry than to be obsessed by sexual urges.

10To those who are married, here's my command (*to be clear,* this isn't merely my opinion; it comes from the teaching of the Lord Jesus): it is not right for a wife to leave her husband. 11If she does, she must either remain single or reconcile with her husband, *but she should not marry someone else*. Likewise, the husband should not divorce his wife.

12-13To everyone else, here's my counsel (this is not a direct command from the Lord; *it is my opinion*): if a brother has a wife who does not believe Jesus' teachings and the truth of His resurrection, he is to stay with her as long as she is willing to live with him. The same is true for any sister; you should not leave your husband even if he has no allegiance to Jesus. 14Here's the reason: An unbelieving husband is consecrated *by that union—touched by the grace of God* through his believing wife—and *the same is true* when the husband is a man of faith and he's wed to an unbelieving wife. His wife is consecrated through their union. If this weren't so, your children wouldn't be pure; *but as it is when faith enters in,* God sets apart these children *to be used uniquely for His purposes.* 15If the unbelieving spouse decides the marriage is over, then let him or her go; the believing partner is freed *from the marital vows* because God has called you to peace. 16Remember that *anything is possible, so* the life you lead *and the love you show under this strain* may be what finally liberates your partner.

17So here is my instruction to all the churches: each must live with the gifts the Lord *Jesus* grants you and with the call God offers you. 18When you heard the voice of Jesus, *what were your circumstances?* Were you living as a circumcised *Jew*? If so, then don't try to undo your circumcision. Were you living as if you were an uncircumcised *outsider*? If so, you don't need to become a Jew. 19You see, whether you are circumcised or not—these outward signs aren't the issue—the way you live out the commands of God is what really matters. 20It is important for all people to live *out faith* in the circumstances they know.

► The call to faith is not a call to abandon your life, family, neighborhood, and culture. We must play with the hand God deals us, not look for a new deck. He works through faith to redeem broken lives and wasted years, not to provide a change of scenery. Even in the worst circumstances, faith can change the believer from the inside.

21Did you hear God's voice while you were a slave? Don't be concerned. (But if the

opportunity comes to gain your freedom, then take it.) 22For the slave who hears the Lord's call is set free to belong to the Lord. In the same way, the so-called free person is called to become a slave of the Anointed One. 23A high price has been paid for your freedom, so don't *devalue God's investment by* becoming a slave to people. 24My brothers and sisters, each of you should remain in whatever external circumstances you were in when God called you.

25Now when it comes to unmarried young women, I do not have a command from our Lord. The best I can do is to give you my advice as a trustworthy brother who knows the Lord's mercy well. 26Because of the challenging times we live in, I think the best plan is to stay as you are. 27If you are married, don't divorce. If you are single, there is no need to get married. 28But if you decide to get married, this is not a sin; there is nothing wrong with a young woman taking a husband, *but know that marriage is not easy* and those who marry will face hard times. I am only trying to protect you. 29But *hear what* I say, brothers and sisters: the time is short *and growing shorter.* So for the time remaining, even if you have wives, live *with the undivided focus* of those who do not have them. 30Those who cry should live as those who have no tears. Those who rejoice should live as those who have no pleasure. Those who buy things should live as those who do not possess anything. 31If you make use of this *rebellious and broken* world, live as if you have no use for it—because the form of this world is fading away.

32My primary desire is for you to be free from the worries *that plague humanity*. A single man can focus on the things of the Lord and how to please the Lord, 33but a married man has to worry about the details of the here and now and how to please his wife. 34A married man will always have divided loyalties. *The same idea is true for* a young unmarried woman. She concerns herself only with the work of the Lord and how to dedicate herself entirely, body and spirit, *to her Lord*. On the other hand, a married woman has vast responsibilities for her family and a desire to please her husband. 35I am not trying to give you more rules and regulations. I only want to give you advice that is fitting and helpful. I want to help you live lives of faithful devotion to the Lord without any distraction.

36*But I have this advice for every single man:* If anyone thinks he is behaving badly toward his fiancée, if his desires prove to be too much for him, and if he feels they ought to marry, then he should do what he wants; it is not wrong *to marry her*. It is better that we let men *and women in this situation do as they wish and* get married. 37If a man has no compulsion and chooses not to marry his fiancée, but commits himself to live *a celibate life for the sake of following God* and has the strength to live out his conviction, then he is doing a good thing. 38So those who marry do a good thing, *and they will share in a holy blessing;* those who do not marry do an even better thing *because they are part of an even greater blessing in the service of God.*

39A wife should stay by her husband's side all of his life. But if he dies, she is free to marry any man she wishes as long as it is in the Lord. 40*You can likely guess that* in my opinion this woman would be better off to remain single, and I think that I have *this insight from* God's Spirit.

8 As to the concern of eating food dedicated to idols: we know that all of us have knowledge*, but knowledge can be risky.* Knowledge promotes *overconfidence and worse* arrogance, but *charity of the heart* (love, that is) looks to build up *others*. 2Just because a person presumes to have some bit of knowledge, that person doesn't necessarily have the right kind of knowledge. 3But if someone loves God, *it is certain that* God has already known that one.

4So to address your concerns about eating food offered to idols, let me start with what we know. An idol is essentially nothing, as there is no other God but the One. 5And even if *the majority believes* there are many so-called gods in heaven and on earth (certainly many *worship* such "gods" and "lords"), *this is not our view.* 6For us, there is one God, the Father who is the ultimate source of all things and the goal of our lives. And there is one Lord—Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King;* through Him all things *were created,* and by Him we are *redeemed*.

7But this knowledge is not in everyone. Up until now, some have been so familiar with idols *and what goes on in the temples* that when they eat meat that has been offered first to some idol, their weak consciences are polluted. *This is the issue.* 8*Again, here's what we know:* what we eat will not bring us closer to God—we gain nothing in feasting and lose nothing by fasting. 9Now let me warn you: don't let

your newfound liberty cause those who don't know this to fall face-first. 10Let's say a person *(someone who knows of Jesus)* sees you eating in the temple of an idol; and because the person with a weaker conscience is still unsure of things, he becomes confident, follows your lead, and eats idol food. 11Now, because of your knowledge *on display in your conduct,* the weaker brother or sister—for whom the Anointed One died—is destroyed! Ruined! 12What's more, *by living according to your knowledge,* you have sinned against these brothers and sisters and wounded their weak consciences—and because you sinned against them, you have sinned against the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.*

13So if any type of food is an issue that causes my brothers and sisters to fall away *from God*, then God forbid I should ever eat it again so that I would never be *the crack, the rise, or the rock on the road* that causes them to stumble.

► Meat left over from pagan temple sacrifices was sold daily in the market. It was about the only option available for those who didn't raise their own livestock. Paul knows that idols are nothing really because there is only one God, but another brother thinks he is engaging in a heinous act and supporting a pagan temple by eating food that comes from a pagan sacrifice. So what is a believer to do? Well, it is not a matter of knowledge: Who's right? Who's wrong? It's a matter of love. Paul says that he has the right to eat the meat, but that he gladly gives up that right for the sake of the other brother. Paul limits his freedom out of love for the Corinthians.

9 Am I not truly free? Am I not an emissary* *of the Liberating King*? Have I not personally encountered Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work, *my mission* in the Lord? 2Even if others don't recognize that I am His emissary,* at least you do because you are the seal, *the living proof* that the Lord commissioned me to be His representative.

3Let me speak in my own defense against those *keeping themselves* busy picking me apart. 4Have we lost the right to eat and drink? 5Have we lost the right to bring along our wives, our sisters in Jesus? Other emissaries travel with their wives, and so do the brothers of our Lord, not to mention Cephas. 6Is it just Barnabas and I who have lost the right to earn a living? 7Is a soldier in combat required to pay his own salary? Who would plant a vineyard and not enjoy one grape from it? Who would care for *and nurture* a flock but never taste the fresh milk?

8These ideas aren't based on merely human notions; the law says these same things. 9In Moses' law, it is written: "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out your grain."* Is God's concern here limited to oxen, 10or does He speak here ultimately for our benefit? These things were written for us, so as the plowman plows and the worker gathers, they can labor with the hopeful expectation that they, too, will share in the good harvest. 11*The same principle applies here:* Is it too much to ask that we would be compensated materially for planting *life- and world-changing* spiritual realities? 12If you have rightfully supported others, shouldn't we deserve your support even more?

But we have never insisted on this right; instead, we would rather put up with anything than to put some obstacle in the way that prevents *even one person from experiencing* the good news of the Anointed One. 13Perhaps it has escaped your notice that leaders and priests of the temple make their livings off the temple and that those who tend the altar eat their dinners from part of the sacrifices. 14So *it shouldn't be a stretch that* the Lord has arranged for preachers of the gospel to make a living by *those who have embraced and been liberated by* the gospel.

► Paul works hard. He travels the known world starting new churches and writes letters instructing other churches. Simultaneously, he makes and sells tents to fund his basic needs and missionary travels. Would Paul's time be better spent training young pastors or preaching to a group of church leaders rather than making

* 9:1 Literally, apostle * 9:2 Literally, apostle * 9:9 Deuteronomy 25:4

tents? By giving his churches his service for free, is he doing a disservice to those who will serve these churches in the future and have families to care for?

15*Despite what I've said here,* I have never staked a claim for such things, and I have no intention to start now; that's not why I'm writing. I would rather die than have anyone *(including me)* invalidate my right to boast. 16You see, if I preach the good news, it's nothing to brag about. *This urgency,* this necessity has been laid on me. In fact, if I were to stop sharing this good news, I'd be in big trouble. 17*You see, my story is different. I didn't volunteer for this.* Had I volunteered to preach the good news, then I would deserve a wage, a reward, *or something.* But I didn't choose this. God chose me and entrusted me with this mission. 18*You're looking for the catch. I know you're wondering,* "What reward is he talking about?" My reward, *besides being with you and knowing you,* is sharing the good news of the Anointed One with you free and clear. That means I don't insist on all my rights for support in the good news; 19that also means that I am free of obligations to all people. And, even though no one *(except Jesus)* owns me, I have become a slave *by my own free will* to everyone *in hopes* that I would gather more *believers.* 20When around Jews, I emphasize my Jewishness in order to win them over. When around those who live *strictly* under the law, I live by its regulations—even though I have a different perspective on the law now—in order to win them over. 21*In the same way,* I've made a life outside the law to gather those who live outside the law (although I personally abide by and live under the Anointed One's law). 22I've been *broken, lost, depressed, oppressed, and* weak that I might *find favor and* gain the weak. I'm *flexible, adaptable, and* able to do and be whatever is needed for all kinds of people so that *in the end* I can use every means at my disposal to offer them salvation. 23I do it all for the gospel *and for the hope* that I may participate with everyone who is blessed by the proclamation of the good news.

24We all know that when there's a race, all the runners bolt for the finish line, but only one will take the prize. When you run, run for the prize! 25Athletes in training *are very strict with themselves,* exercising self-control *over desires, and for what?* For a wreath that soon withers *or is crushed or simply forgotten.* That is not our race. We run for the crown that we will wear for eternity. 26So I don't run aimlessly. *I don't let my eyes drift off the finish line.* When I box, I don't throw punches in the air. 27I discipline my body and make it my slave so that after *all this,* after I have brought the gospel to others, I will still be qualified *to win the prize.*

10 I wouldn't want you to be ignorant *of our history*, brothers and sisters. Our ancestors were once *safeguarded* under a *miraculous* cloud *in the wilderness* and brought *safely* through the sea. 2*Enveloped in water* by cloud and by sea, they were, *you might say,* ritually cleansed into Moses through baptism.* 3*Together they were sustained supernaturally:* they all ate the same spiritual food, *manna;* 4and they all drank the same spiritual water, flowing from a spiritual rock that was always with them, for the rock was the Anointed One, *our Liberating King.* 5Despite all of this, they were punished in the wilderness because God was unhappy with most of them.

6Look at what happened to them as an example; *it's right there in the Scriptures* so that we won't make the same mistakes and hunger after evil as they did. *So here's my advice:* 7don't *degrade yourselves by* worshiping anything less than the living God as some of them did. *Remember* it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and then rose up in *dance and* play."* 8We must be careful not to engage in sexual sins as some of them did. In one day, 23,000 died *because of sin.** 9None of us must test *the limits of* the Lord's patience. Some of the Israelites did, and serpents *bit them and* killed them. 10You need to stop your groaning and whining. *Remember the story.* Some of them complained, and the messenger of death came for them and destroyed them. 11All these things happened for a reason: to sound a warning. They were written down and passed down to us to teach us. *They were meant especially for us* because *the beginning of* the end is happening in our time. 12So let even the most confident believers *remember their examples and* be very careful not to fall *as some of them did.*

* 10:2 Literally, immersed * 10:7 Exodus 32:6 * 10:8 Numbers 25:9

One of the strengths of the Jewish people is their corporate identity that comes from belonging to a unique, suffering people deeply loved by God. The tendency for the new, non-Jewish believers may be to create a new identity among themselves because they lack the sense of belonging shared by Israel's descendants. A new day is dawning, a day when all may come to God regardless of ethnicity, locale, or social class. Believers in Corinth are not part of a new movement; they are a fresh expression of the historic movement of God.

The twenty-first century church needs to hear this truth today as much as the church in Corinth did two millennia ago. The world has changed drastically since the times of Abraham, David, John the Baptist, and even Martin Luther. In the midst of radical economic and technological advances, some within the church are embracing new or contemporary practices and regarding them as somehow superior to ancient and historic practices. Paul is challenging this idea and calling all believers to see themselves as a part of the local, global, and historic church.

13Any temptation you face will be
nothing new. But God is faithful, and He
will not let you be tempted beyond what
you can handle. But He always provides a
way of escape so that you will be able to
endure *and keep moving forward*. 14So
then, my beloved friends, run from idola-
try *in any form*. 15As wise as I know you
are, understand clearly what I am saying
and determine the right course of action.
16When we give thanks *and share* the cup
of blessing, are we not sharing in the blood
of the Anointed One? When we *give
thanks and* break bread, are we not shar-
ing in His body? 17Because there is one
bread, we, though many, are also one body
since we all share one bread. 18Look no
further than Israel *and the temple prac-
tices, and you'll see what I mean*. Isn't it
true that those who eat sacrificial foods
are communing at the altar, sharing its
benefits? 19So what does all this mean?
I'm not suggesting that idol food itself has
any special qualities or that an idol itself
possesses any special powers, 20but I am
saying that the outsiders' sacrifices are
actually offered to demons, not to God. *So
if you feast upon this food, you are feasting
with demons*—I don't want you involved
with demons! 21You can't hold the *holy* cup
of the Lord *in one hand* and the cup of
demons *in the other*. You can't share in the
Lord's table while picking off the altar of
demons. 22Are we trying to provoke the
Lord *Jesus*? *Do we think it's a good idea* to
stir up His jealousy? Do we have *ridiculous
delusions about matching or even* surpass-
ing His power?

23*There's a slogan often quoted on
matters like this:* "All things are permitted."
Yes, but not all things are beneficial. "All
things are permitted," *they say. Yes*, but not
all things build up *and strengthen others
in the body*. 24We should stop looking out
for our own interests and instead focus on
the people living and breathing around us.
25Feel free to eat any meat sold in the mar-
ket without your conscience raising ques-
tions about scruples 26because "the earth
and all that's upon it belong to the Lord."*

► Paul's instruction on this matter is clear: believers should give up their rights and freedoms for the sake of others. This is the essence of sacrifice. This is what Jesus did. This is what Paul does. Otherwise, community becomes impossible. But no state or church authority should force compliance; it must arise from a heart of love and a disposition that puts the needs of others first.

27So if some unbelievers invite you to
dinner and you want to go, feel free to
eat whatever they offer you without rais-
ing questions about conscience. 28-29But
if someone says, "This is meat from the
temple altar, *a sacrifice to god so-and-so*,"
then do not eat it. Not so much because
of your own conscience [because the
earth and everything on it belongs to the
Lord],* but out of consideration for the
conscience of the other fellow who told
you about it. So *you ask,* "Why should I

* 10:26 Psalm 24:1 * 10:28-29 Some manuscripts omit this portion.

give up my freedom to accommodate the scruples of another?" 30or, "If I am eating with gratitude to God, why am I insulted for eating food that I have properly given thanks for?" *These are good questions.*

31Whatever you do—whether you eat or drink *or not*—do it all to the glory of God! 32Do not offend Jews or Greeks or any part of the church of God *for that matter*. 33*Consider my example:* I strive to please all people in all my actions and words—but don't think I am in this for myself—their rescued souls are the only profit.

11 So imitate me, *watch my ways, follow my example,* just as I, too, *always seek to* imitate the Anointed One.

2I must say how pleased I am *to hear that* you remember me in everything and continue to hold on to the traditions I have passed on to you. 3But *it is important* that you understand this *about headship*: the Anointed One is the head of every man, the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of the Anointed. 4*Knowing this,* any man wearing a covering over his head while praying or prophesying *in your gathering* disgraces his head*, Jesus.* 5-6On the other hand, any woman—*I mean, of course, a married woman*—not wearing a veil over her head while praying or prophesying disgraces her head*, her husband.* It wouldn't be much different than if she walked into worship with her head shaved. For if a woman isn't going to be veiled properly, she ought to *go ahead and* cut off her hair; but if it brings shame to the woman *and her husband* to have all her hair cut off or her head shaved clean, then by all means let her wear a veil.

7*Here's the distinction:* man is created in God's image and for His glory, so he should not cover his head. But a wife is the glory of her husband. *She ought to be covered.* 8Man, *you remember*, was not fashioned from the body of a woman. But woman, *though she was sculpted by the hands of God,* was fashioned from *the bones and flesh of* man.* 9Furthermore, *don't forget that* man was not created for woman; woman was created for man *to be his helper in everything.* 10This means that a wife should wear *a veil* on her head as a sign she is under authority, especially when gathering in the company of heavenly messengers. 11Regardless *of how it all began*, husbands and wives should recognize they are not independent; 12for just as woman was pulled from *the side of* man, man is pulled from *the womb of* woman. *In a similar way,* all things *and all people* share the same ultimate source, God.

13Judge for yourselves: *when you gather to worship,* is it appropriate for a woman to pray to God without covering her head? 14*Consider the ways of nature:* doesn't nature itself teach you that a man who wears his hair long invites *shame and* dishonor to cover him? 15But *doesn't nature also teach* that when a woman has long hair, it is her glory? It *radiates her beauty and* acts as a natural veil. 16If you feel like debating more on this*, just know that* we, along with all other churches of God, have adopted the same custom.

17On this next matter, I wish I could applaud you; but I can't because your gatherings have *become counterproductive*, making things worse *for the community* rather than better. 18Let me start *with this:* I hear that your gatherings are polarizing the community; and to be honest, this doesn't surprise me. 19I've accepted the fact that factions are *sometimes useful and even* necessary so that those who are authentic *and those who are counterfeit* may be recognized. 20*This distinction is obvious* when you come together *because* it is not the Lord's Supper you are eating *at all.* 21When it's time to eat, some hastily dig right in; *but look—some have more than others:* over there someone is hungry, and over here someone is drunk! 22What is going on? *If a self-centered meal is what you want,* can't you eat and drink at home? Do you have so little respect for God's people *and this community* that you shame the poor *at the Lord's table*? I don't even know what to say to you! Are you looking for my approval? You won't find it.

23I passed on to you the tradition the Lord gave to me: On the same night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He took the bread *in His hands*; 24and after giving thanks *to God*, He broke it and said, "This is My body, *broken* for you. Keep doing this so that you *and all who come after* will have a vivid reminder of Me." 25After they had finished dinner, He took the cup and in the same way said, "This cup is the new covenant, *executed* in My blood. Keep doing this; and whenever you drink it, you *and all who come after* will have a vivid reminder of Me." 26Every time you taste this bread

* 11:8 Genesis 2:21-25

and every time you place the cup *to your mouths* and drink, you are declaring the Lord's death, *which is the ultimate expression of His faithfulness and love,* until He comes again.

God doesn't demand perfection to partake at the Lord's table, rather brokenness. Their pride is causing division during the meal; instead they need to fellowship in a shared, broken spirit.

27So if someone takes of this bread and drinks from the Lord's cup improperly—*as you are doing*—he is guilty of *violating* the body and blood of our Lord. 28Examine yourselves first. Then you can properly approach *the table* to eat the bread and drink from the cup; 29because otherwise, if you eat and drink without properly discerning the significance of the Lord's body, then you eat and drink *a mouthful of* judgment upon yourself. 30Because of this violation, many in your community are now sick and weak; some have even died. 31But if we took care to judge ourselves, then we wouldn't have to worry about being judged *by another*. 32*In fact,* the Lord's hand of judgment is correcting us so that we don't suffer the same fate as the rest of the *rebellious* world: condemnation.

33From now on, brothers and sisters, *this is what I want you to do:* when you come together to eat *at the Lord's table*, wait for each other. If someone is hungry *and can't wait*, he should go home and eat. In that way, your gatherings won't result in *God's* judgment. The rest of the instructions I have *for you* will have to wait until I come.

12 Now let me turn to *some issues about* spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters. There's much you need to learn.

2Remember *the way you used to live* when you were pagans *apart from God*? You were engrossed—enchanted with voiceless idols, led astray *by mere images carved by human hands.* 3With that in mind, I want you to understand that no one saying "Jesus is cursed" is operating under God's Spirit, and no one confessing "Jesus is Lord" can do so without the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

4Now there are many kinds of *grace* gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. 5There are many different ways to serve, but *they're all directed by* the same Lord. 6There are many amazing working gifts in the church, but it is the same God who energizes them all in all *who have the gifts.*

► Paul's description of the works of the Spirit, the Lord (Jesus), and God (the Father) links the three persons together in remarkable ways. Although Paul never articulates the doctrine of the Trinity, what he writes here about the Godhead relationship—their community of persons—becomes the raw materials used by later believers to construct the church's teaching on the Trinity. In this chapter the apostle emphasizes the agency of the Spirit. For him the Spirit is not just an impersonal force or feeling; He is just as much a person within the Trinity as the Father and the Son. Accordingly, the Spirit chooses where to impart gifts as He works together with the Father and the Son to build up the church.

7Each believer has received a gift that manifests the Spirit's *power and presence*. That gift is given for the good of the whole community. 8The Spirit gives one person a word of wisdom, but to the next person the same Spirit gives a word of knowledge. 9Another will receive *the gift of* faith by the same Spirit, and still another gifts of healing—all from the one Spirit. 10One person is enabled *by the Spirit* to perform miracles, another to prophesy, while another is enabled to distinguish *those prophetic* spirits. The next one speaks in various kinds of unknown languages, while another is able to interpret those languages. 11One Spirit works all these things in each of them individually as He sees fit.

12Just as a body is one whole made up of many different parts, and all the different parts comprise the one body, so it is with the Anointed One. 13We were all ceremonially washed through baptism* together into one body by one Spirit. *No matter our heritage*—Jew or Greek, insider or outsider—*no matter*

* 12:13 Literally, immersed, in a rite of initiation and purification

our status—oppressed or free—we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14*Here's what I mean:* the body is not made of one large part but of many *different parts.* 15Would it seem right for the foot to cry, "I am not a hand, so I couldn't be part of this body"? Even if it did, it wouldn't be any less joined to the body. 16And what about an ear? If an ear started to whine, "I am not an eye; I shouldn't be attached to this body," in all its pouting, it is still part of the body. 17Imagine the entire body as an eye. How would a giant eye be able to hear? And if the entire body were an ear, how would an ear be able to smell? 18*This is where God comes in.* God has meticulously put this body together; He placed each part in the exact place to perform the exact function He wanted. 19If all members were a single part, where would the body be? 20So now, many members *function* within the one body. 21The eye cannot wail at the hand, "I have no need for you," nor could the head bellow at the feet, "I won't go one more step with you." 22It's actually the opposite. The members who seem to have the weaker functions are necessary to keep the body moving; 23the body parts that seem less important we treat as some of the most valuable; and those unfit, untamed, unpresentable members we treat with an even greater modesty. 24That's something the more presentable members don't need. But God designed the body in such a way that greater significance is given to the *seemingly* insignificant part. 25That way there should be no division in the body; instead, all the parts mutually depend on and care for one another. 26If one part is suffering, then all the members suffer alongside it. If one member is honored, then all the members celebrate alongside it. 27You are the body of the Anointed, *the Liberating King;* each and every one of you is a *vital* member. 28God has appointed *gifts* in the assembly: first emissaries,* second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, healers, helpers, administrators, and then those who speak with various unknown languages. 29Are all members gifted as emissaries? Are all gifted with prophetic utterance? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Or are all gifted in healing arts? Do all speak or interpret unknown languages? *Of course not.* 31Pursue the greater gifts, and let me tell you of a more excellent way—*love.*

* 12:28 Literally, apostles

► Gifts of the Spirit, which are intended to strengthen the church body, often divide the body because members of the church elevate those who possess the more visible gifts over those whose gifts function in the background. In fact, this is the very problem facing the Corinthians. So while talking about the importance and function of these gifts in chapters 12 and 14, Paul shifts his focus to the central role love plays in a believer's life in chapter 13. Love is essential for the body to be unified and for members to work together. Members of the body that are very different, with little in common, are able to appreciate and even enjoy others because of the love that comes when a life is submitted to God.

13 What if I speak in the *most elegant* languages of people or in the *exotic* languages of the heavenly messengers, but I live without love? Well then, anything I say is like the clanging of brass or a crashing cymbal. 2What if I have the gift of prophecy, am blessed with knowledge and insight to all the mysteries, or what if my faith is strong enough to scoop a mountain *from its bedrock*, yet I live without love? If so, I am nothing. 3I could give all that I have to feed the poor, I could surrender my body to be burned *as a martyr*, but if I do not live in love, I gain nothing *by my selfless acts.*

► Paul boils it all down for the believers in Corinth. Religious people often spend their time practicing rituals, projecting dogma, and going through routines that might look like Christianity on the outside but that lack the essential ingredient that brings all of it together—love! It is a loving God who birthed creation and now pursues a broken people in the most spectacular way. That same love must guide believers, so faith doesn't appear to be meaningless noise.

4Love is patient; love is kind. Love isn't
envious, doesn't boast, *brag, or strut*
about. There's no arrogance in love; 5it's
never rude, crude, or indecent—it's not
self-absorbed. Love isn't easily upset.
Love doesn't tally wrongs 6or celebrate
injustice; but truth—*yes, truth*—is love's
delight! 7Love puts up with anything and
everything that comes along; it trusts,
hopes, and endures no matter what. 8Love
will never become obsolete. Now as for
the prophetic gifts, they will not last;
unknown languages will become silent,
and the gift of knowledge will no longer be
needed. 9Gifts of knowledge and prophecy
are partial at best, *at least for now,* 10but
when the perfection *and fullness of God's*
kingdom arrive, all the parts will end.
11When I was a child, I spoke, thought,
and reasoned in childlike ways *as we all*
do. But when I became a man, I left my
childish ways behind. 12For now, we can
only see a dim and blurry picture of things,
as when we stare into polished metal. I
realize that everything I know is only part
of the big picture. But one day, *when Jesus*
arrives, we will see clearly, face-to-face.
In that day, I will fully know just as I have
been wholly known *by God.* 13But now
faith, hope, and love remain; these three
virtues must characterize our lives. The
greatest of these is love.

14 So *in everything* strive to love.
Passionately seek the gifts of
the Spirit, especially the gift of
prophecy. 2*You see,* a person speaking in
an *unknown* language is not addressing
the church because he is really addressing
God—those who overhear don't under-
stand because he is speaking in the Spirit
the depths of the mysteries *of the Lord.*
3But a person who has the gift of prophecy
teaches in a way that builds up the com-
munity, draws them near, and comforts
them. 4Those who speak in an unknown
language only strengthen themselves, but
those who prophesy strengthen the com-
munity. 5While I'd like for you all to be able
to speak *by the Spirit* in unknown lan-
guages, my preference would be for you all
to prophesy *by the Spirit.* Those who speak
prophetically *are God's mouthpiece and* are
far more useful to the church than those
who speak in exotic languages—unless
there is another who interprets so that the
community may be strengthened.

6If I come to you, brothers and sisters,
talking in unknown languages, what good
would that be for any of you? You receive
no benefit unless I speak to you some
word of revelation, knowledge, prophecy,
or instruction *in your own language.* 7Look,
if inanimate objects, *musical instruments*
like a pipe or harp, don't make a clear,
distinct sound, how would you know what
tune is being played? 8If the bugle blares
more like a clank, who would know to
prepare for battle? 9It's the same with you.
Unless you speak a message in a language
everyone understands, they won't know
what you're talking about. You'll be talking
into the wind. 10This world is full of lan-
guages, each and every one of them having
meaning; 11but if I don't understand the
meaning of some sound, then I become
like a foreigner to the person speaking, and
the person speaking will be like a foreigner
to me. 12It's the same with you; in your pas-
sion for spiritual gifts, seek to strengthen
the community of believers, *and you will all*
be better off.

13So anyone who speaks in an
unknown language should pray for the
ability to interpret 14because if I pray in
such a language, although my spirit prays,
my mind isn't productive. 15What do I do
then? I pray. I pray with my spirit but also
with my mind engaged; I sing with my
spirit but also with my mind engaged. 16If
you speak a word of blessing in the spirit
only, then how will an uninformed person
who can't understand your prayer say
"Amen" when you are done giving thanks?
17Even though you give thanks *to God* well,
the unknowing person doesn't benefit.
18I thank God that I speak in unknown
languages more than the rest of you; 19but
when the church gathers, I would rather
speak five words with my mind so I can
be understood and train others than utter
10,000 exotic words.

20Brothers and sisters, don't think
like children. Be innocent of malice but
mature in understanding. 21In the law, it
states:

> "I will send My message to this people
> with strange languages and foreign
> lips.
> And even when that happens,
> they will not listen to Me," says the
> Lord.*

22So speaking in unknown languages is
not a sign to the believing but *a miracle*

* 14:21 Isaiah 28:11-12

to the unbelieving; prophecy, though, is not a sign to the unbelieving but for the believing. 23*Imagine what would happen* if the entire church gathered together speaking in different languages, *one foreign to the next.* Then people who have never heard of such a thing or unbelieving people walk up on all that's going on. Would they not think each and every one of you were raving lunatics? 24But let's say an outsider or unbeliever walks in on a different scene: all are speaking for God with great power and insight *in a language they know. What then? Well,* the outsider would come under the conviction *of his own sins* and be called to accountability by the words of all *the prophets.* 25The very secrets of his heart would be revealed, *and right there—mystified*—he would fall on his face in worship to God, proclaiming *all the while* that God most certainly dwells among you.

26What should you do then, brothers and sisters? When you come together, *each person has a vital role because each has gifts.* One person might have a song, another a lesson to teach, still another a revelation *from God.* One person might speak in an unknown language, another will offer the interpretation, but all of this should be done to strengthen *the life and faith of the community.* 27But if any do speak in an exotic language, limit it to two or three people at the most, and have them speak one at a time, while another interprets for the rest. 28If there is not an interpreter present, then the one should stay silent during the gathering, speaking only to himself and God. 29Have two to three prophets speak, and let others *with discerning gifts* evaluate the messages they hear. 30Now if *in the course of things* a message comes to another who is seated, then the first one speaking should be silent *until this new message can be spoken.* 31To *avoid confusion and* create a space where all can learn and be encouraged, let only one prophet speak at a time *without interruption.* 32*You see,* the prophetic spirits are under the control of the prophets 33because God is the author of order, not confusion. This is how it is in all gatherings of the saints. 34Wives should be respectfully silent at the gatherings, as they are not allowed to speak; and they should yield *themselves to those in authority* just as it is written in the law. 35When they want to learn anything *in particular*, they should ask their husbands when they get home. It creates a shameful situation for them to speak at church. 36Do you think the word of God came to the world by you? Or that it came only to you?

Paul clearly wants to correct the excessive use of speeches given in these exotic, unknown languages, but he doesn't want them banned either.

37Let any person who thinks he is a prophet or a spiritual person affirm that these things I write to you are the commands of the Lord. 38Whoever chooses to be ignorant of this will be treated as ignorant. 39So, my dear brothers and sisters, passionately desire to prophesy; but don't ban the gift of speaking in unknown languages. 40Just maintain the proper order in all things.

15 Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I preached to you *when we first met. It's the essential message* that you have taken to heart, the central story you now base your life on; 2and through this gospel, you are liberated—unless, of course, your faith has come to nothing. 3-4For I passed down to you the crux of it all which I had also received *from others,* that the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* died for our sins and was buried and raised from the dead on the third day. All this happened to fulfill the Scriptures; *it was the perfect climax to God's covenant story.* 5Afterward He appeared alive to Cephas* *(you may know him as Simon Peter),* then to the rest of the twelve. 6*If that were not amazing enough,* on one occasion, He appeared to more than 500 believers at one time. Many of those brothers and sisters are still around *to tell the story,* though some have fallen asleep* in Jesus. 7Soon He appeared to James, *His brother and the leader of the Jerusalem church,* and then to all the rest of the emissaries* *He Himself commissioned.** 8Last of all, He appeared to me;* I was like a child snatched from his mother's womb. 9You see, I am the least of all His emissaries, not fit to be called His emissary because I hunted down and persecuted God's church. 10Today I am who I am because of God's grace, and *I have made sure that* the grace He offered me has not been wasted.

* 15:5 Luke 24:34 * 15:6 Literally, died * 15:7 Literally, apostles * 15:7 Acts 1:3-4 * 15:8 Acts 9:3-6

I have worked harder, *longer, and smarter* than all the rest; but *I realize* it is not me—it is God's grace with me *that has made the difference*. 11In the end, *it doesn't matter* whether it was I or the other witnesses *who brought you the message*. What matters is that we keep preaching and that you have faith in this message.

12Now if we have told you about the Anointed One (how He has risen from the dead *and appeared to us fully alive*), then how can you *stand there and* say there is no such thing as resurrection from death? 13*Friends,* if there is no resurrection of the dead, then even the Anointed hasn't been raised; 14if that is so, then all our preaching has been for nothing and your faith *in the message* is worthless. 15And what's worse, all of us *who have been preaching the gospel* are now guilty of misrepresenting God because we have been spreading the news that He raised the Anointed One from the dead (which must be a lie if what you are saying about the dead not being raised is the truth). 16*Please listen.* If *you say*, "the dead are not raised," then *what you are telling me is that* the Anointed One has not been raised. *Friends,* 17if the Anointed has not been raised *from the dead*, then your faith is worth less *than yesterday's garbage*, you are all doomed in your sins, 18and all the *dearly* departed who trusted in His liberation are left decaying *in the ground*. 19If what we have hoped for in the Anointed doesn't take us beyond this life, then we are world-class fools, deserving everyone's pity.

20But the Anointed One was raised from death's slumber and is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep *in death*. 21For since death entered *this world* by a man, it took another man to make the resurrection of the dead *our new* reality. 22*Look at it this way:* through Adam all of us die, but through the Anointed One all of us can live again. 23But this is how it will happen: the Anointed's *awakening* is the firstfruits. It will be followed by the resurrection of all those who belong to Him at His coming, 24and then the end will come. After He has *conquered His enemies and* shut down every rule and authority vying for power, He will hand over the Kingdom to God, the Father *of all that is*. 25And He must reign as King until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26The last hostile power to be destroyed is death itself. 27*All this will happen to fulfill the Scripture that says,* "You placed everything on earth beneath His feet."* (Although it says "everything," it is clear that this does not also pertain to God, *who created everything* and made it all subject to Him.) 28Then, when all creation has taken its rightful place beneath God's sovereign reign, the Son will follow, subject to the Father who exalted Him over all created things; then God will be God over all.

► Resurrection is central to the gospel. In fact, without the bodily resurrection of Jesus there is no good news at all. For in Jesus, God personifies His redeeming work and demonstrates the scope of that redemption. He is a God who brings life from death, peace from war, prosperity from adversity, and bounty from famine. The resurrection of Jesus marks a new era of God's dealing with the world. He intends nothing less than the total reclamation of His good creation damaged by human folly, sin, and death.

29*You have probably heard that* some people are undergoing ritual cleansings of baptism* for the dead. Why are they doing that? If the dead are not going to be raised, then why are people being baptized for them? 30Why are we putting our lives on the line all the time *if there's no resurrection*? 31I die every day! I swear that it's true! That's something you take pride in, brothers and sisters, as I do in Jesus the Anointed, our Lord. 32But if I have fought against the wild beasts in Ephesus for some human cause, then what good has that done me? If the dead are not raised, then there's nothing more to do than—*as the saying goes*—eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*

33But don't be so naïve—*there's another saying you know well*—Bad company corrupts good habits. 34Come to your senses, live justly, and stop sinning. *It's true that* some have no knowledge of God. I am saying this to shame you *into better habits.*

35Now I know what some of you are thinking: "Just how are the dead going to be raised? What kind of bodies will they have when they come *back to life*?" 36*Don't*

* 15:27 Psalm 8:6 * 15:29 Literally, immersions, to show repentance * 15:32 Isaiah 22:13

be a fool! The seed you plant doesn't produce life unless it dies. *Right?* 37The seed doesn't have *the same look,* the same body, *if you will,* of what it will have once it starts to grow. It starts out a single, naked seed—whether wheat or some other grain, *it doesn't matter*—38and God gives to that seed a body just as He has desired. For each of the different kinds of seeds God prepares a unique body. 39*Or look at it this way:* not all flesh is the same. *Right?* There is *skin* flesh on humans, *furry* flesh on animals, *feathery* flesh on birds, and *scaly* flesh on fish. 40*Likewise* there are bodies made for the heavens and bodies made for the earth. The heavenly bodies have a different kind of glory *or luminescence* compared to bodies below. 41*Even among the heavenly bodies, there is a different level of brilliance:* the sun shines differently than the moon, the moon differently than the stars, and the stars themselves differ in their brightness.

42It's like this with the resurrection of those who have died. The body planted in the earth decays. But the body raised from the earth cannot decay. 43The body is planted in disgrace and weakness. But the body is raised in splendor and power. 44The body planted *in the earth* was animated by the physical, material realm. But the body raised *from the earth* will be animated by the spiritual. Since there is a physical, material body, there will also be a spiritual body. 45That's why it was written, "The first man Adam became a living soul"; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. 46*Everything has an order.* The body is not animated first by the spiritual but the physical; then the spiritual *becomes its life-giving source.* 47The first man, *Adam,* came from the earth and was made from dust; the second man, *Jesus,* has come from heaven. 48The earth man shares his earth nature with all those made of earth; likewise the heavenly man shares His heavenly nature with all those made of heaven. 49Just as we have carried the image of the earth man in our bodies, we will* also carry the image of the heavenly man *in our new bodies at the resurrection.*

► Redemption is not merely forgiveness of sin's guilt so our souls can go to heaven someday. Our true hope is to be free from physical death just as Jesus was raised from the dead. Accordingly, this hope of bodily resurrection stands against the expectation that souls escape from their mortal bodies (as if your soul is the real "you" and your body is a disposable external space suit) and merely float up to heaven. Rather, Paul presents resurrection as a new creation; and this restored bodily existence affirms and fulfills the original intent of creation. Believers don't have to wait until the future to experience this Spirit-enabled life because living in obedience to God through the Spirit is a foretaste of the total experience that will come when all is restored later.

50Now listen to this: brothers and sisters, this present body is not able to inherit the kingdom of God any more than decay can inherit that which lasts forever. 51Stay close because I am going to tell you a mystery—something you may have trouble understanding: we will not all fall asleep in death, but we will all be transformed. 52*It will all happen so fast,* in a blink, a mere flutter of the eye. The last trumpet will call, and the dead will be raised from their graves with a body that does not, cannot decay. All of us will be changed! 53We'll step out of our mortal clothes and slide into immortal bodies, *replacing everything that is subject to death with eternal life.* 54And, when we are all redressed with bodies that do not, cannot decay, when we put immortality over our mortal frames, then it will be as *Scripture* says:

Life everlasting has victoriously
swallowed death.*
55Hey, Death! What happened to your
big win?
Hey, Death! What happened to your
sting?*

56Sin came *into this world*, and death's sting *followed*. Then sin took aim at the law and gained power *over those who follow the law.* 57Thank God, then, for our Lord Jesus, the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* who brought us victory *over the grave.*

* 15:49 Other manuscripts read "so let us." * 15:54 Isaiah 25:8 * 15:55 Hosea 13:14

58My dear brothers and sisters, stay
firmly planted—be unshakable—do many
good works in the name of God, and know
that all your labor is not for nothing when
it is for God.

16 Now I call you, just as I did the
churches gathering in Galatia,
to collect funds to support
God's people *in Jerusalem.* 2On *Sunday,* the
first day of the week, *I want* each of you to
set aside an amount, as God has blessed
you, so the funds will be collected by the
time I come. 3When I get there, I will send
those you recommend by your own letters
to carry your *generous and gracious* dona-
tion to Jerusalem. 4If you think it seems
appropriate for me to travel with them,
then we'll go together.

5*Get ready.* I will come your way after
traveling through Macedonia. For I'm just
passing through Macedonia 6and will prob-
ably stay with you through the winter so
that you may provide for my next journey
(wherever that may be). 7I want to recon-
nect with you, not just pass through; if the
Lord is willing, I hope to stay awhile. 8But
until Pentecost, I plan to stay in Ephesus
9because, not only has *God* opened a sig-
nificant door here for me to serve, but also
there is a lot of opposition against me.

► Churches are often characterized by words such as "independent" and "autonomous." But one would be hard-pressed to find any of these ideas in the Scriptures. Instead, Paul seems to be modeling submission and interdependence. We must always consider others and shape our actions to bless them. But he does not stop there—it is clear that we are responsible to care for one another in physical and monetary ways. What might Paul say to the church today, given the drastic disparity between the wealthy churches of the West and the brothers and sisters in the rest of the world who lack food, water, or shelter?

10If Timothy comes, see that he is com-
fortable and untroubled; his work is the
Lord's, as is mine. 11No one should treat
him badly. Send him on to meet me in
peace because the brothers and sisters
here and I are looking for him. 12You
shouldn't expect to see our brother Apol-
los, although I tried to persuade him to
come to you with the rest of the brothers
and sisters, because now is not the best
time for him to come. When it's his time,
he will come.

13*Listen,* stay alert, stand tall in
the faith, be courageous, and be strong.
14Let love prevail in your life, words, and
actions.

15*Finally*, brothers and sisters, I call
on you *to follow your leaders*. People like
those in the house of Stephanas—you
know they were among the first believers
in Achaia, and they have devoted their
lives to serving God's people—16*I urge you*
to submit to the authority of such leaders,
to every coworker, and to those who *offer
their backs and shoulders for the* work. 17I
celebrate the arrival of Stephanas, Fortu-
natus, and Achaicus, as they have supplied
me with what you could not. 18They have
been a breath of fresh air for me as I know
they are for you, so respect and honor
those like them.

19The churches in Asia salute you.
Aquila and Prisca send a heartfelt greeting
in the Lord along with those who gather
at their house. 20The entire family in faith
here sends their greetings. *Be sure you*
greet one another by a holy kiss.

21This *closing* greeting is written by
my own hand—Paul's: 22May those who
have no love for the Lord be cursed. Mara-
natha, *"Our Lord, come!"* 23May the grace
of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24My love to
you all in *the name of* the Anointed One,
Jesus. [Amen.]*

* 16:24 Some manuscripts omit this word.

2 CORINTHIANS

Letter to the church in Corinth

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he heard from Timothy that the situation between him and the church he loved was deteriorating. Apparently in Paul's absence, a number of false teachers had instructed the church and claimed that Paul was not a true emissary of Jesus. They criticized his message and his methods; they charged that he was inferior to the real emissaries. So Paul made a hasty trip across the Aegean from Ephesus—where he was working—in hopes of repairing the rift between them. But the visit backfired. Instead of making things better, it made things worse. He returned to Ephesus from the "agonizing visit," as he later characterized it, and wrote a letter "covered with tears." This time Paul dispatched Titus with the letter. Perhaps he could intervene before a permanent break resulted.

When Titus caught up with Paul in Macedonia, he had good news and bad news. The good news was that a majority of believers in Corinth were back with Paul. The tearful letter—now lost—and Titus's vigilant efforts apparently worked. The bad news was that there was a minority of believers and influential leaders who were still unconvinced. So Paul wrote the letter we now call 2 Corinthians to congratulate the majority and to confront the minority, urging both to stay with the true gospel, and to pave the way for a peaceful, positive visit.

More than any letter Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians offers insight into his work as Jesus' emissary. As he responds to the accusations of his opponents, he articulates clearly his understanding of the good news and his call as one divinely commissioned to carry the good news to both Jews and outsiders. In response to their negative appraisals of Paul's ministry, he challenges them to recognize that faithful ministry entails suffering for others as an embodiment of Jesus' death. It's clear he is embarrassed by the way he has to defend himself at times; still he refuses to sit idly by as his work and the church are in jeopardy. At the heart of the letter is an appeal for the Corinthians to join in the collection for the Jerusalem church. The initiative has a dual purpose. First, Paul hopes to provide substantial relief to the poor in Judea after a lengthy period of famine and hard times. Second, he wants to build a bridge from the churches he is establishing in Asia and Greece to the "mother church" in Jerusalem. Paul understands well the heart of his Lord, and he does everything he possibly can to promote peace and unity among all the churches.

1 Paul, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed *pressed into service* by the will of God, and our brother Timothy to God's church that gathers in Corinth and all the saints in the region of Achaia.

2May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, surround you.

3All praise goes to God, Father of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One. He is the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort. 4He consoles us as we endure the pain and hardship of life so that we may draw from His comfort and share it with others in their own struggles. 5For even as His suffering continues to flood over us, through the Anointed we experience the wealth of His comfort just the same. 6If we are afflicted *with such trouble and pain*, then know it is so that you might ultimately experience comfort and salvation. If we experience comfort, it is to encourage you so that you can hold up while you endure the same sufferings we all share. 7Remember that our hope for you stands firm, *unshaken and unshakable*. That's because we know that as you share in our sufferings, so you will also share in our comfort.

8My brothers and sisters, we have to tell you that when we were in Asia the troubles we faced were nearly more than we could handle. The burdens we bore nearly crushed us. Our strength dwindled to nothing. For a while, we weren't sure we would make it through the whole ordeal. 9We thought we would have to serve out our death sentences right then and there. As a result, we realized that we could no longer rely on ourselves and that we must trust solely in God, who possesses the power to raise the dead. 10*Miraculously* God Himself delivered us from the cold hands of death. We again place our hope in Him alone, and we know He will deliver us. 11Join us in this work. Lend us a hand through prayer so that many will give thanks for the gift that comes to us when God answers the prayers of so many.

► Some believe that prosperity and comfort are the markers of a faithful Christian; in order to believe that, you have to ignore completely the life and writings of Paul, the emissary. It is only when you suffer that you can meet God as your comforter. In these letters, and often in our own lives, it is when we seem to have come to the end of ourselves that we see and experience the fullness of God in entirely new ways. This is not to say that any of us should or would seek out the kind of suffering Paul experienced; we do not long to be imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, or hunted by authorities. But when our dark days come, we should be ready to learn, grow, and experience the fullness of God in the midst of our troubles.

12We are proud of the fact that we have lived before the world and especially before you with clear consciences, living holy lives mixed with genuine sincerity before God. We have not relied on any human wisdom but on the grace *and favor* of God. 13We are not writing to you in anything *resembling codes or riddles*; we only write those lessons you are ready to read and understand. I hope you will *study them, value them, and* truly understand them until the end. 14You have already begun to grasp what we mean in part; but on the day when our Lord Jesus returns, we will be as proud of you as you are of us.

15-16In *this spirit of* trust and confidence, I was intending to come your way first *on my current journey*. So that you might have a double dose of this grace and assurance, my plan was to visit you on my way to Macedonia and return to you again on the journey back so that you could assist me on the trip to Judea. 17*But since this didn't happen,* was I just being indecisive? Were my plans made in the flesh *rather than by God's Spirit*? How can I say "yes" and "no" in the same breath? 18Because our God is always faithful *to His promises*, our word to you was not both "yes" and "no"—*"Yes, I'll come," and then, "No, I've changed my mind."* 19For the Son of God—Jesus the Anointed whom we (Silvanus,* Timothy, and I) have preached to you—was not both "yes" and then "no." With Him the answer is always "yes." 20In Jesus we hear a resounding "yes" to all of God's many promises. This is the reason we say "Amen" to and through Jesus when giving glory to God. 21*Remember that* God has established our relationship with you

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:19 Silvanus is better known in Acts as Silas.

in the Anointed One, and He has anointed *and commissioned* us *for this special mission.* 22He has marked us with His seal and placed His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee, a down payment *of the things to come.*

23*If I were in court today,* I'd call God as a witness to my soul. *Here's the truth:* I decided not to come back to Corinth in order to spare you *further pain and sorrow.* 24It's not that we want to coerce you in any matter of faith; we are coworkers called to increase your joy because you have stood firm in faith.

The believers in Corinth are exhausting Paul and one another with their negativity and criticism. Nothing destroys the beauty of Christian community more aggressively than these kinds of patterns.

2 I finally determined that I would not come to you again for yet another agonizing visit. 2If my visits create such *pain and* sorrow for you, who can cheer me up except for those I've caused such grief? 3This is exactly what I was writing to you about earlier so that when we are face-to-face I will not have to wallow in sadness in the presence of friends who should bring me the utmost joy. For I felt sure that my delight would also become your delight. 4My last letter to you was covered with tears, composed with great difficulty, and *frankly,* a broken heart. It wasn't my intention to depress you *or cause you pain*; rather, I had hoped you would see it for what it was—a demonstration of the overwhelming love I have for all of you.

► Interpersonal relationships are often filled with disagreements and tensions. It's common to hear someone long for the "good old days" of the New Testament when things were simpler and people were holier. But Paul's ministry proves the first-century churches were no different. They were just as full of fights, tensions, and power plays as modern churches are. We should seek to be loving but also firm when the situation demands it. We should be quick to offer forgiveness to and seek reconciliation with those who turn back from their divisive actions. That's what Paul did.

5But if anyone has caused harm, he has not so much harmed me as he has—and I don't think I'm exaggerating here—harmed all of you. 6*In my view,* the majority of you have punished him well enough. 7So instead of continuing to ostracize him, I encourage you to offer him *the grace of* forgiveness and the comfort *of your acceptance.* Otherwise, *if he finds no welcome back to the community,* I'm afraid he will be overwhelmed with extreme sorrow and lose all hope. 8So I urge you to demonstrate your love for him once again. 9I wrote these things to you with a clear purpose in mind: to test whether you are willing to live and abide by all *my counsel.* 10If you forgive anyone, I forgive that one as well. Have no doubt, anything that I have forgiven—when I do forgive—is done ultimately for you in the presence of the Anointed One. 11*It's my duty* to make sure that Satan does not win even a small victory over us, for we don't want to be naïve *and then fall prey* to his schemes.

12When I arrived at Troas, bringing the good news of the Anointed, the Lord opened a door there for me. 13Yet my spirit was restless because I could not find my brother Titus. Eventually I told them goodbye and set out for Macedonia.

14Yet I am so thankful to God, who always marches us to victory under the banner of the Anointed One; and through us He spreads the beautiful fragrance of His knowledge to every corner of the earth. 15*In a turbulent world* where people are either dying or being rescued, we are the sweet smell of the Anointed to God *our Father.* 16To those who are dying, they smell the stench of death in us. And to those being rescued, we are the unmistakable scent of life. Who is worthy of this calling? 17For we are nothing like the others who sell the word of God like a commodity. *Do not be mistaken;* our words come from God with the utmost sincerity, always spoken through the Anointed in the presence of God.

3 Are we back to page one? Do we need to gather some recommendations *to prove our validity* to you? Or do we need to take your letter of commendation to others *to gain credibility*? 2You are our letter, every word burned onto

our* hearts to be read by everyone. 3You are the living letter of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* nurtured by us and inscribed, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God—*a letter too passionate* to be chiseled onto stone tablets, but *emblazoned* upon the human heart.

4This is the kind of confidence we have in and through the Anointed toward our God. 5*Don't be mistaken;* in and of ourselves we know we have little to offer, but any competence *or value* we have comes from God. 6Now God has equipped us to be capable servants of the new covenant, not by authority of the written law which only brings death, but by the Spirit who brings life.

► Apparently Paul is responding to repeated questions from the church in Corinth requiring him to justify his actions and explain his words. But instead of addressing each separately, Paul suggests a new course of action: let my record be based on the fruit in your lives. The Corinthians had experienced the promised effects of the new covenant—transformed hearts through the Spirit—as prophesied by Jeremiah (31) and Ezekiel (36–37). If the Corinthians agree the Spirit is working in them, then they have to agree that Paul's ministry to them is productive.

How do we stand up to the same test? If our lives were judged based on the fruit of the seeds we have planted and nurtured in the lives of others, would we be proud or mortified?

7Now *consider this:* if the ministry of death, which was chiseled in stone, came with so much glory that the Israelites could not bear to look at Moses' face even as that glory was fading, 8imagine the kind of greater glory that will accompany the ministry of the Spirit. 9If glory ushered in the ministry that offers condemnation, how much more glory will attend the ministry that promises to restore and set the world right? 10In fact, what seemed to have great glory will appear entirely inglorious in the light of the greater glory *of the new covenant.* 11If something that fades away possesses glory, how much more intense is the glory of what remains?

12In light of this hope that we have, we act with great confidence and speak *with great courage.* 13We do not act like Moses who covered his face with a veil so the children of Israel would not stare as the glory *of God* faded *from his face.** 14Their minds became as hard *as stones*; for up to this day when they read the old covenant, the same veil continues *to hide that glory*; this veil is lifted only through the Anointed One. 15Even today a veil covers their hearts when the words of Moses are read; 16but in the moment when one turns toward the Lord, the veil is removed. 17*By* "the Lord" *what I mean* is the Spirit, and *in any heart* where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is liberty. 18Now all of us, with our faces unveiled, reflect the glory of the Lord as if we are mirrors; and so we are being transformed, *metamorphosed*, into His same image from one radiance of glory to another, just as the Spirit of the Lord accomplishes it.

► Drawing from Exodus 32–34, Paul uses Moses as a model of one who has been transformed by God's glory, but in a limited way. Moses encountered God (the Lord) through the Spirit on that mountain, but the Spirit now—as a fulfillment of the new covenant—dwells in the hearts of believers and continually transforms them. This transformation is based on a new way of understanding God's revelation: Jesus Himself, the One who reveals God's glory, is the very image of God. Through this Spirit-enabled encounter, believers experience a new way of living and therefore come to resemble the Anointed One as they reflect His glory.

4 Since we are *joined together* in this ministry as a result of the mercy *shown to all of us* by God, we do not become discouraged. 2Instead, we have renounced all the things that hide in shame; we refuse to live deceptively or use

* 3:2 Other manuscripts read "your hearts." * 3:13 Exodus 34:33-35

trickery; we do not pollute God's Word *with any other agenda*. Instead, we aim to tell the truth plainly, appealing to the conscience of every person under God's watchful eye. 3Now if our gospel remains veiled, it is only veiled from those who are *lost and* dying, 4because the *evil* god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers. As a result the light of the good news, the radiant glory of the Anointed—who is the very image of God—cannot shine down on them. 5We do not preach about ourselves. The subject of all our sermons is Jesus, the Anointed One. He is Lord *and Master* of all. For Jesus' sake we are here to serve you. 6The God who spoke *light into existence,* saying, "Let light shine from the darkness,"* is the very One who sets our hearts ablaze to shed light on the knowledge of God's glory *revealed* in the face of Jesus, the Anointed One.

7But this beautiful treasure is contained in us—*cracked* pots made of earth and clay—so that the transcendent character of this power will be clearly seen as coming from God and not from us. 8We are cracked and chipped from our afflictions on all sides, but we are not crushed by them. We are bewildered at times, but we do not give in to despair. 9We are persecuted, but we have not been abandoned. We have been knocked down, but we are not destroyed. 10We always carry around in our bodies the reality of the brutal death *and suffering* of Jesus. As a result, His *resurrection* life *rises and* reveals its wondrous power in our bodies as well. 11For while we live, we are constantly handed over to death on account of Jesus so that His life may be revealed even in our mortal bodies of flesh. 12So death is constantly at work in us, but life is working in you.

Jesus' death is the means to new life for others. Similarly when believers suffer for others as Jesus did, their suffering is an avenue for God's life to transform situations.

13We share the same spirit of faith as the one who wrote *the psalm,* "I believed; therefore I spoke."* We also believe, and that belief leads us to acknowledge 14that the same God who resurrected the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus and will usher us all together into His presence. 15All of this is happening for your good. As grace is spread to the multitudes, there is a growing sound of thanks being uttered by those relishing in the glory of God.

16So we have no reason to despair. Despite the fact that our outer humanity is falling apart and decaying, our inner humanity is breathing in new life every day. 17You see, the short-lived pains of this life are creating for us an eternal glory that does not compare to anything we know here. 18So we do not set our sights on the things we can see *with our eyes*. All of that is fleeting; *it will eventually fade away.* Instead, we focus on the things we cannot see, which live on and on.

► In chapter 3, Paul explains how the Spirit transforms believers so they are conformed to the image of Jesus. He now clarifies that this change means believers embody Jesus' death through suffering and participate in His present, risen life. This life is ultimately experienced through the resurrection of the body in the future, but it also consists of an inward renewal in the midst of the challenges and troubles of daily existence. Our hope is, therefore, not a release from our bodies but a resurrection of our bodies so that the life inside us now will show outside as well. While we still suffer, this hope of bodily resurrection is a matter of faith.

5 We know that if our earthly house—a mere tent *that can easily be taken down*—is destroyed, we will then live in an eternal home in the heavens, a building crafted by divine—not human—hands. 2Currently, in this tent of a house, we continue to groan *and ache* with a deep desire to be sheltered in our permanent home 3because then we will be truly clothed *and comfortable*, protected by a covering for our *current* nakedness. 4The fact is that in this tent we anxiously moan, *fearing the naked truth of our reality*. What we crave above all is to be clothed so that what is *temporary and* mortal can be wrapped completely in life. 5The One who has worked *and tailored* us for this is God Himself, who has gifted His Spirit to us as a pledge *toward our permanent home.*

* 4:6 Genesis 1:3 * 4:13 Psalm 116:10

6In light of this, we live with a daring passion and know that our time spent in this body is also time we are not present with the Lord. 7The path we walk is charted by faith, not by what we see with our eyes. 8There is no doubt that we live with a daring passion, but in the end we prefer to be gone from this body so that we can be at home with the Lord. 9Ultimately it does not matter whether we are here or gone; our purpose stays fixed, and that is to please Him. 10*In time* we will all stand in judgment before the throne of the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* to receive what is just for our conduct (whether it be good or bad) while we lived in this temporary body.

11So because we stand in awe of the *one true* Lord, we make it our aim to convince all people *of the truth of the gospel*; God sees who we really are, and I hope *in some way* that you'll look deeply into your consciences to see us as well. 12*But we hope you understand that* we are not trying to prove ourselves to you *or pull together a résumé that will impress you.* We are simply hoping that you will find a sense of joy in connecting with us. And when you are approached by others (who may value appearances more than the heart) *asking questions about us,* you will be able to offer an answer for them. 13If we *seem out of control or* act like fanatics, it is for God. But if we act in a coherent and reasonable way, it is for you. 14You see, the controlling force in our lives is the love of the Anointed One. And our confession is this: One died for all; therefore, all have died. 15He died for us so that we will all live, not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose from the dead. 16*Because of all that God has done,* we now have a new perspective. We used to show regard for people based on worldly standards and interests. No longer. We used to think of the Anointed the same way. No longer. 17Therefore, if anyone is united with the Anointed One, that person is a new creation. The old life is gone—and see—a new life has begun! 18All of this is *a gift* from *our Creator* God, who has *pursued us and* brought us into a restored *and healthy* relationship with Him through the Anointed. And He has given us *the same mission,* the ministry of reconciliation, *to bring others back to Him.* 19*It is central to our good news that* God was in the Anointed making things right between Himself and the world. This means He does not hold their sins against them. But it also means He charges us to proclaim the message that heals and restores our broken relationships *with God and each other.*

20So we are now representatives of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King;* God has given us a charge to carry through our lives—urging all people on behalf of the Anointed to become reconciled to *the Creator* God. 21He orchestrated this: the *Anointed* One, who had never experienced sin, became sin for us so that in Him we might embody the very righteousness of God.

► These simple verses capture the heart of the good news. Lowering Himself, the sinless Jesus took our sin upon Himself and canceled its power through His death and resurrection. As believers are united with Him, they are raised up with Him and embody God's righteousness, experiencing forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life. This righteousness is a new creation gift that can never be separated from the Giver, and so believers only experience it because they are "in Him."

6 As for those of us working as His emissaries,* we beg you not to take the grace of God lightly. 2For God says *through Isaiah*,

> When the time was right, I listened to you;
> and that day you were delivered, I was your help.*

Look, now the time is right! See, your day of deliverance is here! 3*We are careful in what we teach* so that our words won't be a stumbling block and so that no one will discredit our ministry. 4But as God's servants, we commend ourselves in every situation. So that with great endurance we persevere even in anguish and hardship. We have been cornered *by the enemy* 5suffering beatings, imprisonments, uproars, toil, sleeplessness, and starvation. 6And by the Holy Spirit with purity, understanding, patience, kindness, and sincerest love we have proved ourselves. 7Now with the voice of truth and power of God—armed

* 6:1 Literally, apostles * 6:2 Isaiah 49:8

on the right and armed on the left with righteousness *from God*—we continue. 8Whether respected or loathed, praised or criticized as frauds, yet true, 9as unknown *to this world*, and yet well known *to God,* we serve Him. We are treated as dying and yet we live, as punished and yet we are not executed. 10Though we are sorrowful, we continually rejoice. As *the poorest of* the poor, we bring richness to all, and though we have nothing, we possess all things.

11Corinthians, we have been completely open to you. *We've exposed the truth,* holding nothing back while our hearts open wide *to take you in.* 12We have revealed our affection toward you—though *it's obvious* you have a hard time showing your affection toward us. 13If I could offer some fatherly advice: open yourselves up as children; share your hearts with us as we have done for you.

14Don't develop partnerships with those who are not followers of Jesus' teachings. For what real connection can exist between righteousness and rebellion? How can light participate in darkness? 15What harmony can exist between the Anointed and Satan?* Do the faithful and the faithless have anything in common? 16Can the temple of God find common ground with idols? Don't you see that we house the temple of the living God within us? *Remember when* He said,

> "I will make My home with them and
> walk among them.
> I will be their God,
> and they will be My people.*
> 17So then turn away from them,
> turn away and leave *without looking back*,"* says the Lord.
> "Stay away from anything unclean,
> *anything impure,*
> and I will welcome you.*
> 18And I will be for you as a father,
> and you will be for Me as sons and
> daughters,"*
> Says the Lord Almighty!

► The most important partnership in life is marriage. There are other kinds of union, but the union of husband and wife transcends any other. God created sexual intimacy as a unique gift to marriage. Its purpose goes beyond pleasure and procreation. As a man and a woman join their bodies together, the Spirit does a unique work of binding these two individuals as one person. But the involvement of the Spirit is not possible when a believer is intimate with a nonbeliever. They are not filled with the same Spirit and cannot experience the fullness God intends. Paul's instructions are practical, simple, and clear.

7 Because we have these promises, dearly loved ones, out of respect for God we should scour the filth from our flesh and spirit and move toward perfect *beauty and* holiness.

2Take us into your hearts; *love us as we love you. You have nothing to fear.* We have hurt no one, ruined no one, swindled no one. 3I am not writing these things to condemn you, as I said before. Our hearts embrace you, so we stand beside you whether facing life or death. 4I am completely confident and incredibly proud of you. Even in all this turbulence I am at peace—I am overflowing with joy.

5When we came into Macedonia, we were completely worn out—under attack from every angle—nagging opposition on the outside, *our own nagging* fears from the inside. 6But God, who comforts the downcast, brought us comfort when Titus arrived *from Corinth.* 7We were relieved, not just to see him, but because he told us how he was encouraged to learn about your longing, your grieving, and your continued enthusiasm for me. So these were all more reasons for me to rejoice!

► Jesus said blessings come out of mourning (Matthew 5:4). The very thought is ridiculous to some; but from Paul's perspective, God uses weaknesses and is present in pain. This truth is revolutionary. In the midst of suffering, the mourner abandons pretense and self-consciousness. There we meet God and one another in honest ways that open the doors to redemption when we are willing.

* 6:15 Literally, Belial * 6:16 Leviticus 26:12; Ezekiel 37:27 * 6:17 Isaiah 52:11 * 6:17 Ezekiel 20:34, 41 * 6:18 2 Samuel 7:14

God chose a people for Himself—a people that make up a body, bound together in a covenant. The forces of this world seek to divide and isolate, but God seeks to unite and reconcile. We must all learn to serve one another and hold our self-interests in abeyance to find a greater good in community.

The believers in Corinth were struggling to find unity and harmony in their local church. Some were living selfishly by eating all the food at their common meals or emphasizing issues that create division in the community. For Paul it was not enough that they learn to live well with one another, although that was important. They had to know they were part of a larger body—they belonged to the churches in Jerusalem, Ephesus, Philippi, and the new frontier of Christianity. We are also part of a global church. What would happen if the church would begin to live this simple truth and generously share all it has with our brothers and sisters across the globe?

[8]I knew you would be upset with my last letter, but I do not regret sending it. If there were times I did have second thoughts, it was because I could see that the letter did hurt you, even if only for a while. [9]Now I am glad—not because it caused you grief but because you were moved to make a permanent change* that can happen only with the realization that your actions have gone against God—I'm glad to know you suffered no long-term loss because of what we did. [10]Now *this type of deep sorrow,* godly sorrow, is not so much about regret; but it is about producing a change of mind and behavior* that ultimately leads to salvation. But *the other type of sorrow,* worldly sorrow, *often is fleeting and* only brings death. [11]*Look at what is happening among you!* Notice how authentic and diligent you have become because this godly sorrow has been at work *in your community. But there's more:* your desire to clear your name, your *righteous* anger, your respect, your longing, your zeal, and your *concern for* justice. All these demonstrate how you have been made clean. [12]So when I wrote my *last difficult* letter, it was not to comfort the victim or confront the perpetrator—it was to stir up your sincere devotion for us under God's watchful eye. [13]In the midst of all that has happened, *though it has been difficult,* we are comforted *and encouraged.* When we saw the *relief and* joy on Titus's face, we celebrated even more because his spirit had been totally refreshed by you. [14]Now if I have bragged *in the past* about you to Titus, I have nothing to be ashamed of. Just as we've spoken the whole truth to you, I'm glad to know that our boasts to Titus *about you* have proven true as well. [15]His love for you overflows even more as he recalls your obedience and how you *respectfully and somewhat nervously*, with fear and trembling, took him in. [16]I have great joy *now* because I have great confidence in you.

8 Now, brothers and sisters, let me tell you about the *amazing* gift of God's grace that's happening throughout the churches in Macedonia. [2]Even in the face of severe anguish *and hard times*, their elation and poverty have overflowed into a wealth of generosity. [3]I watched as they willingly gave what they could afford and then went beyond to give even more. [4]They came to us *on their own,* begging to take part in this work *of grace* to support the *poor* saints *in Judea.* [5]*We were so overwhelmed*—none of us expected their reaction—that they truly turned their lives over to the Lord and then gave themselves to support us in our work as we answer the call of God. [6]That's why we asked Titus to finish what he started among you regarding this gracious work of charity. [7]Just as you are rich in everything—in faith and speech, in knowledge and all sincerity, and in the love we have shown among you*—now I ask you to invest richly in this gracious work too. [8]I am not going to command you, but I am going to offer you the chance to prove your love genuine in the same way others have done. [9]You know the grace *that has come to us* through our Lord Jesus the Anointed. He set aside His infinite riches and was born into the lowest circumstance so that you may gain great riches through His humble poverty. [10-11]Listen, it's been a year *since we called your attention to this opportunity to demonstrate God's grace*, so here's

* 7:9 Literally, repent * 7:10 Literally, repentance * 8:7 Other manuscripts read "you have shown us."

my advice: pull together your resources and finish what you started.

Remember how excited you were at first; it's time to complete this task in the same spirit. 12Now if there is a willingness to help, give within your means. That's perfectly acceptable. No one expects you to go without or borrow to give. 13-14The objective is not to go under so others will have some relief; the objective is to use this opportunity today to supply their needs out of your abundance. *One day it may be the other way around,* and they will need to supply your needs from what they have. That's equality. 15As it is written, "The one who gathered plenty didn't have more than he needed; the one who gathered little didn't have less."*

16I praise God who lovingly burdened Titus's heart for you just as He did mine. 17You see, when we approached him about you, he eagerly stepped up, not only because of our request but because of his own desire to help. 18We're also sending with him a brother who is well known among the gatherings of believers because of how well he proclaims the good news. 19And there's more *you should know*: he has been handpicked by the churches to accompany us as we carry on this work of grace. *All this is being done* for the glory of the Lord and to show our own good will. 20We're being careful so that no one can claim that we are mishandling the funds we've collected. 21For we are taking every precaution to remain aboveboard—not only in the Lord's eyes, but in the eyes of the people too. 22So we are also sending another brother who's proven himself time and again. He's certainly *trustworthy and* enthusiastic *for the gospel; and after hearing about all you are doing,* he's even more excited because he has confidence in you. 23If anyone asks about Titus, he's my partner and coworker in this ministry to you. If there's any question about who the other brothers and sisters are, they are emissaries* of the churches, traveling to bring glory to the Anointed One, *our Liberating King*. 24So welcome them before the community in love; show the churches *they represent* that I have not exaggerated your charity and kindness.

9 There's nothing further I could add about your efforts for God's people *in Judea*. 2I know you are ready. I bragged on you throughout Macedonia, telling them how the people in Achaia have been prepared since last year; and your passion has been contagious. 3Still I thought it would be best to send these brothers and sisters ahead to help you finish the final details so all my bragging wouldn't be for nothing. 4If some of the Macedonians decide to travel with me, all of us would be more than embarrassed if we arrived and you weren't ready to give after the way we've been going on about you. 5So to help you get your previously promised gift ready, it made sense to me to ask the brothers and sisters to go on ahead so you will have *all the time you need to* put it together as planned and so it doesn't look *thrown together or* coerced.

► Giving away money is one of the hardest things believers do, especially when there are bills to pay and more expenses than income. However, helping others with their physical needs and not only their spiritual needs is a fundamental principle of Christian spirituality. Perhaps it would be easier to give our financial resources if we could turn away from our own continual consumption and live simpler lifestyles. Then there would be not only the willingness but also the ability to share God's blessings with others.

6But I will say this *to encourage your generosity*: the one who plants little harvests little, and the one who plants plenty harvests plenty. 7Giving grows out of the heart—otherwise, you've reluctantly grumbled "yes" because you felt you had to or because you couldn't say "no," *but this isn't the way God wants it*. For *we know that* "God loves a cheerful giver."* 8God is ready to overwhelm you with more blessings than you could ever imagine so that you'll always be taken care of in every way and you'll have more than enough to share. 9Remember what is written *about the One who trusts in the Lord*:

He scattered abroad; He gave *freely* to the poor;
His righteousness endures throughout the ages.*

* 8:15 Exodus 16:18 * 8:23 Literally, apostles * 9:7 Proverbs 22:8 * 9:9 Psalm 112:9

10The same One who has put seed into the hands of the sower and brought bread to fill our stomachs will provide and multiply the resources you invest and produce an abundant harvest from your righteous actions. 11You will be made rich in everything so that your generosity *will spill over in every direction. Through us* your generosity is at work inspiring praise and thanksgiving to God. 12For this mission will do more than bring food and water to fellow believers in need—it will overflow in a cascade of *praises and* thanksgivings for our God. 13When this mission *reaches Jerusalem and* meets with the approval *of God's people there*, they will give glory to God because your confession of the gospel of the Anointed One led to obedient action and your generous sharing with them and with all exhibited your sincere concern. 14Because of the extraordinary grace of God at work in you, they will pray for you and long for you. 15Praise God for this *incredible, unbelievable,* indescribable gift!

10 I, Paul, appeal to you in the same gentle and loving spirit of the Anointed—*yes,* I who am humble when I'm face-to-face with you but audacious to you *in these letters* when I'm away *(I know what they say)*. 2If it were up to me, I'd rather not have to be so bold when I'm with you, especially with the kind of forceful confidence I can work up when I confront those who have accused us of walking in a worldly way. 3For though we walk in the world, we do not fight according to this world's rules of warfare. 4The weapons of the war we're fighting are not of this world but are powered by God and effective at tearing down the strongholds *erected against His truth.* 5We are demolishing arguments and ideas, every high-and-mighty philosophy that pits itself against the knowledge of *the one true* God. We are taking prisoners of every thought, *every emotion*, and subduing them into obedience to the Anointed One. 6As soon as you choose obedience, we stand ready to punish every act of disobedience.

7Look at what is going on right in front of you. If anyone is convinced that he belongs to the Anointed, then he should think again; even if he belongs to Him, so do we. 8I'm not embarrassed, even if it seems to others I have gone overboard in speaking about the power the Lord has given us to edify and encourage you and not to destroy anyone who strays. 9I don't want it to seem as if I'm simply trying to scare you with my letters; *they are not hollow*. 10For some people are saying, "Paul's letters sound authoritative and strong, but in person he just doesn't measure up—even his speeches don't deliver." 11They need to understand this: whatever we say through our letters when we are away, that is exactly what we will do when we are looking you in the eye.

12For we would never dare to compare ourselves with people who have based their worth on self-commendation. They check themselves against and compare themselves with one another. *It just shows that* they don't have any sense! 13So we will carefully limit our boasting to the extent only of what God has done in and through us, a reach that extends as far as you. 14For it wasn't as if we were overreaching *into someone else's territory* by reaching out to you. Weren't we the first ones to bring you the good news of the Anointed One? 15We carefully put limits on our boasting and avoid taking credit for what others do. But we do hope to see your faith grow so that we can watch our mission really expand all the way to the limits *God has set for us.* 16*The plan includes* taking the good news to people and lands beyond you. We've no interest in or intention of staking claim to other people's accomplishments in their arenas. *As the Scripture says,* 17"The one who boasts must boast in the Lord."* 18Now *let's be clear:* it's not the one who commends himself who is approved; it's the one whom the Lord commends.

Paul's tone changes. Some believe chapters 10–13 may be from his second letter "covered with tears" (2:4). His rebuke and strong warning are meant to lead the Corinthians lovingly to repentance.

11 Please endure a little foolishness on my part; you have come so far with me already. 2*To be completely honest,* I am extremely jealous for you; but it's the same kind of jealousy God has for you. You see, *like an attentive father,* I have pledged your hand in marriage and promised to present you as a pure virgin to *the One who would be your husband,* the Anointed One. 3But now I'm afraid that as that serpent tricked Eve with his wiles,

* 10:17 Jeremiah 9:24

so your *hearts and* minds will be tricked and you will stray from the single-minded love and pure devotion to Him. 4So then, if someone comes along and presents you with a Jesus different from the one we told you about, or if you receive a spirit different from the one gifted *through our Lord Jesus*, or even if you hear a gospel different from the one you heard *through us*; then you're ready to go with it.

5I consider myself in league with the *so-called* great emissaries; I lack nothing. 6Even if I'm not the greatest speaker, I make up for it by what I know *of God* and have proved it time and again to you. 7Was it a sin to humble myself *and serve* you so that you might be lifted up? *Did I wrong you somehow* by instructing you in the good news of God without charge? 8*In a sense,* I robbed other churches by accepting their support just so I could serve you. 9If any need arose while I was with you, I didn't trouble anyone. When the brothers and sisters arrived from Macedonia, they covered all my needs so that I didn't become a burden to any of you; and I plan on keeping it that way. 10*For I tell you,* as the truth of the Anointed One lives in me, I will continue to boast about this all throughout Achaia. 11Why am I doing this? It's not because I don't love you—God knows I do—12-13but I will continue doing what I am doing to cut off any opportunity—*clearly* some are looking for one—for these false emissaries, these *low-down,* untrustworthy preachers, these posers who act as emissaries of the Anointed, to claim that they work under the same terms that we do. 14No wonder *they are so good at it.* Satan himself poses as a messenger of heavenly light, 15so why should we expect less from his servants—*plodding over the earth,* pretending to be ministers of righteousness—but in the end, they'll get what's coming to them.

16So as I said before, please don't mark me a fool; but if you must, then please accept me even as that and give me a little more room to boast. 17What I am saying now is not in character with our Lord but is the bragging of a self-assured fool. 18Just as other fools brag according to their worldly accomplishments, so I, too, will have to boast; 19meanwhile, you—so wise, so tolerant—gladly bear this *kind of* foolishness. 20How easily you tolerate becoming another's slave, having them consume you, letting them rob you *blind,* or allowing them to edge their way past you or slap you in the face. 21Embarrassingly I admit that next to them we must look very weak!

But in whatever way they dare to boast—*remember,* I'm speaking *in character* as a fool—I dare to boast *even more*! 22Are they Hebrews, *God's chosen*? So am I. Are they true Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23Are they servants to the Anointed One, *the Liberating King*? I am even more so! (I can't believe how foolish I sound.) I have worked harder *for God's kingdom*, taken more beatings, been dragged in and out of prisons, and have been eye-to-eye with death. 24Five times I have withstood thirty-nine lashes from Jewish authorities, 25three times I was battered with rods, once I was almost stoned to death, three times I was shipwrecked, and I spent one day and night adrift on the sea. 26I have been on many journeys *and faced the most extreme circumstances*: perilous rivers, violent thieves, and threats by my own people and by the Gentile outsiders alike. I have faced dangers in the city, in the wilderness, and at sea; and danger from spies among our brothers and sisters. 27I have survived toil and hardships, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst without a crumb in sight, bare to the cold. 28As if these external trials weren't enough, there is the daily stress I feel and anxiety I carry for all the churches *under my care.* 29Who is weak without *this arousing* my empathy? Who gets hurt and offended without *this inciting* my burning anger?

30*So as you can see,* if I have to boast, I will, but only in my own weaknesses. 31The God and Father of our Lord Jesus, He who is worthy of eternal blessing, can confirm that I am telling you the truth. 32Once, in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas had his people in the city looking for me in order to arrest me. 33But I crouched in a basket and was lowered out of a window in the city wall, and I narrowly escaped his tight grip.

► Sincerity is a difficult thing to judge. The commitment that people have to a cause can only be determined over time. One test might be: do they persevere through hardships and challenges? In this regard, Paul is without equal. If the cause of Jesus were a fleeting interest or a halfhearted pursuit, then he would have given up after

Paul is speaking of himself in verses 2-5 in an odd, third-person way. He writes cryptically for a purpose: to distract from the fact that, at least for the moment, he is boasting of something other than weakness. In heavenly journeys, Paul has seen amazing sights and heard amazing sounds—sights and sounds no human can or should ever speak of.

But God adds something to keep Paul from being carried away by such ecstasies: He gives His emissary "a thorn in the flesh." Perhaps it is a chronic physical or emotional illness he suffers. Perhaps it is the steady stream of opponents who follow Paul wherever he goes. In God's wisdom, Paul doesn't say because his listeners would likely fixate on whatever problem he has in unhealthy ways. That's what humans do. Still Paul believes that God sent this unwelcome messenger, so he pleads with God three times to remove it. Why just three times? Why doesn't he bombard heaven daily with his pleas? Well, it may be because he knows Jesus prayed three times in the garden for the cup of suffering to be removed. Ultimately Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father, and Paul does too: "Grace is enough, Paul. Grace is enough."

his first beating. But Paul's compassion for those who did not know the beauty of the gospel was stubborn and unyielding. This persecutor-turned-emissary always had his critics. But who could call him insincere?

12 Boasting like this is necessary, but it's *unbecoming and probably* unavailing. *Since you won't hear me any other way,* let me tell you about visions and revelations I received of the Lord.

2Fourteen years ago, there was this man I knew—a believer in the Anointed who was caught up to the third heaven. (Whether this was an in- or out-of-body experience I don't know; only God knows.) 3-4This man was caught up into paradise (*let me say it again,* whether this was an in- or out-of-body experience I don't know; only God knows), and he heard inexpressible words—words a mortal man is forbidden to utter. 5I could brag about such a man; but as for me, I have nothing to brag about outside my own shortcomings. 6So if I want to boast, I won't do so as a fool because I will be speaking the truth. But I will stop there, since I don't want to be credited with anything except exactly what people see and hear from me. 7To *keep me grounded and* stop me from becoming too high and mighty due to the extraordinary character of these revelations, I was given a thorn in the flesh—a nagging nuisance of Satan, a messenger to plague me! 8I begged the Lord three times to liberate me *from its anguish;* 9and *finally* He said to me, "My grace is enough to cover and sustain you. My power is made perfect in weakness." *So ask me about my thorn,* inquire about my weaknesses, and I will gladly go on and on—*I would rather stake my claim in these* and have the power of the Anointed One at home within me. 10I am at peace *and even take pleasure* in any weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and afflictions for the sake of the Anointed because when I am at my weakest, He makes me strong.

11I have become a fool, but you drove me to it. Why didn't you stick up for me? I may not be much, but you could have shown me the same respect as you did the other *so-called* great emissaries.* I am not inferior to them in the least. 12Miracles, wonders, and signs were all performed right before your eyes, proving I am who I say, a true emissary *of Jesus.* 13With the exception of not asking you to shoulder the burden of my care, I have treated you no differently from any other churches. Forgive me for wronging you *by not charging for my services*!

14Now listen, for the third time I am ready to travel to you, and *once again* I will not burden you because there's nothing of yours that I want: the only thing I want is you. You see, it's not right for children to have to save up for their parents because it's the parents' job to care for their children. 15I would happily spend until I had

* 12:11 Literally, apostles

nothing left if it was for you. But just because I love you more, should you love me less? 16Because even though you didn't have to lift a finger for me, *lies abound that* I deceived you by some clever act. 17Did I cheat you somehow through one of the coworkers I sent your way*? If any of them defrauded you, I'd like to see it.* 18I was the one who insisted Titus come to you with the brother I sent along. Did Titus take advantage of you in some way? Didn't we work in the same spirit and follow the same direction?

19I hope you don't think that all this time we've been defending ourselves to you. We come as the voice of the Anointed; God will judge whether all our work has been useful in building you up, beloved. 20*And quite honestly*, I am afraid that when I come, we may both be disappointed with what we find; in my fear, *my thoughts go from bad to worse—into a drama* of friction, rivalry, fevered tempers and fists, selfishness, slander, defamation, pride, and complete chaos. 21I am worried that when I come to visit that my God will humble me *somehow* before you, that I will have to grieve over all those who have sinned before and then refused to turn away* from their addictions to impure practices, immoral sex, and reckless perversions.

13 This is my third trip to your city and community. *As the Scripture says,* "Every charge must be confirmed by two or three witnesses."* 2As I said before on my second visit, I say now again while absent. Consider this an advance warning, *if you wish,* to those of you still caught up in your old sins and to all the rest as well: when I come the next time, I will not spare anyone *who is out of order*. 3You asked to see evidence that *the power of* the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* is at work in me. *Well, you will see it* because He won't be weak in dealing with you. Instead, He will do great things in you. 4Now it's true that He was crucified in weakness, but *it's also true that* He lives by God's power. For we *who belong to Him* are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by God's power for you.

► Weakness looks like failure in the eyes of the world, but for Paul weakness is an avenue to share in Jesus' death and, therefore, in His life as well. The challenge is to remain faithful even in the difficult times, even when there is no one left to provide support. It is in these times that God's power and comfort are most evident. This call to embrace weakness and suffering is difficult. It is normal to run from pain. But the examples of Jesus in the Gospels, of Paul in his letters, and of David in the psalms are of finding God's strength in times of weakness.

5Examine yourselves. Check your faith! Are you really in the faith? Do you still not know that Jesus the Anointed is in you?—unless, of course, you have failed the test. 6Surely you will realize we have not failed the test, 7but we pray to God that you will stay away from evil. *What's important is* not whether we appear to have passed the test, but that you do what is right *and act honorably*, even if it appears that we have failed. 8For there's nothing we can do to oppose the truth; all we can do is align ourselves with it. 9You see, we celebrate when we are weak but you are strong. Our prayer is *simple*: that you may be *whole and* complete. 10*How I hope* I am saving you by writing this to you in advance; this letter will spare me from using the Lord's authority to come down on you when I arrive. His intention in giving me this authority is to build you up, not tear you down.

11Finally, brothers and sisters, keep rejoicing and repair whatever is broken. Encourage each other, think as one, and live at peace; and God, *the Author* of love and peace, will remain with you. 12Greet each other with a holy kiss, *as brothers and sisters.* 13All the saints *here with me* send you their greeting.

14May the grace of the Lord Jesus the Anointed, the love of God *the Father,* and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remain with you all. [Amen.]*

Paul ends his letters as he begins them, praying that grace be with those who read this letter. From first to last, the life of faith is framed by grace.

* 12:21 Literally, repent * 13:1 Deuteronomy 19:15 * 13:14 The earliest manuscripts omit this word.

GALATIANS

Letter to the churches of Galatia

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

In the decades following Jesus' death and resurrection, the churches were locked in an extremely difficult dispute that had far-reaching implications. The earliest followers of Jesus were mostly Jews who recognized Him as the Liberator for Israel. Some of them taught that all believers—both Jews and non-Jews—had to observe Jewish law in order to enter into the benefits and community created through God's actions in Jesus. These people were called "Judaizers" because they insisted that non-Jews live like Jews. Paul writes Galatians to counter this threat to Christian liberty. The tone of this letter is harsh because Paul believes the very truth of the gospel and his ministry are in jeopardy. Since circumcision is the act that initiated non-Jews into Jewish faith, it becomes a symbol for the whole controversy. In this brief book, Paul lays the groundwork for what becomes the orthodox understanding of salvation; namely, that Jews and non-Jews alike enter into a positive relationship with God by grace through faith, not through observing the law.

Paul begins the letter by insisting that his call as an emissary came directly from Jesus, not any human institution. Apparently some were criticizing him, not only for what they thought was a deficient gospel, but also for lacking credentials. So Paul responds by recounting his own story of how he persecuted the church until he experienced a revelation of Jesus. He sees his call largely in prophetic terms and begins his ministry without any kind of human blessing or instruction. When Paul does present his understanding of the good news years later to the Jerusalem leaders, they affirm his message and confirm his call as the apostle to the Gentiles. But this does not put an end to the controversy. As this letter shows, it is played out again and again in the churches.

Paul argues his case from both the experience of the Galatians and the Hebrew Scriptures. The Galatians have received the Spirit, not because they kept the law, but because they have received the gospel in faith. Likewise he explains that in Scripture faith has always been the way Abraham and his spiritual children have related to God and entered into His promises. Therefore those who put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior become the true sons and daughters of Abraham.

1 Paul, an emissary* commissioned directly by Jesus the Anointed One and God the Father (who raised Him from the dead)—not *(as some claim)* an agent of men or any person—[2]and all the brothers and sisters with me to you, the churches of Galatia.

[3]May the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed live in you; [4]*He is the very Savior* who rescues us from this present, *perverse* age dominated by evil by giving His life according to our Father's will to deal with our sins. [5]May God's glorious name forever receive honor. Amen.

► From the opening address, it is clear that Paul is angry with what is going on among the churches of Galatia. He feels compelled to defend himself from opponents who are attacking his call as Jesus' emissary. Paul counters the attack by distancing himself from any human institution: he was not called by any church or committee. God the Father and the Lord Jesus commissioned Paul directly to be the emissary to the nations.

[6]*Frankly* I am stunned. I cannot believe that you have abandoned God so quickly—even after He called you through the grace of the Anointed One—and have fallen for a different gospel. [7]Actually there is only one true gospel of the Anointed, and you—because of divisive prodding by others—are accepting a distorted version which is not the gospel at all!

People are being deceived with an imitation of the true gospel, and they have bought into it. The words are nothing but twisted lies.

[8]No matter the source of the false gospel, even if it is preached by us or a heavenly messenger, *ignore it.* May those *who add to or subtract from the gospel of Jesus* be *eternally* cursed! [9]Listen again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than what you have accepted, may he find himself cursed!

[10]Do you think I care about the approval of men or about the approval of God? Do you think I am on a mission to please people? If I am still *spinning my wheels* trying to please men, then there is no way I can be a servant of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.*

[11]Know this, dear brothers and sisters: the good news I brought to you isn't *the latest in fiction or* the product of some creative mind. [12]It is not a legend I learned or one that has been passed down from person to person, *ear to ear*. I was gifted with this message as Jesus the Anointed revealed Himself *miraculously to me.* [13]Surely you are familiar with my personal history, with my dedication to the teachings and traditions of Judaism. I persecuted the church of God—in fact, I meant to destroy it. [14]I excelled in the teachings of Judaism far above other Jewish leaders, and I was zealous to practice the ways of our ancestors. [15]But God—who set me apart even before birth and called me by His grace—chose, to His great delight, [16]to reveal His Son in me so I could tell His story among the outsider nations. I didn't confer with anyone right away, [17]nor did I go to those who were already emissaries* in Jerusalem. I went straight to Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

[18]After *living this adventurous mission for* three years, I made my way to Jerusalem and spent 15 days with Cephas, *whom you know as Peter.* [19]But I didn't see any emissary* other than James, our Lord's brother. [20](You can be certain that what I am offering you *is an authentic account.* Before God, it's the whole truth—I wouldn't lie.) [21]Later I journeyed to Syria and Cilicia; [22]and *since I had spent so little time in* Judea among the churches of the Anointed One, no one there could pick me out of a crowd. [23]But stories of my call and mission preceded me: "The very man who wanted to kill us all is now preaching the faith he once labored to destroy." [24]And so they praised God for the miracle He did in my life.

2 [1-2]As a result of a revelation, I returned to Jerusalem 14 years later; and *this time* Barnabas and Titus accompanied me. *When I arrived,* I shared the *exact* gospel that I preach to the outsiders. I first shared God's truth privately with those who were people of influence and leadership because I thought *if they did not embrace the freedom of my good news, then* any work *I had done for Jesus here* and any in the past would be spoiled.

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:17 Literally, apostles * 1:19 Literally, apostle

One of the great stories in the Bible is the transformation of Saul, the Pharisee, from a persecutor of the church to the greatest missionary that history has ever witnessed. Seldom does Paul relate that story in his letters. He doesn't need to because he usually does that in person when he is planting a church. But on this occasion, as he defends his call and the gospel, he retells a bit of his personal history to underscore the complete metamorphosis that has taken place in his life. In his former life, Paul admits—quite painfully, no doubt—that he tried to destroy this movement. Borrowing language from the prophets, Paul narrates how God unveiled to him the truth about Jesus. At just the right moment, even while Paul was an active enemy, God revealed His Son to Paul and called him to be heaven's emissary to the nations. Paul immediately stopped his campaign against the church, which was just beginning to emerge from its Jewish roots and spread to the Gentile nations.

3*Listen carefully*. None of the Jerusalem leaders insisted that Titus be circumcised, although he is Greek. 4Some people who were pretending to be our brothers and sisters were brought in to spy on the freedom we enjoy in the Anointed One, Jesus—*their agenda was clear:* they wanted to enslave us. 5But we didn't give in to them. We didn't entertain their thoughts for a minute! We resisted them so the true gospel—*and not some counterfeit*—would continue to be available to you.

6It makes no difference to me (or to God for that matter) if people have power or influence. God doesn't choose favorites *among His children*. Even the so-called pillars *of the church* didn't contribute anything new to my understanding *of the good news*. 7But it quickly became obvious to them *what God was doing:* He had entrusted me to carry the good news to the uncircumcised, just as Peter was called to preach to those who were circumcised. 8God was at work in the ministry of Peter, as emissary* to the Jews, and was also *moving and* working with me in my ministry to the outsider nations.

9When James, Cephas *(whom you know as Peter)*, and John—three men purported to be pillars *among the Jewish believers*—saw that God's favor was upon me *to fulfill this calling,* they welcomed and endorsed* both Barnabas and me. *They agreed that our ministries would work as two hands,* theirs *advancing the mission of God* among the Jews and ours toward the outsider nations, *all with the same message of redemption.* 10*In parting,* they requested we always remember to care for the poor *among us*, which was something I was eager to do.

11But when Cephas came to Antioch, *there was a problem.* I got in his face and exposed him *in front of everyone*. He was clearly wrong. 12*Here's what was going on:* before certain people from James arrived, Cephas used to share meals with the Gentile outsiders. And then, after they showed up, Cephas suddenly became aloof and distanced himself from the outsiders because he was afraid of those believers who thought circumcision was necessary.

► Since Christianity arises from Judaism, some traveling preachers from Jerusalem think that Jewish believers must remain true to Jewish rules regarding circumcision, Sabbath observance, and kosher food. If they rigorously follow the food rules, then Jewish believers are not supposed to share a meal with "unclean" Gentile outsiders, as Peter has been doing in Antioch. They advocate that Gentile outsiders need to follow Jewish ways and practices to become full members of the family of God. Paul—and the Jerusalem council (Acts 15)—strongly reject this. The apostle argues that it is only the faithfulness of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit that serve as the foundation of the new covenant and as the entrance into the people of God.

13The rest of the Jewish believers followed his lead, including Barnabas! Their

* 2:8 Literally, apostle * 2:9 Literally, gave the right hand of fellowship

hypocritical behavior was so obvious—
14their actions were not at all consistent
with everything the good news *of our*
Lord represents. So I approached Cephas
and told him in plain sight of everyone:
"If you, a Jew, have lived like the Gentile
outsiders and not like the Jews, then how
can you turn around and urge the out-
siders to start living like Jews?" 15We are
natural-born Jews, not sinners from the
godless nations. 16But we know that no
one is made right *with God* by meeting
the demands of the law. It is only through
the faithfulness of Jesus* the Anointed
that salvation is even possible. This is
why we put faith in Jesus the Anointed:
so we will be put right with God. It's His
faithfulness—not works prescribed by the
law—that puts us in right standing with
God because no one will be acquitted and
declared "right" for doing what the law
demands. 17Even though we are seeking
a right relationship *with God* through the
Anointed, *the fact is* we have been found
out. We are sinners. But does that mean
the Anointed is the one responsible for
our sins? Absolutely not! 18If I reconstruct
something I have worked so hard to
destroy, then I prove myself a sinner.

► So why all this personal history? Paul thinks it is useful because the people preaching the false gospel in Galatia claim to be operating under the authority of some of the followers of Jesus from Jerusalem, the mother church. Paul doesn't have their pedigree and, according to them, doesn't deserve the rank he claims as the emissary to the nations. They say that not only is Paul deficient, but his message is, too, because it doesn't bring outsiders to follow the law. So Paul goes toe-to-toe with them, defending not only his call but also his message. The good news he preaches comes directly from the risen Jesus and is confirmed by the Jerusalem leaders.

19The law has provided the means *to end*
my dependence on it for righteousness, and
so I died to the law. Now I *have found the*
freedom to truly live for God. 20I have been
crucified with the Anointed One—I am
no longer alive—but the Anointed is living
in me; and whatever life I have left in this
failing body I live by the faithfulness of
God's Son, the One who loves me and gave
His body *on the cross* for me. 21I can't dis-
miss God's grace, *and I won't.* If being right
with God depends on how we measure up
to the law, then the Anointed's sacrifice *on*
the cross was the most tragic waste in all
of history!

3 Galatians, don't act like fools! Has
someone cast a spell over you? Did
you miss the crucifixion of Jesus the
Anointed that was reenacted right in front
of your eyes? 2Tell me this: Did the Holy
Spirit come upon you because you lived
according to the law? Or was it because
you heard *His message of grace* through
faith? 3Are you so foolish? Do you think
you can perfect something God's Spirit
started with any human effort? 4Have you
suffered so greatly for nothing—if it was
indeed for nothing? 5You have experienced
the Spirit He gave you *in powerful ways.*
Miracle after miracle has occurred *right*
before your eyes in this community, so tell
me: did all this happen because you have
kept certain provisions of God's law, or
was it because you heard *the gospel* and
accepted it by faith?

► Paul primarily focuses on the efficacy of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of the church and of a right relationship with God, but he also correlates this with the presence of the Spirit. If the Spirit is working among the outsiders, it shows that they aren't really "outsiders" when it comes to membership in the people of God. Paul supports this by showing how the presence of the Spirit is none other than the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. However, the Spirit only came through Abraham's descendant, that is, the new covenant with God is mediated by Jesus and the Spirit, not the law.

6*You remember Abraham.* Scripture tells us,
"Abraham believed God *and trusted in His*

* 2:16 Often translated "faith in Jesus."

promises, so God counted it to his favor as righteousness."* 7Know this: people who trust in God are the true sons and daughters of Abraham. 8For it was foretold to us in the Scriptures that God would set the Gentile nations right by faith when He told Abraham, "I will bless all nations through you."* 9So those who have faith *in Him* are blessed along with Abraham, our faithful ancestor.

10*Listen,* whoever seeks *to be righteous* by following *certain* works of the law actually falls under the law's curse. I'm giving it to you straight from Scripture *because it is as true now as when it was written:* "Cursed is everyone who doesn't live by and do all that is written in the law."* 11Now it is absolutely clear that no one is made right with God through the law because *the prophet Habakkuk told us*, "By faith the just will obtain life."* 12The law is not *the same thing as life* formed by faith. In fact, *you are warned against this when God says,* "The one who observes My laws will live by them."* *I am trying to tell you that* 13the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. It was stated *in the Scriptures*, "Everyone who hangs on a tree is cursed *by God*."* 14*This is what God had in mind all along:* the blessing He gave to Abraham might extend to all nations through the Anointed One, Jesus; and we are the beneficiaries of this promise of the Spirit that comes *only* through faith.

15My dear brothers and sisters, here's a real-life example I can give you: *With a last will and testament, when all the property is accounted for,* the document is signed, witnessed, and notarized; and afterward no one can make changes to it. 16*In a similar way*, *God's* promises established *a binding agreement* with Abraham and his offspring. *In the Scriptures,* it is carefully stated, "and to your descendant" (meaning one), not "and to your descendants"* (meaning many). Therefore, *in these covenant promises, God was* not *referring* to every son and daughter *born into Abraham's family* but to the Anointed One *to come*. 17What this all means is that the law given *to Israel* comes along some 430 years after the promise *made to Abraham;* so it does not invalidate the covenant God previously agreed to *or in any way* do away with His promise. 18You see, if the law became the sole basis for the inheritance, then it would put God in the position of breaking a covenant because He had promised it to Abraham.

► Throughout this argument, one critical question remains: why would God give the law if it would not bring His people into a right standing with Him? Couldn't God have found a better way of doing this? It isn't as if the law is a bad thing or a mistake that God needs to correct. It has a good purpose, but a limited one. It never supplants God's promise to Abraham. Rather, the law keeps sin in check until the time is right for the saving justice that comes through faith in Jesus. The law serves as a tutor or a schoolmaster, revealing our great need for salvation and pointing everyone toward Jesus.

19*Now you're asking yourselves,* "So why *did God give us* the law?" God commanded His heavenly messengers to deliver it into the hand of a mediator for this reason: to help us rein in our sins until the Offspring, about whom the promise was made *in the first place*, would come. 20A mediator represents more than one, but God is *only* one. 21*"So," you ask*, "does the law contradict God's promise?" Absolutely not! Never was there written a law that could lead to *resurrection and* life; if there had been, then surely we could have experienced saving righteousness through keeping the law. *But we haven't.* 22Scripture has subjected the whole world to sin's power so that the faithful obedience of Jesus the Anointed might extend God's promises to everyone who has faith. 23Before faith came on the scene, the law did its best to keep us in line, restraining us until the faith that was to come was fully revealed. 24So then, the law was like a tutor, assigned to *train us and* point us to the Anointed, so that we will be acquitted *of all wrong* and made right by faith. 25But now that *true* faith has come, we have no need for a tutor. 26It is your faith in the Anointed Jesus that makes all of you children of God 27because all of you who have been initiated into the Anointed One through the ceremonial washing of

* 3:6 Genesis 15:6 * 3:8 Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 * 3:10 Deuteronomy 27:26 * 3:11 Habakkuk 2:4
* 3:12 Leviticus 18:5 * 3:13 Deuteronomy 21:23 * 3:16 Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

baptism* have put Him on. 28It makes no difference whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a freeman, a man or a woman, because in Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* you are all one. 29Since you belong to Him *and are now subject to His power,* you are the descendant of Abraham and the heir *of God's glory* according to the promise.

4 Listen. I am going to explain *how this all works:* When a minor inherits an estate *from his parents*, although he is the owner of everything, he is the same as a slave. 2Until the day set by his father, the minor is subject to the authorities or guardians *whom his father put in charge*. 3It is like that with us; there was a time when we were like children held under the elemental powers of this world. 4When the right time arrived, God sent His Son into this world (born of a woman, subject to the law) 5to free those who, *just like Him,* were subject to the law. Ultimately He wanted us all to be adopted as sons and daughters. 6Because you are now part of God's family, He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts; *and the Spirit* calls out, "Abba, Father." 7You no longer have to live as a slave because you are a child *of God*. And since you are His child, God guarantees an inheritance *is waiting* for you.

"Abba" is an address spoken by children to their fathers expressing intimacy and respect. It would not be out-of-the-question to think of it as "Dad," or "Daddy."

8During the time before you knew God, you were slaves to powers that are not gods at all. 9But now, when you are just beginning to know *the one True* God—actually, *He is showing how completely* He knows you—how can you turn back to weak and worthless *idols made by men, icons of these* spiritual powers? Haven't you endured enough bondage to these *breathless* idols? 10You are observing particular days, months, *festival* seasons, and years; 11you have me worried that I may have wasted my time laboring among you.

12Brothers and sisters, I have become one of you. Now *it's your turn*—become as I am. You have never wronged me. 13Do you remember the first time I preached the good news to you? I was sick, and 14I know my illness was a hardship to you, but you never drew back from me or scorned me. You cared for me as if I were a heavenly messenger of God, possibly as well as if I were the Anointed Jesus Himself! *Don't you remember?* 15What has happened to your *joy and* blessing? I tell you, *the place was so thick with love that* if it were possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and handed them to me. 16And now, do I stand as your enemy because I tried to bless you with the truth? 17*I'll tell you what these false brothers and sisters are counting on:* your attention. They are ravenous for it. They are not acting *honorably or* in your best interests. They want to keep you away *from the good news we proclaim* so they can have you all to themselves. 18Listen, there's nothing wrong with zeal when you're zealous for *God's* good purpose. And what's more, you don't have to wait for me to be with you to seek the good. 19My dear children, I feel the pains of birth upon me again, and I will continue in labor for you until the Anointed One is formed completely in you. 20I wish I were there. This letter is really harsh, yet I am really perplexed by you.

21*Now it's your turn to* instruct me. All of you who want to live by the rules of the law, are you really listening to and heeding what the law teaches? *Listen to this:* 22it's recorded *in the Scripture* that Abraham was the father of two sons. One son was born to a slave woman, *Hagar,* and the other son was born to a free woman, *Abraham's wife, Sarah*. 23The slave woman's son was born through only natural means, but the free woman's son was born through a promise *from God*. 24I'm using an allegory. *Here's the picture:* these two women stand for two covenants. The first *represents the covenant God made* on Mount Sinai—this is Hagar, who gives birth to children of slavery. 25Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and she stands for the Jerusalem *we know* now. She has lived in slavery along with her children. 26But there is a Jerusalem *we know* above. She is free, and she is our mother. 27*Isaiah* wrote,

> Be glad, you who feel sterile and never gave birth!
> Raise a joyful shout, childless woman, who never went into labor!
> For the barren woman produces many children,
> more than the one who has a husband.*

* 3:27 Literally, immersion, in a rite of initiation and purification

* 4:27 Isaiah 54:1

28So you *see now,* brothers and sisters,
you are children of the promise like Isaac.
29The *slave's* son, born through only what
flesh could conceive, *resented and* persecuted the one born *into the freedom* of the
Spirit. *The slave's son picked at Isaac,* just
as you are being picked at now. 30So what
does the Scripture say? "Throw out the
slave and her son, for the slave's son will
never have a share of the inheritance coming to the son of the free woman."* 31So,
brothers and sisters, we are not children of
the slave woman, but *sons and daughters*
of the free.

5 So stand strong for our freedom!
The Anointed One freed us so we
wouldn't spend one more day under
the yoke of slavery, *trapped under the law.*

2Listen because I, Paul, am going to
make this message very clear *so it cannot be misunderstood:* if you undergo the rite
of circumcision, then all that the Anointed
accomplished will be lost on you. 3And
understand this: if you choose to be circumcised, then you will oblige yourself to
do every single rule of the law *for the rest of your life.* 4You, *and anyone else* who seeks
to be on the right side of God through the
law, have effectively been cut off from the
Anointed, *circumcised from grace,* and cast
off from the favor of God. 5We, on the other
hand, *continue to live* through the Spirit's
power and wait confidently in the hope
that things will be put right through faith.
6Here's the thing: in Jesus the Anointed
whether you are circumcised or not makes
no difference. What makes a difference is
faith energized by love.

7Who has impeded your progress
and kept you from obeying the truth?
You were off to such a good start. 8*I know for certain* the pressure isn't coming from
God. He keeps calling you *to the truth.*
9*You know what they say,* "Just a little yeast
causes all the dough to rise," *so even the slightest detour from the truth will take you to a destination you do not desire.* 10*Despite this,* I'm confident because the Lord *reassures me that* you will *truly hear and* take
my message to heart. Besides, *I also know that* these troublemakers, whoever they
are, will answer to God and be judged
accordingly. 11As for me, brothers and
sisters, if I continue to preach circumcision—*as these agitators claim*—then why
do I still face persecution? *If I were to preach a compromised version of the good news,* then the scandal of the cross would
come to an end. 12I really wish that these
people who weigh you down with corrupt
counsel would mutilate themselves!

13Brothers and sisters, God has called
you to freedom! *Hear the call,* and do
not *spoil this gift by* using your liberty to
engage in what your flesh desires; instead,
use it to serve each other *as Jesus taught* through love. 14For the whole law comes
down to this one instruction: "Love your
neighbor as yourself,"* so 15why all this
vicious gnawing on each other? If you are
not careful, you will find you've eaten each
other alive!

16Here's my instruction: walk in the
Spirit, and let the Spirit bring order to
your life. If you do, you will never give in
to your selfish and sinful cravings. 17For
everything the flesh desires goes against
the Spirit, and everything the Spirit desires
goes against the flesh. There is a constant
battle raging between them that prevents
you from doing *the good* you want to do.
18But when you are led by the Spirit, you
are no longer subject to the law.

19It's clear that our flesh entices us
into practicing some of its most heinous
acts: participating in corrupt sexual
relationships, impurity, unbridled lust,
20idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, arguing, jealousy, anger, selfishness, contentiousness,
division, 21envy *of others' good fortune,*
drunkenness, drunken revelry, and other
shameful vices *that plague humankind.* I
told you this clearly before, and I only tell
you again *so there is no room for confusion:*
those who give in to these ways will not
inherit the kingdom of God.

► Paul has been preaching about the call of God to freedom, and so he now spells it out: we are done with the demands of the law; now we are free to live in the Spirit and to be truly right with God. As free people, the Spirit gives us the characteristics of Jesus; we, too, can freely love in joy and peace. We can have patience along with kindness and faithfulness that can only come from the Father. We can reflect the goodness of God while being gentle in operating with self-control. For those who follow Him and live in the Spirit, these characteristics

* 4:30 Genesis 21:10 * 5:14 Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 7:12; 22:39-40

or fruits are a gift from God. As we grow in the faith, we find that we belong to God and can walk daily in the Spirit.

22The Holy Spirit produces a different kind of fruit: *unconditional* love, joy, peace, patience, kindheartedness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness, and self-control. You won't find any law opposed to fruit like this. 24Those of us who belong to the Anointed One have crucified our old lives and put to death the flesh and all the lusts and desires that plague us.

25*Now* since we have chosen to walk with the Spirit, let's keep each step in perfect sync with God's Spirit. 26This will happen when we set aside our self-interests *and work together to create true community* instead of a culture consumed by provocation, *pride,* and envy.

6 My spiritual brothers and sisters, if one *of our faithful* has fallen into a trap and is snared by sin, *don't stand idle and watch his demise*. Gently restore him, being careful not to step into your own snare. 2Shoulder each other's burdens, and then you will live as the law of the Anointed teaches us. 3Don't *take this opportunity to* think you are better than those who slip because you aren't; then you *become the fool and* deceive even yourself. 4Examine your own works so that if you are proud, it will be because of your own accomplishments and not someone else's. 5Each person has his or her own burden to bear *and story to write*.

6Remember to share what you have with your mentor in the Word.

7Make no mistake: God can't be mocked. *What you give is what you get.* What you sow, you harvest. 8Those who sow *seeds* into their flesh will only harvest destruction *from their sinful nature*. But those who sow *seeds* into the Spirit shall harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. 9May we never tire of doing what is good and right before our Lord because in His season we shall bring in a great harvest if we can just persist. 10So seize any opportunity *the Lord gives you* to do good things *and be a blessing* to everyone, especially those within our faithful family.

Following in the path of the Spirit is not a chore; instead it opens us up to experiencing the life God has for us.

11Look at how giant these letters are now that I am writing with my own hand!

12The troublemakers who are putting pressure on you to be circumcised are trying to impress the flesh. They want to avoid the persecution that comes from preaching the cross of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.* 13But even those who receive circumcision can't keep the law—*although they think they can*—and they hope to influence which way you go with your own skin so they can have bragging rights over your flesh.

14May I never put anything above the cross of our Lord Jesus the Anointed. Through Him, the world has been crucified to me and I to this world. 15Let me be clear: circumcision *won't save you*—uncircumcision won't either *for that matter*—for both amount to nothing. God's new creation *is what counts, and it* counts for everything. 16May peace and mercy come to all of you who live by this rule and to the Israel of God.

17In the future, don't let anyone cause trouble for me because I bear in my body the marks that wounded Jesus.

18May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, infuse your spirit *with His,* brothers and sisters. Amen.

EPHESIANS

Letter to the church in Ephesus

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

During Paul's time, Ephesus was one of the great cities of the world. It was a wealthy commercial seaport on the Cayster River, not far from the Aegean Sea in what is western Turkey today. The Ephesians were a proud people; their city was home of the ancient temple of Diana (a goddess known to the Greeks as Artemis), one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The city was immersed in the magical arts, a kind of religion that promised people protection from fate, demons, curses, and incantations. This is why Paul's letter is filled with powerful language and promises that Jesus has defeated them through His death and resurrection.

According to Luke, Paul spent nearly three years in Ephesus planting and nurturing a church there, so it seems a bit odd that the letter itself is so generic. Unlike most of Paul's other letters, Ephesians lacks a personal touch, a personal message to specific members of the church at Ephesus. There's good evidence to suggest that Paul intended this letter to be circulated among a number of churches in Asia, but eventually it came to rest in and was identified with the city of Ephesus. It seems clear from the themes and content that Ephesians is not a letter for any particular church; it's a letter for every church in every age.

Writing from his prison cell, possibly in Rome, Paul pictures all liberated believers occupying a new spiritual location he calls "the heavenly realms." In this place, they enjoy all the spiritual blessings God has prearranged for them, but they also wait for the next act in the drama of redemption. They have already been raised to live in this new reality, but the world is still not yet what it will be when the Anointed One, the Liberating King, comes again. Even now Jesus is positioned at God's right hand, reigning over the spiritual powers the Ephesians fear most; so Paul assures them that as they belong to Jesus and take up the full armor of God, they have nothing to fear.

1 Paul, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed, *directly commissioned as His representative* by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus]* faithful in Jesus the Anointed.

2May God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed surround you with grace and peace.

This letter begins with praise and thanksgiving to

God the Father, who blesses us
Jesus, who redeems us
the Holy Spirit, who seals us.

3Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus the Anointed One, who grants us every spiritual blessing in these heavenly realms *where we live* in the Anointed—*not because of anything we have done, but because of what He has done for us.* 4God chose us to be in a relationship with Him even before He laid out plans for this world; He wanted us to live holy lives characterized by love, *free from sin,* and blameless before Him. 5He destined us to be adopted as His children through *the covenant* Jesus the Anointed *inaugurated in His sacrificial life.* This was His pleasure and His will *for us.* 6Ultimately God is the one worthy of praise for showing us His grace; *He is merciful and marvelous,* freely giving us these gifts in His Beloved. 7*Visualize this:* His blood *freely flowing down the cross,* setting us free! We are forgiven for our sinful ways by the richness of His grace, 8which He has poured all over us. With all wisdom and insight, 9He has enlightened us to the great mystery *at the center* of His will. With immense pleasure, He laid out His intentions *through Jesus,* 10a plan that will climax when the time is right *as He returns to create order and unity*—both in heaven and on earth—when all things are brought together under the Anointed's *royal rule.* In Him 11we stand to inherit even more. As His heirs, we are predestined *to play a key role* in His *unfolding* purpose that is energizing everything to conform to His will. 12As a result, we—the first to place our hope in the Anointed One—will live in a way to bring Him glory and praise. 13Because you, too, have heard the word of truth—the good news of your salvation—and because you believed *in the One who is truth*, your lives are marked with His seal. This is *none other than* the Holy Spirit who was promised 14as the guarantee toward the inheritance we are to receive when He frees and rescues all who belong to Him. To God be all praise and glory!

► This letter begins with praise and thanksgiving offered to God. Paul celebrates all the spiritual "blessings" available to all believers in Jesus, the Anointed One. This means that He is the one through whom God has acted to rescue the world. But more than that, He is the Lord to whom we belong and the spiritual place where all believers are presently located. In God's purpose, heaven has come down to where we live so that we now occupy this wonderful realm where salvation is at work, where God's truth and beauty are a reality, and where we wait as the rest of His plan is worked out.

15This is why, when I heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus that is present in your community and of your great love for all God's people, 16I haven't stopped thanking Him for you. I am continually speaking to Him on your behalf in my prayers. *Here's what I say:*

> 17God of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, Father of Glory: *I call out to You on behalf of Your people.* Give them minds ready to receive wisdom and revelation so they will truly know You. 18Open the eyes of their hearts, *and let the light of Your truth flood in.* Shine Your light on the hope You are calling them to embrace. Reveal to them the glorious riches You are preparing as their inheritance. 19Let them see the full extent of Your power that is at work in those of us who believe, and may it be done according to Your might and power.

Friends, it is this same might and *resurrection* power that 20He used in the Anointed One to raise Him from the dead and to position Him at His right hand in heaven. *There is nothing over Him.* 21He's above all rule, authority, power, and dominion; over every name invoked, *over*

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:1 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

every title bestowed in this age and the next. 22God has placed all things beneath His feet and anointed Him as the head over all things for His church. 23This church is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

► Often in his letters, Paul records his prayers for his churches. He is constantly talking with God about those he considers his spiritual children. He prays that God will grant them wisdom, knowledge, and great power. This is the same power that was at work when God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him in heaven. Ultimately Paul knows all powers have been subjected to Jesus, the God-man, and He is destined to be head over all creation. In the resurrection of Jesus, the ultimate redemption of the cosmos has begun, and the church is the first act of God's glorious drama.

2 As for you, *don't you remember how you used to just exist? Corpses,* dead *in life,* buried by transgressions, 2wandering the course of this *perverse* world. *You were the offspring* of the prince of the power of air—*oh, how he owned you,* just as he still controls those living in disobedience. *I'm not talking about the outsiders alone;* 3we were all guilty of falling headlong for the persuasive passions of this world; we all have had our fill of indulging the flesh and mind, *obeying impulses to follow perverse thoughts motivated by dark powers.* As a result, our natural inclinations led us to be children of wrath, just like the rest of humankind.

4But God, with the *unfathomable* richness of His love and mercy focused on us, 5united us with the Anointed One and infused our lifeless souls with life—even though we were buried under mountains of sin—and saved us by His grace. 6He raised us up with Him and seated us in the heavenly realms with *our beloved* Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King.* 7*He did this for a reason:* so that for all eternity we will stand as a living testimony to the incredible riches of His grace and kindness that He freely gives to us by uniting us with Jesus the Anointed. 8-9For it's by God's grace that you have been saved. You receive it through faith. It was not *our plan or* our effort. It is God's gift, *pure and simple.* You didn't earn it, *not one of us did,* so don't go around bragging *that you must have done something amazing.* 10For we are the product of His hand, *heaven's poetry etched on lives,* created in the Anointed, Jesus, to accomplish the good works God arranged long ago.

► The relationship between faith and works is often misunderstood. Some think that salvation is God's reward for good deeds. If that's true, then it can't possibly be a gift. If it were a reward, then heaven would be a place where people might compare notes on what they did to make it through the gates. But Paul is confident in the truth of the gospel. The truth is that salvation is God's gift through Jesus. Grace and faith make salvation real in us. When we are transformed by grace, then we become His new creation and begin to live out the good works He has planned for us. Works, then, aren't the cause of salvation; they are its result. To put it another way, works aren't the means of salvation; they are its presence.

11So never forget how you used to be. Those of you born as outsiders *to Israel* were *outcasts*, branded "the uncircumcised" by those who bore the sign of the covenant in their flesh, a sign made with human hands. 12You had absolutely no connection to the Anointed; you were strangers, separated from God's people. You were aliens to the covenant they had with God; you were hopelessly stranded without God in a *fractured* world. 13But now, because of Jesus the Anointed *and His sacrifice, all of that has changed.* God gathered you who were so far away and brought you near to Him by the *royal* blood of the Anointed, *our Liberating King.*

14He is the embodiment of our peace, *sent once and for all* to take down the great barrier of hatred and hostility that has divided us so that we can be one. 15He offered His body *on the sacrificial altar* to bring an end to the law's ordinances and

dictations *that separated Jews from the outside nations. His desire was* to create in His body one new humanity from the two *opposing groups*, thus creating peace. 16*Effectively* the cross becomes God's means to kill off the hostility *once and for all* so that He is able to reconcile them both to God in this one new body.

17The Great Preacher of peace *and love* came for you, and *His voice* found those of you who were near and those who were far away. 18By Him both have access to the Father in one Spirit. 19And so you are no longer called outcasts and wanderers but citizens with God's people, *members of God's holy family,* and residents of His household. 20You are being built on a *solid* foundation: *the message* of the prophets and *the voices* of God's chosen emissaries* with Jesus, the Anointed Himself, the *precious* cornerstone. 21The building is joined together *stone by stone—all of us chosen and sealed* in Him, rising up to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22In Him you are being built together, creating a *sacred* dwelling place *among you* where God can live in the Spirit.

► For Paul there are two kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles, or to put it another way, insiders and outsiders. The Prince of Peace is establishing peace where division and hostility once ruled unchallenged. In the Jerusalem temple, a stone wall separated Jewish from non-Jewish worshipers. According to Paul, the cross is God's instrument to dismantle the wall, end the segregation, and make the two into one. God wants one people of God. That has been His plan all along.

Today walls continue to exist, erected strategically to separate people by race, religion, class, culture, and sex. Those who erect these walls, protect them, and maintain them will find that they are enemies of the gospel that brings all together into one worshiping family.

3 All this is exactly why I, Paul, am a prisoner of Jesus the Anointed, His representative to the outsider nations. 2You have heard, haven't you, how God appointed me to bring you His message of grace? 3And how the mystery was made known to me in a revelation? I briefly wrote about it earlier. 4When you read what I have written, you will be better able to understand *the depth of* my insight into the mystery of the Anointed One, 5a mystery that has never before been shown to past generations. Only now are *these secrets* being revealed to God's chosen emissaries* and prophets through the *Holy* Spirit. 6Specifically, *the mystery* is this: by trusting in the good news, the Gentile outsiders are becoming *fully enfranchised* members of the same body, heirs alongside *Israel,* and beneficiaries of the promise *that has been fulfilled* through Jesus the Anointed.

7I became a servant *and preacher* of this gospel by the gift of God's grace as He exercised His *amazing* power over me. 8I cannot think of anyone more unworthy to this cause than I, the least of the least of the saints. *But here I am,* a grace-made man, privileged to be *an echo of His voice and* a preacher to all the nations of the riches of the Anointed One, riches that no one ever imagined. 9*I am privileged* to enlighten all *of Adam's descendants* to the mystery concealed from previous ages by God, the Creator of all, through Jesus the Anointed. 10*Here's His objective*: through the church, He intends now to make known His infinite and boundless wisdom to all rulers and authorities in heavenly realms. 11This has been His plan from the beginning, one that He has now accomplished through the Anointed One, Jesus our Lord. 12His faithfulness* *to God* has made it possible for us to have the courage we need and the ability to approach the Father confidently. 13So I ask you not to become discouraged because *I am jailed for speaking out* on your behalf. *In fact,* my suffering is something that brings you glory.

14It is for this reason that I bow my knees before the Father, 15after whom all families in heaven above and on earth below receive their names, *and pray*:

16*Father,* out of Your *honorable and* glorious riches, strengthen Your people. Fill their souls with the power of Your Spirit 17so that through faith the Anointed One will reside in their hearts. May love be *the rich soil* where their lives

* 2:20 Literally, apostles * 3:5 Literally, apostles * 3:12 Often translated "faith in Him."

take root. May it be the bedrock where their lives are founded *so that together* 18-19with all of Your people they will have the power to understand that the love of the Anointed is infinitely long, wide, high, and deep, surpassing everything anyone previously experienced. God, may Your fullness flood through their entire beings.

This is a doxology of praise to the One with power that is beyond understanding.

20Now to the God who can do so many *awe-inspiring things, immeasurable things,* things greater than we ever could ask or imagine through the power at work in us, 21to Him be all glory in the church and in Jesus the Anointed from this generation to the next, forever and ever. Amen.

4 As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you: Live a life that is worthy of the calling He has *graciously* extended to you. 2Be humble. Be gentle. Be patient. Tolerate one another in *an atmosphere thick with* love. 3Make every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit has already created, with peace binding you together.

► Now that Paul has described the new world as God would have it, he urges believers to live out their callings with humility, patience, and love: to walk as Jesus walked. These are the ways of Jesus. Paul encourages them to do whatever it takes to hold onto the unity that binds people together in peace. He does not ask them to create that unity; this has already been accomplished through the work of the Rescuer and His Spirit. Rather, he calls believers to guard that unity—a more modest but no less significant task—because that unity is founded on God's oneness and work in the world.

4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were all called to pursue one hope. 5There is one Lord *Jesus*, one *living* faith, one ceremonial washing through baptism,* and 6one God—the Father over all who is above all, through all, and in all. 7*This God* has given to each of us grace in full measure according to the Anointed's gift 8as *the Scripture* says,

When He ascended to the heights,
He put captivity in chains;
And *in His triumph,* He gave gifts to the people.*

9(Well, when it says "He ascended," then that must mean that He had descended earlier to the lower levels, that is, to the earth. 10The One who descended is the same One *who rose from the dead* to ascend far above all the heavens so that He could fill all things.)

11It was the *risen* One who handed down *to us such gifted leaders*—some emissaries,* some prophets, some evangelists, as well as some pastor-teachers—12so that God's people would be *thoroughly* equipped to minister and build up the body of the Anointed One. 13*These ministries will continue* until we are unified in faith and filled with the knowledge of the Son of God, until we stand mature *in His teachings* and fully formed in the likeness of the Anointed, *our Liberating King.* 14Then we will no longer be like children, tossed around here and there upon ocean waves, picked up by every gust of religious teaching spoken by liars or swindlers or deceivers. 15Instead, by truth spoken in love, we are to grow in every way into Him—the Anointed One, the head. 16He joins and holds together the whole body with its ligaments providing the support needed so each part works to its proper design to form a healthy, *growing, and mature* body that builds itself up in love.

17Therefore, as a witness of the Lord, I insist on this: that you no longer walk in the outsiders' ways—with minds devoted to worthless pursuits. 18They are blind to *true* understanding. They are strangers and aliens to the kind of life God has for them because they live in ignorance *and immorality* and because their hearts are *cold,* hard stones. 19And now, since they've lost all *natural* feelings, they have given themselves over to sensual, greedy, and reckless living. They stop at nothing to satisfy their impure appetites.

20But this is not *the path of* the Anointed One, which you have learned. 21If you have heard Jesus and have been

* 4:5 Literally, immersion, in a rite of initiation and purification * 4:8 Psalm 68:18 * 4:11 Literally, apostles

taught by Him according to the truth that is in Him, 22then you know to take off your former way of life, your *crumpled* old self—*that dark blot of a soul* corrupted by deceitful desire and lust—23*to take a fresh breath* and to let God renew your attitude and spirit. 24Then *you are ready to* put on your new self, modeled after the very likeness of God: truthful, righteous, and holy.

25So put away your lies and speak the truth to one another because we are all part of one another. 26When you are angry, don't let it carry you into sin.* Don't let the sun set with anger in your heart or 27give the devil room to work. 28If you have been stealing, stop. Thieves must go to work *like everyone else* and work honestly with their hands so that they can share with anyone who has a need. 29Don't let even one rotten word seep out of your mouths. Instead, offer only fresh words that build others up when they need it most. That way your good words will communicate grace to those who hear them. 30It's time to stop bringing grief to God's Holy Spirit; you have been sealed with the Spirit, marked as His own for the day of rescue. 31Banish bitterness, rage and anger, shouting and slander, and any and all malicious thoughts—*these are poison.* 32Instead, be kind and compassionate. *Graciously* forgive one another just as God has forgiven you through the Anointed, *our Liberating King.*

We come to God as sinners; but He wants to transform our habits, attitudes, and practices into the ways of Jesus: to live, forgive, and love as He did.

5 So imitate God. *Follow Him* like adored children, 2and live in love as the Anointed One loved you—so much that He gave Himself as a fragrant sacrifice, pleasing God.

3*Listen,* don't let any kind of immorality be breathed among you. Any demoralizing behaviors (*perverse sexual acts, uncleanliness,* greediness, *and the like*) are inappropriate topics of conversation for those set apart as God's people. 4Don't swear or spurt nonsense. Don't make harsh jokes *or clown around.* Make proper use of your words, and offer them thankfully in praise. 5This is what we know for certain: no one who engages in loose sex, impure actions, and greed—which is just a form of idolatry—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God and His Anointed.

6Don't be fooled by people whose sentences are compounded with *useless words,* empty words—*they just show they are empty souls.* For, in His wrath, God will judge all the children of disobedience for these kinds *of sins.* 7So don't *be persuaded into their ignorance*; *and don't* cast your lot with them 8because, although you were once the personification of darkness, you are now light in the Lord. So act like children of the light. 9For the fruit of the light is all that is good, right, and true. 10Make it your aim to learn what pleases our Lord. 11Don't get involved with the fruitless works of darkness; instead, expose them *to the light of God.* 12You see, it's a disgrace to speak of their secrets (so don't even talk about what they do when no one is looking). 13-14When the light shines, it exposes *even the dark and shadowy* things and turns them into *pure reflections of* light. This is why they sing,

Awake, you sleeper!
Rise from your grave,
And the Anointed One will shine on you.

15So be careful how you live; *be mindful of your steps.* Don't run around like idiots *as the rest of the world does.* Instead, walk as the wise! 16Make the most of every *living and breathing* moment because these are evil times. 17So understand *and be confident in* God's will, and don't live thoughtlessly. 18Don't drink wine excessively. The drunken path *is a reckless path. It* leads nowhere. Instead, let God fill you with the Holy Spirit. 19*When you are filled with the Spirit, you are empowered to* speak to each other in *the soulful words of* pious songs, hymns, and spiritual songs; to sing and make music with your hearts attuned to God; 20and to give thanks to God the Father every day through the name of our Lord Jesus the Anointed for all He has done.

► Wisdom is a rare commodity. Paul urges believers, then and now, to walk wisely. It involves living well every day. Time itself seems to be co-opted by dark forces. But when believers understand God's will, avoid drunkenness,

* 4:26 Psalm 4:4

and allow God to fill them with His Spirit, they are able to walk wisely and live well. The Spirit-filled life is not just for a special few; it is the normal Christian life, and it affects everything, including how we live in community and how we treat others at home.

21 *And the Spirit makes it possible to* submit *humbly* to one another out of respect for the Anointed. 22 Wives, *it should be no different* with your husbands. Submit to them as you do to the Lord, 23 for God has given husbands a *sacred* duty to lead as the Anointed leads the church and serves as the head. (The church is His body; He is her Savior.) 24 So wives should submit to their husbands, *respectfully,* in all things, just as the church yields to the Anointed One.

25-26 Husbands, you must love your wives so *deeply, purely, and sacrificially that we can understand it only when we* compare it to the love the Anointed One has for *His bride,* the church. *We know* He gave Himself up completely to make her His own, washing her clean of all her impurity with water and *the powerful presence of* His word. 27 *He has given Himself* so that He can present the church as His radiant bride, unstained, unwrinkled, and unblemished—*completely free from all impurity*—holy and innocent before Him. 28 So husbands should care for their wives *as if their lives depended on it,* the same way they care for their own bodies. As you love her, you ultimately are loving *part of* yourself *(remember, you are one flesh).* 29 No one really hates his own body; he takes care to feed and love it, just as the Anointed takes care of His church, 30 because we are *living* members of His body. 31 "And this is the reason a man leaves his father and his mother and is united with his wife; the two come together as one flesh."* 32 There is a great mystery *reflected* in this *Scripture,* and I say that it has to do with *the marriage of* the Anointed One and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each husband is to love *and protect* his own wife as if she were his very heart, and each wife is to respect her own husband.

6 *Now to you,* children, obey your parents in the Lord because this is right *in God's eyes.* 2 This is the first commandment onto which He added a promise: "Honor your father and your mother, and 3 if you do, you will live long and well in this land."*

4 And, fathers, do not drive your children mad, but nurture them in the discipline and teaching *that come* from the Lord.

5 Slaves, respect and fear your earthly masters. Obey and serve them with the same sincerity of heart as you serve the Anointed One. 6 Don't put on a show just because they are looking (as if you were a people pleaser); but as a slave of the Anointed, do the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve them in good faith as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because all good deeds are gifted back from the Lord, and they are yours whether you are a slave or not.

9 Masters, hear this: act in kind to your slaves. Stop *terrorizing and* threatening them. Don't forget that you have a Master in heaven who does not take sides or pick favorites.

10 Finally, *brothers and sisters,* draw your strength and might from God. 11 Put on the full armor of God to protect yourselves from the devil and his evil schemes. 12 We're not waging war against enemies of flesh and blood alone. No, this fight is against tyrants, against authorities, against *supernatural* powers *and demon princes that slither* in the darkness of this world, and against wicked *spiritual armies* that lurk about in heavenly places.

13 And this is why you need *to be head-to-toe in* the full armor of God: so you can resist during these evil days and be fully prepared to hold your ground. 14 Yes, stand—truth banded around your waist, righteousness as your chest plate, 15 and feet protected in preparation to proclaim the good news of peace. 16 Don't forget to raise the shield of faith above all else, so you will be able to extinguish flaming spears hurled at you from the wicked one. 17 Take also the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

► Paul knows that the real battles and dangers we face are not against flesh and blood. The enemies we see are real enough, but they are animated by spiritual forces of darkness that

* 5:31 Genesis 2:24 * 6:2-3 Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

stay strategically hidden from view. These powers often reveal themselves in institutional evils—genocide, terror, tyranny, and oppression—but the weapons needed to combat them are not earthly weapons at all. What is needed, Paul advises, is to stand firm in God's power and to suit up in the full armor of God. Although the devil and his demon armies are destined for destruction, they are serious threats now and must be resisted and beaten back. For Paul, the best offensive weapons we have are the word of God and prayer.

[18]Pray always. Pray in the Spirit. Pray about everything in every way you know how! And keeping all this in mind, pray on behalf of God's people. Keep on praying feverishly, and be on the lookout *until evil has been stayed.* [19]And please pray for me. Pray that truth will be with me before I even open my mouth. *Ask the Spirit to guide me* while I boldly defend the mystery that is the good news—[20]for which I am an ambassador in chains—so pray that I can bravely pronounce the truth, as I should do.

[21]I am sending to you Tychicus, my dear brother and faithful minister in the Lord. He will tell you everything that has been going on here with me [22]so you will know how I am and what I am doing. He's coming with news that will hopefully comfort your hearts. [23]Brothers and sisters, *let me leave you with a blessing:*

> May peace and love with faith be yours from God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed. [24]May His grace surround all who love our Lord Jesus the Anointed with a never-ending love.

PHILIPPIANS

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Letter to the church in Philippi

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

This little letter has had a big impact on the church in Paul's day and ours. At the heart of it is Paul's consistent plea that the Philippians "rejoice in the Lord." For Paul, joy is not a good feeling based on favorable happenings; it is a decision, a deliberate choice to celebrate God's work through Jesus in any and every circumstance. Ironically Paul writes this letter from a prison probably in Rome or Caesarea; no one knows for certain. What is certain is that, despite his chains, Paul is content where he is, in part, because he sees the gospel progressing. As a servant and prisoner of the Lord Jesus, that thrills and satisfies him.

Paul writes this letter to thank the Philippians for a gift he just received and to announce some travel plans, assuming he'd be freed from prison. For years he has enjoyed a warm and intimate friendship with the believers of this little Roman colony, the first church in Europe. From the moment he first preached Jesus' message in Philippi, the church there has supported and encouraged Paul in ways no other church has. Now they have renewed their concern for him with another act of generosity. No wonder the emissary feels closer to them than to any other church he has founded!

One of the most beautiful moments in this letter is a hymn to the Anointed, the Liberating King, in 2:6-11. Whether Paul has composed this hymn himself or quotes it from another source, no one knows. Nevertheless this hymn recounts a beautiful story of love and humility as Jesus descends into the world to serve humanity and face the horrors of the cross; then He is exalted by God, given a unique name, and declared "Lord" by all creatures to the glory of God. Paul makes Jesus the lordly example of humility and urges others to follow Him and adopt His attitude. As disciples of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus demonstrate that same spirit of service as they pour themselves out for the gospel and for the Philippians.

1 Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus the Anointed One, greet you, *our friends* in Philippi—those set apart by Jesus the Anointed—*and we greet the* elders and deacons *who serve* with you. 2Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed.

3Whenever you cross my mind, I thank my God for you *and for the gift of knowing you.* 4My spirit is lightened with joy whenever I pray for you (and I do constantly) 5because you have partnered with me to spread the gospel since the first day *I preached to you.*

6I am confident that the Creator, who has begun such a great work among you, will *not stop in mid-design but will* keep perfecting you until the day Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King, returns to redeem the world.* 7It is only right that I should feel such admiration for you all—you hold me close to your hearts. And, since we are partners in *this great work of* grace, you have never failed to stand with me as I have defended and stood firm for the gospel—even from this prison cell. 8Before God I want you to know how much I long to see you and love you with the affection of the Anointed One, Jesus.

9Here's what I pray for you:

> *Father,* may their love grow more and more in wisdom and insight—10so they will be able to *examine and* determine the best *from everything else.* And on the day of the Anointed One, *the day of His judgment,* let them stand pure and blameless, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that ripens through Jesus the Anointed.

All this I pray, with a view to God's ultimate praise and glory.

Many come to visit Paul in his imprisonment and listen to him tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

12*I have good news,* brothers and sisters; and I want to share it. *Believe it or not,* my imprisonment has actually helped spread the good news *to new places and populations.* 13Word has spread through the ranks of the imperial guard and to everyone else *around me* that I am in prison because of my faith in the Anointed One. 14My imprisonment has instilled courage in most of our brothers and sisters, so they *are trusting God more and* have been even more daring as they speak the good news without fear.

15-17*I am well aware that* some people out there are preaching the message of the Anointed One because of jealousies and rivalries. Their motives aren't pure. They're driven by selfish ambitions and personal agendas, hoping somehow to add to my pain here in prison. *And I also know* there are others who are preaching the Anointed from true goodness, motivated by love. *They wish me the best because* they know I'm here in prison in defense of the gospel.

► Even in difficult times, Paul remains faithful because he realizes that the kingdom and the message of the Anointed One are more important than any one messenger. Paul uses his own willingness to sacrifice himself as a model for believers to follow. He directs them to be good and faithful citizens of the heavenly kingdom, no matter what opposition they receive.

18So what *do we do* then? *Listen. What matters is* that in every way, *regardless of the motives*—whether pure or shady—the great story of the Anointed is a cause for joy. I will continue to rejoice 19because I know that through your *encouragement and* prayers and through the help of the Spirit of Jesus the Anointed, I will soon be released from this dark place. 20I don't expect that dishonor and shame will plague me in any way, but I do hope that I will continue to be able to speak freely and courageously *about Jesus,* and that now and forever the Anointed One will be glorified and placed above all else through this body of mine—whether I live or die. 21For my life is about the Anointed *and Him alone.* And my death, *when that comes,* will mean great gain for me. 22So, if it's His will that I go on serving here, my work will be fruitful *for the message.* I honestly wouldn't know how or what to choose; 23I would be hard-pressed to decide. I lean toward leaving this world to be with the Anointed One because I can only think that would be much better. 24To stay in this body of flesh—*even with all its pains and weaknesses*—would best serve your needs. 25Now that I think of it, I am

sure of this: I would prefer to remain to share in the progress and joy of your growing belief. 26When I return to you, we will celebrate Jesus the Anointed even more.

27*So here is what I want you to do:* conduct yourselves as *true and* worthy citizens of the Anointed's gospel, so that whether I make it or don't make it to see you, I will *at least* hear that you continue to stand, united in one spirit, single-minded *in purpose* as you struggle together for the faith in the gospel. 28Don't be paralyzed in any way by what your opponents are doing. Your steadfast faith in the face of opposition is a sign that they are doomed and that you have been graced with God's salvation. 29And now, you have been given the privilege of not only believing in *Jesus* the Anointed, *our Liberating King,* but *being chosen* to suffer for Him as well. 30You have seen me suffer for Him. *Since I've been away*, you've heard of the other agonizing conflicts I've had to face. Now you know firsthand the pains of this battle.

2 If you find any comfort from being in the Anointed, if His love brings you some encouragement, if you experience true companionship with the Spirit, if His tenderness and mercy fill your heart; *then, brothers and sisters,* 2*here is one thing that would* complete my joy—come together as one in mind and spirit and purpose, sharing in the same love. 3Don't let selfishness and prideful agendas take over. Embrace true humility, and lift your heads to extend love to others. 4Get beyond yourselves and protecting your own interests; *be sincere,* and secure your neighbors' interests first.

5*In other words,* adopt the mind-set of Jesus the Anointed. *Live with His attitude in your hearts. Remember:*

6Though He was in the form of God,
He chose not to cling to equality with God;
7But He poured Himself out *to fill a vessel brand new;*
a servant in form
and a man indeed.
The very likeness of humanity,
8He humbled Himself,
obedient to death—
a merciless death on the cross!
9So God raised Him up to the highest place
and gave Him the name above all.
10So when His name is called,
every knee will bow,*
in heaven, on earth, and below.
11And every tongue will confess*
"Jesus, the Anointed One, is Lord,"
to the glory of God our Father!

► Paul describes a community where every person considers the needs of others first and does nothing from selfishness; it pulls together rather than pulls apart, and it is a body that knows its purpose and lets nothing interfere with it. It is an extended spiritual family where others line up to become part of this sacred assembly and to make it their home because they feel encouragement and know they are truly loved. So Paul urges the Philippians to strive for this radical unity and fulfill his joy by having the mind of Jesus who humbled Himself, became a servant, and suffered the death of the cross. Jesus becomes the example of humility and service, leading to the kind of unity Paul imagines.

12So now, my beloved, obey as you have always done, not only when I am with you, but even more so when I can't be. Continue to work out your salvation, with great fear and trembling, 13because God is energizing you so that you will desire and do what always pleases Him.

14Do all things without complaining or bickering with each other, 15so you will be found innocent and blameless; *you are* God's children called to live without a single stain on your reputations among this perverted and crooked generation. Shine like stars across the land. 16Cling to the word of life so that on the day of judgment when the Anointed One returns I may have reason to rejoice, because it will be plain that I didn't turn from His mission nor did I work in vain. 17Even if my lifeblood is to be poured out like wine as a sacrifice of your faith, I have great reason to celebrate with all of you. 18And for the same reason, you can be glad and celebrate with me.

19I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy your way. He will visit soon *so*

* 2:10 Isaiah 45:23 * 2:11 Isaiah 45:23

that he may report to me how you are doing. To hear all that is going on with you will truly encourage my heart. 20There is no one like Timothy. What sets him apart from others is his deep concern for you *and your spiritual journey. This is rare, my friends,* 21for most people only care about themselves, not about what is *dear to the heart* of Jesus the Anointed. 22You know Timothy is genuine *in the Lord's ways.* He has been a faithful partner to me as we express the good news, as much as my own flesh and blood would have been. 23I expect to send him soon, and I will as soon as I see how things turn out here. 24I trust in the Lord that it won't be very long before I can come *and be with you in person.*

25But for now, I think it is best to send Epaphroditus home to you. *He has become* my dear brother in the Lord. We have worked well together and fought great battles together, and he was an encouraging minister to me in my time of need. 26He could not wait to see you all. He was concerned for you when he found out you knew how sick he really was. 27In fact, he nearly died. But once again, God *was exceedingly kind and* covered him with His mercy. And I, too, by His mercy, have been spared sorrow on top of sorrow.

28I am so excited to be sending him back to you! I can picture the joy on your faces when he arrives; I can feel my worries falling away. 29Welcome him joyfully in the Lord. Esteem all *spiritual leaders* like Epaphroditus 30because he placed his life in grave danger for the work of the Anointed; he risked his life to serve me when you couldn't.

3 It is time that I wrap up these thoughts to you, my brothers and sisters. Rejoice in the Lord! (I don't mind writing these things over and over to you, as I know it keeps you safe.)

2Watch out for the dogs—wicked workers who *run in packs* looking for someone to maul with their false circumcision.

► Circumcision has become a flash point for the early church. Some are teaching that non-Jews have to become Jews to follow Jesus completely, including circumcision, dietary regulations, keeping weekly and annual holy days, and other Jewish practices. Since the time of Abraham, circumcision has been the mark of the covenant with Abraham's spiritual children. Things are changing: outsiders, non-Jews, are entering into the new covenant.

Do they enter by faith alone, or is it faith plus following God's law for Israel? Paul's answer is clear: it is faith alone that makes Jews and outsiders right with God. So he cautions the Philippians to watch out for those who would chastise them into a false circumcision. Real followers of Jesus know that salvation doesn't come from the blade of a knife but from His cross.

3We are the true circumcision—those who worship God in Spirit and make our boast in Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King*—so we do not rely on *what we have accomplished in* the flesh.

4If any try to throw around their pedigrees to you, remember my résumé—which is more impressive than theirs. 5I was circumcised on the eighth day—*as the law prescribes*—born of the nation of Israel, descended from the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew born of Hebrews; I have observed the law according to *the strict piety of* the Pharisees, *separate from those embracing a less rigorous kind of Judaism.* 6Zealous? *Yes.* I ruthlessly *pursued and* persecuted the church. And when it comes to the righteousness required by the law, my record is spotless.

7But whatever I used to count as my greatest accomplishments, I've written them off as a loss because of the Anointed One. 8And more so, I now realize that all I gained *and thought was important* was nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing the Anointed Jesus my Lord. For Him I have thrown everything aside—*it's nothing but a pile of waste*—so that I may gain Him. 9*When it counts,* I want to be found belonging to Him, not clinging to my own righteousness based on law, but actively relying on the faithfulness of the Anointed One. *This is true* righteousness, supplied by God, acquired by faith. 10I want to know Him *inside and out.* I want to experience the power of His resurrection and join in His suffering, shaped by His death, 11so that I may arrive *safely* at the resurrection from the dead.

The crucified and risen Jesus is the model that Paul desires to embody by walking deep in His pathway of death and life—suffering and resurrection.

12I'm not there yet, nor have I become perfect; but I am charging on to gain anything *and everything* the Anointed One, Jesus, has in store for me—*and nothing will stand in my way* because He has grabbed me *and won't let me go*. 13Brothers and sisters, *as I said,* I know I have not arrived; but there's one thing I am doing: I'm leaving my old life behind, putting everything on the line for this mission. 14I am sprinting toward the only goal that counts: *to cross the line,* to win the prize, and to hear God's call *to resurrection life found exclusively* in Jesus the Anointed. 15All of us who are mature ought to think the same way about these matters. If you have a different attitude, then God will reveal this to you as well. 16For now, let's hold on to what we have been shown *and keep in step with these teachings*.

17Imitate me, brothers and sisters, and look around to those already following the example we have set. 18I have warned you before (and now say again through my tears) that we have many enemies—people who reject the cross of the Anointed. 19They are ruled by their bellies, their glory comes by shame, and their minds are fixed on the things of this world. They are doomed. 20But we are citizens of heaven, *exiles on earth* waiting eagerly for a Liberator, our Lord Jesus the Anointed, to come and 21transform these humble, *earthly* bodies into the form of His glorious body by the same power that brings all things under His control.

4 For this reason, brothers and sisters, my joy and crown whom I dearly love, I cannot wait to see you again. Continue to stand firm in the Lord, *and follow my instructions in this letter,* beloved. 2Euodia and Syntyche, I urge you to *put aside your differences,* agree, and work together in the Lord. 3Yes, *Syzygus,* loyal friend, I enlist you to please help these women. They, along with brother Clement and many others, have worked by my side to spread the good news of the gospel. They have their names recorded in the book of life.

4*Most of all, friends,* always rejoice in the Lord! I never tire of saying it: Rejoice! 5Keep your gentle nature so that all people will know *what it looks like to walk in His footsteps*. The Lord is ever present with us. 6Don't be anxious about things; instead, pray. Pray about everything. *He longs to hear your requests,* so talk to God about your needs and be thankful *for what has come.* 7And know that the peace of God (*a peace* that is beyond any and all of our *human* understanding) will stand watch over your hearts and minds in Jesus, the Anointed One.

8Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with *beauty and* truth. Meditate on whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is good, whatever is virtuous and praiseworthy. 9Keep to the script: whatever you learned and received and heard and saw in me—do it—and the God of peace will walk with you.

10I could hardly contain my joy in the Lord when I realized you have started to show your care for me once again. Since you have not had the opportunity to show how much you cared until now, *I want you to know how it touched me.* 11I am not saying this because I am in need. I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances. 12I know how to survive in tight situations, and I know how to enjoy having plenty. In fact, I have learned how to face any circumstances: fed or hungry, with or without. 13I can be content in any and every situation through the Anointed One who is my power and strength. 14Nevertheless, it was admirable of you to participate in my affliction.

► True contentment is the result of a heart committed to the risen Lord. Think of all the sins, pain, and brokenness that come from coveting. Adultery, murder, stealing, and lying can all be traced directly to a prior condition when hearts and minds are frustrated and discontent.

Notice what Paul says doesn't come naturally; it is learned. The normal, natural state of humanity is discontent and quiet desperation. It takes a powerful, spiritual presence to transform anxiety into joyous satisfaction. Ironically, it may be the shackles more than his freedom that schools Paul in the art of contentment. Despite the

chains, Paul discovers this beautiful state of inner peace through the power of Jesus residing in him.

15You remember, Philippians, at the beginning of my gospel journey after I left Macedonia, no church offered me the financial assistance I needed to do the Lord's work, except you alone. 16Even when I took the message to Thessalonica, you sent provisions to me. Twice even! 17Not that I am looking for a gift—I am just looking toward your reward that comes from your gift. 18With what Epaphroditus delivered to me from your generous pockets, I have even been blessed in excess. I am fully satisfied. I know God is pleased with your dedication and accepts this gift as a fragrant offering, a holy sacrifice, on His behalf. 19*Know this:* my God will also fill every need you have according to His glorious riches in Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.* 20So may our God and Father be glorified forever and ever. Amen.

21Greet every saint there in Jesus the Anointed One, for my brothers and sisters and I send our greetings to you. 22All of the saints, especially those serving in Caesar's household, also send salutations to you. 23May you all continue *the journey* with your spirits strengthened by the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One. [Amen.]*

* 4:23 Some manuscripts omit this word.

COLOSSIANS

Letter to the church in Colossae

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Paul wrote this letter about 25 years after his call to be an emissary for Jesus. The headstrong Paul who had planted churches and pioneered the gospel had now become an elder statesman for the growing movement. His reputation was so great that he could send a letter to a church he had neither planted nor even visited and expect to be received as a voice that must be heard.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison. The people in Colossae would have known where, so there was no need to put it in the letter, but that important detail is lost today. It is often said that he wrote it from prison in Rome, although Ephesus or Caesarea cannot be ruled out. The fact is that the Lord's emissary often found himself in prison because his message clashed with the local political, economic, and religious powers. But even as a prisoner, Paul was able to find a secretary or urge a coworker to help him craft and dispatch a letter.

Colossae was an important city located about 100 miles east of Ephesus. There were many religious options in Colossae, Jewish and pagan; and apparently some in Colossae thought that Jesus should simply be added into the mix. But for Paul, Jesus is no add-on. As the Creator and Sustainer, as the head of the church, Jesus deserves their full and undivided attention. According to Paul, Jesus came to liberate not only individuals but all of creation from the powers of darkness.

Paul prays that God will encourage the believers in Colossae to live with a spiritual perspective and that their lives will reflect the transforming power of Jesus (1:9-10). One of the best-known passages in this letter is the wonderful hymn about Jesus found in 1:15-20; it celebrates not only His role as the Creator and Sustainer of the world, but also as the Reconciler and head of the church, which is His body. He then challenges the believers in Colossae to turn from their past, as if their old selves were dead, and to keep their eyes fixed on the goal of new life hidden in Jesus (3:2-4). Paul speaks individually to wives, husbands, children, slaves, and masters and finally asks them to pray with him that "we can go on telling the mystery of the Anointed One." Paul truly sees all believers as sharing in his ministry and his imprisonment.

1 Paul, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed *serving* at God's pleasure, along with our brother Timothy 2to you, *dear* holy and faithful brothers and sisters in *the family of* the Anointed who live in Colossae. May grace and peace from God our Father [and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One]* envelop you.

3As always, we've been praying for you, thanking God, the Father of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, 4ever since we heard of your faith in Jesus the Anointed and your love for His holy ones—5*a faith and love* that emerge from the hope you have heard about in the word of truth—the gospel—the very hope that awaits you in heaven. 6-7The same gospel that was brought to you is growing and bearing fruit all over the world, just as it has been growing among you since the day you heard and took in the truth of God's grace from our beloved fellow servant Epaphras. (He is a faithful minister of the Anointed on our* behalf.) 8He was the one who told us how you demonstrate your love in *the power of* the Spirit. 9Since the day we got this good news about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We ask:

This is a prayer for knowledge and insight that only can come from God.

Father, may they clearly know Your will and achieve *the height and depth of* spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10May their lives be a credit to You, Lord; and *what's more,* may they continue to delight You by doing every good work and growing in the true knowledge that comes from being close to You. 11Strengthen them with Your infinite power, according to Your glorious might, so that they will have everything they need to hold on and endure hardship patiently and joyfully. 12Thank You, Father, as You have made us* eligible to receive our portion of the inheritance given to all those set apart by the light. 13You have rescued us from dark powers and brought us safely into the kingdom of Your Son, whom You love 14and in whom we are redeemed and forgiven of our sins [through His blood].*

15He is the *exact* image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, *the eternal.* 16It was by Him that everything was created: the heavens, the earth, all things within and upon them, all things seen and unseen, thrones and dominions, *spiritual* powers and authorities. Every detail was crafted through His design, *by His own hands,* and for His purposes. 17He has always been! *It is His hand* that holds everything together. 18He is the head of this body, the church. He is the beginning, the first of those to be reborn from the dead, so that *in every aspect, at every view,* in everything—He is first. 19God was pleased that all His fullness should *forever* dwell in the Son 20who, *as predetermined by God,* bled peace into the world by His death on the cross as God's means of reconciling to Himself the whole creation—all things in heaven and all things on earth.

► As Paul gives thanks to God—a normal thing to do in a letter—he remembers a hymn he heard in the churches. The Colossian hymn (verses 15-20), as we call it, is all about Jesus. It celebrates His reign, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos and second as the head of the church and the One who reconciles every broken thing to God by what He accomplished on the cross. In this hymn, the story of redemption is a witness to God's love. Paul wants the Colossians to understand who they are; but to do that, they must first know to whom they belong.

21You were once at odds *with God*, wicked in your ways and evil in your minds; 22but now He has reconciled you in His body—in His flesh through His death—so that He can present you to God holy, blameless, and *totally* free of imperfection 23as long as you stay planted in the faith. So don't venture away from what you have heard *and taken to heart*: the *living* hope of the good news that has been announced to all creation under heaven and has captured me, Paul, as its servant.

24Now I rejoice in what I've suffered on your behalf, *but even more suffering is ahead for me* as I *take on and* complete what remains of the Anointed's suffering

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:2 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 1:6-7 Some manuscripts read "your." * 1:12 Other manuscripts read "you." * 1:14 Early manuscripts omit this portion.

for the sake of His body, the church. 25I am a servant appointed by God to preach the Word of God until it is known to you and all over—*what I am talking about is nothing less than* 26the mystery *of the ages*! What was hidden for ages, generations and generations, is now being revealed to His holy ones. 27He decided to make known to them His blessing to the nations; the glorious riches of this mystery is the indwelling of the Anointed in you! The very hope of glory.

28We are preaching Him—spreading the Word to all with *equal amounts of* wise warning and instruction—so that, *at the final judgment*, we will be able to present everyone *to the Creator* fully mature because of what Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King*, has done. 29This is why I continue to toil and struggle—because His amazing power and energy surge within me.

► At the heart of the good news is a mystery hidden in ancient Scriptures but now exposed to the world through the lives of the church's holy ones. Paul never refers to just one "holy one"; he always uses the plural. He knows that holiness is too difficult for us to accomplish on our own. Each of us has to be called and equipped by God, but we also have to be accompanied by others who've answered the call. Those who say "yes" to Jesus become the church, the company of those rescued from darkness and ultimately from death. Paul is fond of calling the church the body of the risen Jesus. Our own hopes and dreams for the future are concentrated in Him. Not only do we dwell in Him, but He also dwells in us.

2 This battle I am facing is huge. And I want you to know I do it for you, for all those at Laodicea, and for everyone else (even those who have never seen my face). 2I'm working hard to *comfort and* encourage them so *that they will be knit together*—that many hearts would become one through His love. I do it so they will be rich in understanding and have full knowledge of God's mystery, which is the Anointed One Himself—3in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are concealed. 4I only tell you this to warn you about those who would try and deceive you with their arguments. They seem plausible enough; *but in the end, they are false.* 5Even though I cannot be there in the body, my spirit is with you; and I'm happy to know of your good order and your solid commitment to the Anointed One, *our Liberating King.*

Paul calls the believers in Colossae to remain steadfast in their faith.

6Now that you have welcomed the Anointed One, Jesus the Lord, into your lives, continue to journey with Him *and allow Him to shape your lives.* 7Let your roots grow down deeply in Him, and let Him build you up on a firm foundation. Be strong in the faith, just as you were taught, and always spill over with thankfulness. 8Make sure no predator makes you his prey through some *misleading* philosophy and empty deception based on traditions fabricated by mere mortals. These are sourced in the elementary principles originating in this world and not in the Anointed One *(so don't let their talks capture you).* 9You see, all that is God, all His fullness, resides in His body. 10You, too, are being completed in Him, the One who has dominion over all rule, all authority. 11In Him you were also circumcised, set apart by a spiritual act performed without hands. The Anointed One's circumcision cut you off from the sinfulness of your flesh. 12You were buried with Him beneath the waters of the ceremonial washing called baptism* and then were raised up with Him by faith in the *resurrection* power of God, who brought Him back from the dead. 13And when your flesh was still uncircumcised—dead in transgression *and swathed in its sinful nature*—it was God who brought us* to life with Him, forgave all our sins, and 14eliminated the massive debt we incurred by the law that stood against us. He took it all away; He nailed it to the cross. *But that's not all.* 15He disarmed those who once ruled over us—those who had overpowered us. *Like captives of war,* He put them on display to the world to show His victory over them *by means of the cross.*

* 2:12 Literally, immersion, a rite of initiation and purification * 2:13 Some manuscripts read "you."

16So don't let anyone stand in judgment over you and dictate what you should eat or drink, what festivals you should celebrate, or how you should observe a new moon or Sabbath days—
17all these are only a shadow of what shall come. The reality, *the core, the import,* is found in the Anointed One. 18Don't be cheated out of the prize by others who are peddling the worship of heavenly beings and *false* humility. People like this run about telling *whoever will listen* what they claim to have seen; but in reality they testify only to an inflated mind, saturated in conceit—*not in the Spirit.* 19They are detached from the very head that nourishes and connects the whole body with all of its nerves and ligaments, a body that grows by the kind of growth that can only come from God.

20Listen, if you have died with the Anointed One to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, then why are you submitting yourselves to its rules as if you still belonged to this world? 21*You hear,* "Don't handle this! Don't taste that! Don't even touch it!" 22but everything they are obsessed about will eventually decay with use. These rules are just human commands and teachings. 23*Here's what they are promoting:* fabricated religion, self-humiliation, and bodily abuse. No matter which way they try to tether their bodies, they cannot harness their desires.

► Paul knows the people in Colossae are facing many religious and philosophical options, none of which are neutral. Notice Paul doesn't say, "Just add Jesus to what you already believe," or, "Factor Jesus into your philosophy," or, "Include Jesus in this or that ritual." The claim that "Jesus is Lord" does not allow that. If Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all creation, then all other teachings must give way. All people must bow before Him and only Him.

3 So *it comes down to this:* since you have been raised with the Anointed One, *the Liberating King,* set your mind on heaven above. The Anointed is there, seated at God's right hand. 2Stay focused on what's above, not on earthly things, 3because your *old* life is dead and gone. Your *new* life is now hidden, enmeshed with the Anointed who is in God. 4On that day when the Anointed One—who is our* very life—is revealed, you will be revealed with Him in glory! 5So kill your earthly impulses: loose sex, impure actions, unbridled sensuality, wicked thoughts, and greed (which is *essentially* idolatry). 6It's because of these that God's wrath is coming [upon the sons and daughters of disobedience],* *so avoid them at all costs.* 7These are the same things you once pursued, and together you spawned a life of evil. 8But now make sure you shed such things: anger, rage, spite, slander, and abusive language. 9And don't go on lying to each other since you have sloughed away your old skin along with its evil practices 10for a fresh new you, which is continually renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created you. 11In this re-creation there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and conqueror,* or slave and free because the Anointed is the whole and dwells in us all.

Paul tells them the key to remain unified is to show compassion and forgiveness toward one another.

12Since you are all set apart by God, made holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with *a holy way of life*: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13Put up with one another. Forgive. Pardon any offenses against one another, as the Lord has pardoned you, because you should act in kind. 14But above all these, put on love! Love is the perfect tie to bind these together. 15Let your hearts fall under the rule of the Anointed's peace (the peace you were called to as one body), and be thankful.

16Let the word of the Anointed One richly inhabit your lives. With all wisdom teach, *counsel,* and instruct one another. Sing the psalms, *compose* hymns and songs inspired by the Spirit, and keep on singing—*sing to God* from hearts *full and spilling over* with thankfulness. 17Surely, no matter what you are doing (speaking, *writing,* or working), do it all in the name of Jesus our Master, sending thanks through Him to God our Father.

* 3:4 Some manuscripts read "your." * 3:6 Some early manuscripts omit this portion. * 3:11 Literally, Scythian

► For Paul it isn't enough just to believe the right things. Right belief always produces right living. The gift of salvation demands that we put into practice the character of our King. Just as we take off and throw away old, worn-out clothes, we must strip off certain attitudes and actions of our old selves. Since our lives have been made new in Him, things like sexual immorality, greed, anger, lies, and the rest must find no place in us. But it is not enough to strip off the old; we must put on the new. And that new creation has many qualities of Jesus: compassion, gentleness, and humility; putting up with each other, forgiving each other, and above all, loving each other. These are the ways of Jesus, so they must be our ways too.

18Wives: be submitted to your husbands as
is appropriate in the Lord. 19Husbands: love
your wives, and don't treat them harshly *or*
respond with bitterness toward them.
20Children: obey your parents in
every way. The Lord is well pleased by it.
21Fathers: don't infuriate your children, so
their hearts won't *harbor resentment and*
become discouraged. 22Slaves: obey your
earthly masters in all things. Don't just act
earnest in your service only when they are
watching. Serve with a sincere heart *(even*
when others aren't watching), fearing the
Lord *who is always watching*! 23So no mat-
ter what your task is, work hard. *Always*
do your best as the Lord's servant, not as
man's, 24because you know your reward is
the Lord's inheritance. You serve the Lord,
the Anointed One, and 25anyone who does
wrong will be paid his due because He
doesn't play favorites.

4 And to you masters: treat your slaves fairly and do what is right, knowing that you, too, have a Master in heaven.

► Family life has changed since Paul's day. Today, sociologists talk about modern families as "nuclear": two parents with one or two children. In Colossae, as elsewhere in Paul's world, families were extended by nature: they consisted of a husband, a wife, lots of children, servants, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others. So when Paul addresses the family, he does not envision the modern version of it. He addresses the main family members: wives, husbands, children, fathers, and then slaves. The family reflects the order God desires in the church. Each member is to be responsible to the whole, and love and respect are to serve as the guiding principles within family relationships. Paul and Peter both use the term "submission" within family and church relationships as a description of order and support.

2Pray, *and keep praying*. Be alert and
thankful when you pray. 3And while you
are at it, add us to your prayers. Pray that
God would open doors *and windows and*
minds and eyes and hearts for the word
so we can go on telling the mystery of
the Anointed, for this is exactly why I am
currently imprisoned. 4Pray that I will pro-
claim this message clearly and *fearlessly* as
I should.
5Be wise when you engage with those
outside *the faith community*; make the
most of every moment *and every encounter*.
6When you speak the word, speak it grace-
fully (as if seasoned with salt), so you will
know how to respond to everyone rightly.
7-9I am sending this letter by Tychi-
cus and Onesimus, both dear brothers.
Tychicus has been a faithful minister and
fellow servant in the Lord. He will update
you on me and my* situation here, and
he will no doubt be an encouragement to
you. Onesimus is one of you; and he, too,
has been faithful. You will get the whole
story from them.
10My cellmate Aristarchus sends his
love, as does Mark, Barnabas's cousin.
(You've been sent instructions about him,
so if he comes to you, welcome him.)
11Jesus, also called Justus, also sends greet-
ings. These are the only workers in God's
kingdom here who are of the circumci-
sion, and they are a great comfort to me.

* 4:7-9 Some manuscripts read "so he may know about your."

12Epaphras, another one of your
hometown fellows and a servant of Jesus
the Anointed sends his regards and wants
you to know how passionately and sin-
cerely he speaks to the Lord about you. He
prays *for your spiritual journey,* that you will
continue to mature and stand tall in the
kind of confidence that comes from know-
ing God's will. 13I can testify to his zeal for
you and those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

14Luke, the beloved doctor, says hello;
and so does Demas. 15Send my well wishes
to the brothers and sisters of Laodicea,
especially Nympha and the church that
meets in her house. 16After this letter has
been read among you, see that it is also
read to the church of Laodicea, and make
sure you publicly share the letter I am
sending to them. 17Tell Archippus, "Take
care that you complete the service you
received in the Lord."

18I, Paul, am signing this letter in my
own hand. Remember that I am chained.
Grace be with you all.



Paul's Ministry

1 THESSALONIANS

Letter to the church in Thessalonica

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Not long after Paul first went to Europe, he arrived in Thessalonica. After only three weeks of ministering in the local synagogue, the Jews rebelled and started a riot. In their indictment of Paul and his coworkers before the local judge, they said, "These people—they're *political agitators* turning the world upside down!" (Acts 17:5-6). Paul had spent just a few short weeks with the believers in Thessalonica, but he was greatly blessed by them.

In this warm, fatherly letter which is one of his first, he recalls their true faith, tireless love, and enduring spirit. They truly touched his heart. One can sense the instant affection between these new believers and their spiritual parent. He describes himself as a nursing mother caring for her children and as a father soothing his own children. After encouraging them to continue to grow in the faith and telling how word of their response to the good news has spread throughout the regions of Macedonia and Achaia, Paul pleads with them to avoid sexual defilement because their bodies are the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit and should be kept in holiness and purity. He reminds them of the riches that belong to them, warning them of Satan's activities. He then writes of Timothy's report about their faith. Timothy had been left behind when Paul was forced to move out of the area; later Paul's spirit was buoyed when Timothy spoke of their growth in the faith in the midst of a period of stressful days for Paul.

At this stage in the development of the young church, they were not as greatly hindered by false teachers as were the churches in Asia Minor. But there were some who came from Judea sowing seeds of unrest. Still Paul reminds them of his message of grace to the Gentiles. He then turns to one particular issue about those believers who have died and of their standing before God on the coming day of the Lord. Paul tells them that all believers should have confidence whether they die before the return of the Lord or they are present at the time of His return. All have obtained salvation and should not fear that they will miss out on the joy of the King's return. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of encouraging and caring for one another while guarding the truth.

1 Paul, Silvanus,* and Timothy to the church gathering in Thessalonica, *those living* in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus the Anointed.

May grace and peace be yours [from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed].*

[2]We always thank God for all of you in our prayers. [3]Your actions on behalf of the *true* faith, your *tireless* toil of love, and your unfailing, unwavering, unending hope in our Lord Jesus the Anointed before God our Father have put you consistently at the forefront of our thoughts. [4]O brothers and sisters loved by God, we know He has chosen you. [5]*And here is why: what you experienced in* the good news we brought you was more than words *channeling down your ears*; it came to you as a *life*-empowering, Spirit-infused message that offers complete *hope and* assurance! *We lived transparently before you so that* you would know what sort of people we *truly* are. *We did it* for your sake, [6]and you have modeled your lives after ours just as we are modeling ours after the Lord. You took *to heart* the word *we taught* with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, even in the face of trouble. [7]As a result, you have turned into a model *of faith* yourselves for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. [8]In fact, not only has the message of our Lord thundered from your gathering into Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere *we go,* your faith in God is talked about so we don't even have to say a thing! [9]You see, they go on and on telling us *the story of* how you welcomed us *when we were introduced to you*; how you turned toward God and realigned your life to serve the one true living God—leaving your idols *to crumble in the dust*—[10]and how you now await *the return* from heaven of His Son, whom He raised from the dead—namely, Jesus—our rescuer from the wrath to come.

► It's only by the leading of the Spirit that these first-generation church planters find themselves in this most disagreeable city (although it seems there's no place Paul can go without causing a commotion). Likewise, it is neither by chance nor by any human power that these people are drawn out of their comfy old habits into a radical new way of living. A miracle really takes shape when, by trading in their old ways of living, believers take to heart the message of Jesus, and their unshakable faith shakes up conversations everywhere.

Kingdom work begins at the surrender of life, by giving yourself away and expecting nothing in return. Real change is then ushered in by the loving touch of the Spirit, moving out from people living transparently faithful lives even in the middle of commotion.

2 Brothers and sisters, you yourselves know that our coming to you was not a waste of time. [2]You remember how we had just suffered through brutal and insulting attacks in Philippi; but because of God, we boldly *stepped into the open to* tell you His good news, even though it would likely mean more conflict for us. [3]For we haven't approached you—*or anyone else for that matter*—with some error or impure motives or deceitful agenda; [4]but as we have been approved by God and entrusted with the good news, that's how we are telling the world. We aren't trying to please everybody, but God, the only One who can truly examine our motives. [5]As you know, we didn't sandwich the truth between cunning compliments—*we told it straight*—and before the eye of God, we never conspired to make a single cent *off of you.* [6]We didn't come seeking respect from people—not from you or anyone else—although we could have leveraged our position as emissaries* of the Anointed One, *the Liberating King.* [7]Instead, we proved to be gentle among you, like a nursing mother caring for her own children. [8]We were so taken by you that we not only eagerly shared with you God's good news, but we also shared with you our own lives. That's how much you've come to mean to us.

[9]Don't you remember, my brothers and sisters, how hard we worked and struggled? We worked day and night so that we wouldn't be a burden to any of you and so that we could *continue to* proclaim to you the good news of God. [10]Both you and God can confirm how well we treated the believers: we were always holy,

* 1:1 Silvanus is better known in Acts as Silas. * 1:1 Some early manuscripts omit this portion. * 2:6 Literally, apostles

just, and blameless. 11-12As you know, we comforted and consoled each of you as a father soothes his own children, encouraging you to live lives worthy of God—of the One calling you into His own kingdom and into His glory.

Unlike the Corinthians who struggled to break their old religious and cultural ties when they came to faith, the Thessalonians followed Jesus wholeheartedly and thus faced persecution for their devotion.

13So we have good reason to give thanks to God without pausing. For you have taken into yourselves the word of God we brought to you and received it as a message from God—not just something whipped up by someone like you or us—and that word is at work in you who believe. 14And, brothers and sisters, you even became imitators of the churches of God in Jesus the Anointed that gather in Judea because you were willing to suffer at the hands of your own countrymen as they suffered from the *unbelieving* Judeans. 15*These are the same people* who killed the Lord Jesus, as well as the prophets, and *continued attacking until they* drove all of us out. They don't just offend God; they are *clearly* hostile to the rest of the people 16because they are trying to silence our life-saving message to the nations; and as a result, their sins are always filling up *and overflowing.* But in the end, they will face God's wrath.

17Brothers and sisters, we are like orphans, separated from you for a short time (in presence, yes, but not in heart); and we desperately desire to see your faces *again.* 18However, as much as we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, assure you we tried again and again—Satan thwarted our plans. 19For what is our *true* hope, our *true* joy, our victor's crown in all this? It is nothing if it isn't you standing before our Lord Jesus the Anointed at His arrival. 20You are our glory! You are our joy!

3 But after all our attempts *to come to you* were frustrated, we decided it was best for Silvanus* and me to stay behind in Athens by ourselves 2and to send Timothy (our dear brother [and servant of God],* our partner in the good news of the Anointed One) to strengthen, *comfort,* and encourage you in your faith 3so that you won't be shaken by the sufferings *and wither under this stress* that we know lies ahead. 4*Certainly you remember that* when we were with you, we warned you of the suffering we would have to endure; now, as you well know, it has happened. 5This is why I couldn't stand it anymore and sent *Timothy* to report on *the state of* your faith: because I was worried the tempter had tested you and, if so, all of our hard work would have come to nothing.

6*You can imagine my relief and joy* when Timothy returned to us with such good news about you, about your faith and love *for us*, about how you have such good memories of us and long to see us as much as we long to see you. 7Hearing this *about your faith,* brothers and sisters, brought comfort to us in our *stress-filled* days of trouble and suffering. 8For if you are set firmly in the Lord, then we can truly live. 9What thanks would ever be enough to offer God about you for all the jubilant celebration we'll feel before our God because of you? 10We remain vigilant in our prayers, night and day praying to *once again* see your faces and to help complete whatever may be lacking in your faith.

► It is obvious Paul loves Jesus, and His Spirit reinforces Paul in every way. How else is he able to walk away from beating after beating or endure trials of the heart and mind? He must constantly be praying for those he can and can't reach, for those he is with and for those he has to leave behind. Paul loves Jesus, and so he cannot help but embrace the world as passionately as he does.

11May God Himself, our Father, along with our Lord Jesus, [the Anointed One,]* navigate our way to you. 12May the Lord flood you with an *unending, undying* love for one another and for all humanity, like our love for you, 13so that your hearts will be reinforced *with His strength,* held blameless and holy before God, our Father, when our Lord Jesus, [the Anointed, *the Liberating King,*]* appears along with all His holy ones. [Amen.]*

* 3:1 Silvanus is better known in Acts as Silas. * 3:2 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 3:11 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 3:13 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 3:13 Most manuscripts omit this word.

4 So finally, brothers and sisters, in the *name of our* Lord Jesus, we ask you, we beg you to remember what we have taught you: live a life that is pleasing to God as you are already doing. Yes, we urge you to keep living and thriving in that life! 2For you know the instructions we gave you, instructions that came through the Lord Jesus. 3Now this is God's will *for you*: set yourselves apart and live holy lives; avoid *polluting yourselves with* sexual defilement. 4Learn how to take charge over your own body, maintaining purity and honor. 5Don't let the swells of lustful passion run your life as they do the outsiders who don't know God. 6Don't violate or take advantage of a fellow believer in such matters. As we told you before and warned you: the Lord will settle the score with anyone who does these things. 7Here's why: God does not call us to live impure, *adulterous, scandalous* lives, but to seek holiness *and purity*. 8If you ignore this message, then you're not only rejecting us but you're rejecting God, the One who has given His Holy Spirit to *live in* you.

Paul uses the language of a loving faith family reaching out to others.

9Now there's no need for us to send you instructions on caring for your faith family because God Himself has already taught you how to love outside yourselves. 10And it's evident *you learned that lesson well* by the way you love all the people of Macedonia. Brothers and sisters, we urge you to love even more 11and make it your goal to lead a peaceful life, mind your own business, and keep your hands busy in your work, as we have instructed you. 12That way you will live peacefully with those on the outside, and all your needs will be met without depending on others.

► What a beautiful, dramatic transformation! This is Paul's progression from spoon-feeding people better moral choices to trusting them to live by love according to the conviction of the Spirit, their guide to becoming active participants in the kingdom of God. Paul is acknowledging that there is a power at work that is much greater than his pen. In fact, the same Spirit that inspires Paul's words in these letters is teaching the believers in Thessalonica to live as true believers and teaches us still today.

13Brothers and sisters, we want you to be fully informed about those who have fallen asleep in death so that you will not be overwhelmed with grief like those who live outside of the *true* hope. 14Here's what we believe: since Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, God will bring with Jesus all who have died through Him. 15For we can say all this to you *confidently* because it is the word of the Lord: we who are still alive and left behind when the Lord comes will not precede those who have fallen asleep in death. 16*On that day,* with a command *that thunders into the world*, with a voice of a chief heavenly messenger, and with a blast of God's trumpet, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven; and all those who died in the Anointed One, *our Liberating King,* will rise *from the dead* first. 17Then we who are alive and left behind will be snatched up together with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This is how we, *the resurrected and the living,* will be with Him forever. 18So comfort one another *with this hope, and encourage one another* with these words.

► Many people fear death; perhaps it's the idea of the unknown that stirs the imagination. Death is the great enemy that stands before believers; but through Jesus' own death and resurrection, the power of death is broken. Paul uses the gentle image of the faithful being asleep as a new perspective on the finality of death. One minute you close your eyes to this world; the next you are celebrating with Jesus and experiencing the resurrection of the body. Those sleeping will not even miss a moment; it will all happen in the blink of an eye.

5 Now, brothers and sisters, you don't need further instruction *from us or anyone else for that matter* regarding how the seasons and times *will play out*. 2That's because you know *the truth* well enough. The day of the Lord will *race*

onto the scene and surprise us like a thief
in the night. 3People will be going about
their business chanting, "All is well! All is
at peace!" and in the next moment, *ruin
and* destruction will suddenly seize them
as labor pains grip a woman about to give
birth; for them there will be no escape. 4My
brothers and sisters, *it will be different for
you.* You do not dwell in the darkness, so
that day will not surprise you like a thief.
5For you are all children of light. You are
sons and daughters of the day. We are
not *created* of night, nor are we *owned by*
darkness. 6So then let's not *give in to* sleep
or wander around in a stupor as some do,
but let's stay awake and in control. 7You
see, sleepers sleep through the night, and
drunkards drink the night away; 8but since
we belong to the day, we should stay sober
and in control, covered with a breastplate
of faith and love and a helmet of the hope
of salvation. 9For God has not destined us,
His chosen, to face His wrath but to be the
heirs of salvation through our Lord Jesus
the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* 10who
died for us. So regardless of whether we are
awake or asleep, we will live together with
Him. 11So support one another. Keep build-
ing each other up as you have been doing.

12Brothers and sisters, we ask you
to show appreciation to those who are
working hard among you and those
who are your leaders as they guide and
instruct you in the Lord—*they are price-
less.* 13When you think about them, let it
be with great love in your heart because of
all the work they have done. Let peace live
and reign among you.

14Brothers and sisters, we strongly
advise you to scold the rebels *who devote
their lives to wreaking havoc,* to encour-
age the downcast, to help the *sick and*
weak, and to be patient with all of them.
15Make sure no one returns evil for evil,
but always pursue what is good as it
affects one another *in the church* but also
all people. 16Celebrate always, 17pray con-
stantly, and 18give thanks *to God* no matter
what circumstances you find yourself in.
(This is God's will for all of you in Jesus
the Anointed.) 19Don't suppress the Spirit.
20Don't downplay prophecies. 21Take a
close look at everything, *test it,* then cling
to what is good. 22Put away every form of
evil.

23So now, may the God of peace *make
you His own* completely *and* set you apart
from the rest. May your spirit, soul, and
body be preserved, kept intact and wholly
free from any sort of blame at the coming
of our Lord Jesus the Anointed. 24For the
God who calls you is faithful, and He can
be trusted to make it so.

25Brothers and sisters, *we ask you to*
pray for us. 26Greet one another *warmly*
with a holy kiss. 27Here is my charge to
you before the Lord: have this letter read
to all our brothers and sisters [in the
faith].* 28May the grace of our Lord Jesus,
God's Anointed, be with *all of* you.

Paul knows the healing power of touch. When members of a loving community embrace, the hardest days are easier and no one feels alone.

* 5:27 Some early manuscripts omit this portion.

2 THESSALONIANS

Letter to the church in Thessalonica

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Compared to the gentle, pastoral tone in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, in this letter he seems anxious over what is going on in this robust capital of Macedonia. First, the intensity of persecution against the gatherings of believers is clearly on the rise in and around Thessalonica. But we cannot know exactly who is bringing the pressure on this young community of faith or why they are doing it. What we do know is that it is increasingly dangerous to be a follower of Jesus in this area. Paul assures these new believers that relief is coming when the Lord returns. God's justice will be satisfied when He punishes those who bring such misery on His people.

Second, apparently someone has forged a letter in Paul's name. In that letter, Paul is said to have written that the day of the Lord has already arrived. He is quick to point out that the letter is not from him and to assure the Thessalonians that the day has not arrived. In fact, it won't come, he says, until restraints are removed and "the rebellious one" is unleashed to start a "great rebellion." But as awful as this sounds, Paul again assures them that almost as soon as it begins, the rebellion will be over when the Lord Jesus returns to annihilate the enemy and his minions.

Third, for reasons not altogether clear, a number of people in the community have quit their jobs and are no longer working. As a result, they have become a nuisance and a burden on the rest. Paul confronts them: "Anyone not willing to work shouldn't get to eat!" As he often does, Paul points to his own example. Although as a traveling missionary he had the right to live off of the hospitality of others, he didn't exercise that right; instead he went to work daily to take care of his own needs. So he urges the lazy Thessalonians to follow his example. With all these issues going on in the church, no wonder Paul is a bit nervous.

The themes that dominate both 1 and 2 Thessalonians have much to do with matters of last or ultimate things: death, the afterlife, the second coming, judgment, and eternity. Paul addresses these subjects not long after he planted the church. They are clearly salient issues facing the church in Thessalonica, and they continue to interest believers today. Still Paul doesn't answer every question about what will happen next as the story of redemption unfolds.

1 Paul, Silvanus,* and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians *that gathers* in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus the Anointed. 2May grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus the Anointed be with you.

3Brothers and sisters, we cannot help but thank God for you, which is only appropriate because your faith is growing and expanding and because the love *demonstrated by* each and every one of you is overflowing for one another. 4So, *of course,* we've proudly bragged about you *within circles of God's people* at other churches *near and far* because, even in *the grip of* much persecution and affliction, you've stood firm in your faith and have persevered. 5Your sufferings prove that God's judgment is right! The result: your sufferings have made you worthy—worthy of the kingdom of God, which is the very reason why you are suffering *in the first place*! 6It is only right that God would repay with trouble those who have troubled you 7-8and give relief to all of you still bandaging your wounds, as well as to all the rest of us. On that day—when *the clouds draw back displaying* His powerful heavenly messengers in a fiery blaze, Jesus the Lord will appear from heaven dealing out perfect justice to anyone who doesn't know God and anyone who disobeys the good news of our Lord Jesus. 9*And what's to become of them?* They'll pay for what they've done; their punishment will be eternal destruction. *And what's worse?* They'll be banished from the Lord's presence and glorious power. 10On that day when He comes, all the saints *in heaven and on earth* will celebrate the glory *of His power,* and all who believe will *stand and* be amazed—*this includes you* because you believed us when we testified *on His behalf*. 11All this is why we are constantly praying for you, so God will make you worthy of the *great* calling *you have received from Him* and will give you the power to accomplish every good intention and work of faith. 12Then the *great* name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified through your lives, and you will be glorified in Him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *our Liberating King.*

► On that day—though men and women have spent lifetimes scanning the skies hoping that "perhaps today" is the day of salvation—on that day, the confessed lovers of God and Jesus will glow with all the wonder of children at Christmas.

There are clear premonitions in the Bible about what we can expect on that day; but can anyone, with our rudimentary human knowledge, know what to expect? Jesus confessed that even He did not know the day or the hour when these final moments will play out, so how can we truly know? Likely this fear of the unknown is what took root and began to spread like weeds within the Thessalonians' community. Where fear takes root, faith withers; and people who once focused on the bright hope of the Son turn away.

2 Since, brothers and sisters, we are on the topic of the coming of our Lord Jesus the Anointed and how we will all gather together to meet Him, we ask 2that you don't let your minds get quickly rattled or become anxious because of someone else's so-called "spiritual revelation" or because someone gave you a message or claimed to know of a letter allegedly from us reporting that the day of the Lord has already come! 3Don't be deceived by anyone! That day, *that amazing day,* won't come until after the *great* rebellion and the unveiling of the rebellious one.* *As the spawn of death,* he delights in destruction. 4He sets himself up as the *great* adversary *of God* and vies for a place above all other so-called gods or objects of worship. *If it were possible,* he would even take a seat—*yes, exalt himself*—in the temple of *the one true* God, declaring that he himself is God! 5Don't you remember me telling you all this the last time we were together? 6You know what restrains him now *and what will hold him* until the exact time when he will be revealed. 7For the mystery of sin is already working *its way through the world*; He who holds him back now *will continue to suppress him only until He* is pulled out of the way. 8It is then that this rebellious one will be *finally* unleashed. But the Lord will slay him with the breath of His mouth; and

* 1:1 Silvanus is better known in Acts as Silas. * 2:3 Other manuscripts read "man of sin."

with the splendor of His coming, He will bring him to his *predetermined* end. 9Still the rebellious one arrives with all sorts of power, performing signs and fake miracles sanctioned by Satan; 10he employs every manner of wicked deception to wile away those who are destined for *eternal* death because they reject the love of the truth that leads to salvation. 11Because of this, God sends a deceptive influence over them so they will wander from the truth and believe the lie. 12As a result, God will judge all of those who did not entrust themselves to the truth *when it faced them* but instead reveled in wickedness.

13*But this is not you,* dearly beloved brothers and sisters of the Lord. We cannot help but thank God for you at all times, because from the beginning He handpicked you for salvation through the Spirit's sanctifying work and your belief in the truth. 14He called you to this when we shared our good news with you. Now you can take part in the glory of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.* 15So, brothers and sisters*, all you need to do now is* stand firm and hold tight to the line of teachings we have passed on to you, whether in person or in a letter. 16-17Now may our Lord Jesus (the Anointed One Himself) and God our Father (who has loved us, comforted us eternally, and given us a good hope by His grace) bring comfort to your hearts and strengthen *your wills to accomplish* every good work and word.

► Paul brings the situation to life for them: on one side, the rebellious one opposes God by corrupting God's world, telling lies, and instigating fear; but on the other side, there's Jesus, who comes from above and rains mercy over the world with His blood. He stands ready to return to face these enemies. Paul is trying to explain this epic battle with eternal consequences to his friends who have been led astray by false revelations. While this spiritual battle will occur in the future, skirmishes representing the two sides are already taking place in the church; so remain diligent and faithful in service of the Lord.

3 Brothers and sisters, having shared all this, let me ask you to pray for us. Pray that this message of the Lord will spread quickly and receive the praise and respect *it deserves* from others as it has with you. 2Pray also that we would all be rescued from *the snares of* harmful, wicked people—after all, not all people are believing. 3Still, the Lord is true to His promises; He will hold you up and guard you against the evil one. 4We do not doubt the Lord's intentions for you; we are confident that you are carrying out, and will continue to carry out, the commands we are sending your way. 5May the Lord guide your hearts into God's *pure* love and keep you headed straight into the strong and sure grip of the Anointed One.

6*For the sake of the church,* brothers and sisters, we insist in the name of our Lord Jesus the Anointed that you withdraw from any brother or sister who is out of order and unwilling to work, who is straying from the line of teaching we passed on to all of you. 7You know how essential it is to imitate us *in the way we live life*. We were never undisciplined 8nor did we take charity from anyone *while we were with you*. Instead, *you saw* how we worked very hard day and night so we wouldn't be a burden to even one person in the community. 9We had the right *to depend on your help and hospitality, as you know;* but we wanted to give you a model you could follow, *to lay a path of footprints for you to walk in*. 10This is exactly why, while with you, we commanded you: "Anyone not willing to work shouldn't get to eat!" 11You see, we are hearing that some folks in the community are out of step *with our teaching*; they are idle, not working, but really busy doing nothing—*and yet still expect to be fed!* 12If this is you or someone else in the community, we insist and urge you in the Lord Jesus the Anointed that you go to work quietly, *earn your keep, put food on your own table,* and supply your own necessities. 13And to the rest of you, brothers and sisters, never grow tired of doing good.

14If someone disregards the instructions of this letter, make a note of who it is and don't have anything to do with that person so that this one may be shamed. 15Don't consider someone like this an enemy *(he is an enemy only to himself)* but warn him as *if you were redirecting* your own brother.

Work is part of the ongoing work of creation, an aspect of God's image in us. Those who do not work will be unfulfilled and a burden to those around them.

16 And now, *dear friends*, may the Lord
of peace Himself grace you with peace
always and in everything. May the Lord be
present with all of you.
17 This *final* greeting is by me, Paul,
written by my own hand. This is my signa-
ture, *letting you know that* this is a *genuine*
letter from me, and so I write to you:
18 May the grace of our Lord Jesus the
Anointed be with all of you.

1 TIMOTHY

Personal letter to Timothy

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

In the first three decades after Jesus launched the Christian movement, no one was more influential than Paul, the former Jewish zealot. Many of the early churches were begun through his ministry or were strengthened by the teaching of the emissaries, by Paul or his associates. Because misunderstandings and false teachings were enormous problems in those early years of the church, Paul traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin bringing authoritative teaching, church order, and a strong apologetic to control heresy and divisive elements. Paul mentored a select group of apprentices as they traveled together. Those dedicated coworkers included Barnabas, Silas, Luke, John Mark, and Apollos. Although many others are also mentioned in his letters, possibly those closest to him were two young men he called his sons: Timothy and Titus.

Several of Paul's letters have survived, most of which are addressed to groups of believers at various locations. Four of his letters are addressed to individuals: Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. While each letter is uniquely personal, it's clear that Paul intends that these letters be read in the churches.

In this first letter to Timothy, there is conversational warmth that is not found in the church letters Paul wrote. When Paul moved into Macedonia, he had Timothy remain behind in Ephesus for the purpose of confronting false teaching and bringing order to this influential church through qualified elders and deacons. Timothy is encouraged, despite his young age, to handle difficult problems with authority and maturity. He is told to confront elders, to silence overbearing women, and to avoid activities that will call into question his position and standing in the church. In some ways, Timothy is being thrown into the fire; but he is gifted, called, and well equipped. He will make mistakes; but God is with him, and his spiritual father, Paul, shows great confidence in his young son.

It has become traditional to refer to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus as the Pastoral Epistles because they share a number of common features and themes Paul considered useful to those who lead churches.

1 Paul, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed commissioned by order of God our Savior and Jesus the Anointed, our *living and certain* hope), 2to you, Timothy, my true son in the faith.

May the grace, mercy, and peace *that come only* from God the Father and our Lord Jesus the Anointed *mark your life*.

3As I said that day I left for Macedonia, stay in Ephesus and instruct the *unruly* people *in the church*, *once and for all,* to stop teaching a different doctrine. 4*Tell them* to turn away from fables and endless genealogies. These activities just cause more arguments and confusion. Instead, they should concern themselves with *welcoming in and bringing about* the reign of God, which is all about faith. 5Our teaching *about this journey* is intended to bring us to *a single destination—a place where self-giving* love *reigns* from a pure heart, a clean conscience, and a genuine faith. 6*Yes,* some have walked away from these traits and have fallen into *a life of endless* blabber and nonsense—7they wish to become scholars of the law, but they don't know what they are talking about, and they make these *grand* pronouncements *but clearly don't understand what they just said*.

8You and I know the law is good (if used in the right way), and 9we also know the law was not designed for law-abiding people but for lawbreakers and criminals, the ungodly and sin-filled, the unholy and worldly, the father killers and mother killers, the murderers, 10the sexually immoral and homosexuals, slave dealers, liars, perjurers, and anyone else who acts against the sound doctrine 11laid out in the glorious, *holy, and pure* good news of the blessed God that has been entrusted to me.

12I thank our Lord Jesus the Anointed who empowers me, because He saw me as faithful and appointed me to this ministry. 13Despite the fact that at one time I was slandering the things of God, persecuting and attacking *His people*, He was still merciful to me because I acted in ignorance apart from faith. 14But He poured His grace over me, *and I was flooded* in an abundance of the grace and faith and love that can only be found in Jesus the Anointed.

15Here's a statement worthy of trust: Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King,* came into the world to save sinners, and I am the worst of them all. 16But it is for this reason I was given mercy: by displaying His perfect patience in me, the very worst of all sinners, Jesus the Anointed could show that patience to all who would believe in Him and gain eternal life. 17May the King eternal, immortal, and invisible—the one and only God—now be honored and glorified forever and ever. Amen.

► It is fair to say that Paul never got over the fact that he violently persecuted the church. Even though his rampage against the first followers of Jesus had ended over 20 years earlier, he still grieved because of what he had done. But when Paul was older, he was moved to celebration and praise because God's mercy is always greater than sin. The Lord Jesus called Paul in the midst of his campaign against Him so that he became a public display of Jesus' patient love. So, if we think somehow we are too far from God's mercy, then we should think again.

18Timothy, my dear child, I am placing before you a charge *for the mission ahead.* It is in total agreement with the prophecies once spoken over you. *Here it is: with God's message* stirring and directing you, fight the good fight, 19armed with faith and a good conscience. Some have tried to silence their consciences, wrecking their *lives and ruining their* faiths. 20Hymenaeus and Alexander are among these; I have had to hand them over to Satan so they might learn not to speak against God.

2 So, first and foremost, I urge *God's people to pray*. They should make their requests, petitions, and thanksgivings on behalf of all humanity. 2*Teach them* to pray for kings (or anyone in high places *for that matter*) so that we can lead quiet, peaceful lives—reverent, godly, *and holy*—3all of which is good and acceptable before the eyes of God our Savior 4who desires for everyone to be saved and know the truth. 5Because

There is one God and one Mediator
between God and us—
the man Jesus, *God's* Anointed,
6Who gave His life as a ransom for all
so that we might have freedom.

* 1:1 Literally, apostle

The testimony was given *to me* at just the right time. 7This is exactly what I was appointed *to do—tell everyone His story*—as a herald, an emissary,* a teacher of the outsiders in faith and the truth. (*Listen, I promise* it's all true. I'm not lying.)

8*So here's what you tell them;* here's what I want to see: Men, pray wherever you are. Reach your holy hands *to heaven*—without rage or conflict—*completely open.* 9Women, the same goes for you: dress properly, modestly, and appropriately. Don't get carried away in grooming your hair or *seek beauty in* glittering gold, pearls, or expensive clothes. 10Instead, as is fitting, let good works *decorate your true beauty and* show that you are a woman who claims reverence for God. 11*It's best if* a woman learns quietly and orderly in complete submission.

12*Now, Timothy,* it's not my habit to allow women to teach in a way that wrenches authority from a man. *As I said, it's best if* a woman learns quietly and orderly. 13*This is* because Adam was formed first *by God,* then Eve. 14Plus, it wasn't Adam who was tricked; it was she—the woman was the one who was fooled and disobeyed *God's command first.* 15Still, God, in His faithfulness, will deliver her through childbearing as long as she* remains in faith and love and holiness with self-restraint.

► People are more concerned about their outward appearance than their inner beauty. Paul wants women to pursue the right kind of beauty, the beauty of an inner life fashioned after godliness. That includes proper respect for their husbands, a willingness to learn the truth, and—unlike Eve—avoiding enticing claims. Paul then turns to childbirth. Childbirth is a particularly precarious time in the life of a woman; in that day, many women died trying to deliver their babies. While Paul is not promising lack of pain or assurance of safety in childbirth, he is speaking of God's faithfulness and spiritual rewards to those women who live in faith, love, and holiness, supporting the family and the church in which God places them.

3 *Here's another* statement you may trust: if anyone is seeking a position as overseer *in the church,* he desires an honorable and important work. 2*Here are the qualifications to look for in* an overseer: a spotless reputation, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, sensible, respectable, welcoming to strangers *(allowing them into his home),* and gifted to teach. 3Disqualify any drunk or violent man. Look for a gentle man; no belligerent fellow can follow this calling. And he should be free from money lust. 4He should exert good control over his own household, and his children should obey and honor him. 5(If someone can't manage his own household, then how can he take care of God's family?) 6He mustn't be someone recently converted; otherwise, he may become arrogant and fall into the devil's condemnation. 7He should also be respected *for his character and known as an honorable person* by people outside *of the church* so as to avoid the *trips,* traps, *and pitfalls* of the devil.

8The same standards apply to deacons: they should be dignified. Double-talking *hypocrites,* heavy drinkers, and those greedy for ill-gotten gain *should* not *be considered.* 9They should be people who hold tight to the great mystery of faith with a clear conscience. 10Put these deacon-candidates to the test first; and if they come through without stumbling, then send them out to serve.

11Again the same applies to women *in key positions*; they should also be dignified, not *backstabbing* gossips but self-controlled and faithful to the core.

12Now deacons should live faithfully as the husband of one wife and be in control of their households, including their children. 13Those deacons who serve well will achieve a good standing for themselves *in the community* and have great confidence to walk in the faith that is in Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.*

► If the church lacks qualified, positive leaders, then it will not succeed in its mission. Paul never provides a job description for "overseers" and "deacons." What he does offer is a list of character traits or qualifications that challenge even the most outstanding disciple. Essentially they

* 2:7 Literally, apostle * 2:15 Literally, they

are servant-leaders of the church. They give themselves to the church's well-being by teaching the truth, living a life in imitation of Jesus, and defending the church from false teaching. Paul knows firsthand how important it is to discover, train, and empower capable leaders. Everywhere he goes, he invests a lot of himself in coworkers like Timothy. Now it is Timothy's turn to train the next generation.

14I am writing all this to you, hoping I
can come to you before too long; 15but in
case I am delayed, you will know how one
ought to behave as a member of God's
family—the assembly of the living God,
the pillar and foundation that support the
truth—16and I think you will agree that
the mystery of godliness is great:

He* was revealed in the flesh,
proven right in the Spirit;
He was seen by the heavenly messengers,
preached to outsider nations.
He was believed in the world,
taken up *to the heavens* in glory.

4 But even so, the Spirit very clearly
tells us that in the last times some
will abandon the *true* faith because
of their devotion to spirits *sent to* deceive
and sabotage, and *mistakenly they will
end up* following the doctrine of demons.
2*They will be carried away* through the
hypocrisy of liars whose consciences
have been branded with a red-hot iron,
3saying, "Don't marry. Don't eat *such-and-
such* foods." But God created all these
to be received with gratitude by people
who hold fast to the faith and really com-
prehend the truth. 4For everything God
made is good. *That means* nothing should
be rejected as long as it's received with
a grateful heart, 5for by God's word and
prayer, it is made holy.

Paul turns from moral character to solid doctrine. People were believing strange doctrines and passing rumors. Timothy is expected to confront legalism and immorality with truth and right thinking.

6Place these *truths* before the broth-
ers and sisters. If *you do,* you will be a
good servant of Jesus the Anointed, raised
and fed on words of true belief, trained in
the good instruction you have so clearly
followed. 7Reject worldly fables. Refuse old
wives' tales. Instead, train yourself toward
godliness. 8Although training your body
has certain payoffs, godliness benefits all
things—holding promise for life here and
now and promise for the life that is com-
ing. 9This statement is worthy of trust
and our full acceptance. 10This is what
we work so hard for! This is why we are
constantly struggling: because we have an
assured hope fixed upon a living God who
is the Savior of all humankind—especially
all of us who believe.

11So go out and insist on these things.
Teach them. 12Don't let anyone belittle you
because you are young. Instead, show the
faithful, *young and old,* an example of how
to live: set the standard for how to talk,
act, love, and be faithful and pure. 13Until I
get there, make sure to devote yourself to
the public reading of Scripture, to exhorta-
tion, and to teaching. 14Don't neglect the
gift that was given to you through the
prophecy spoken when the company of
the elders laid their hands on you. 15Cul-
tivate *all* these practices; live by them so
that all will see *how* you are advancing
and growing. 16Take care of yourself, con-
centrate on your teaching, and stick with
these things. If you do, then you will be
effective in bringing salvation to yourself
and all who hear you.

Paul instructs Timothy not to let his youth cause distraction: meet this objection with loving speech, faithful conduct, pure action, and transparent living as an example for all.

5 Respect an elderly man. Don't speak
to him sharply; appeal to him as you
would a father. Treat younger men
as brothers, 2elderly women as mothers,
and younger women as sisters in all purity.

3Honor widows, *but be discerning
about* which ones are truly widows. 4If
any widow has children or grandchildren,
then go to the descendants first and teach
them that it is their spiritual responsibility
to care for their own family, to repay their
parents *and grandparents* because this is
what pleases God. 5*Here's how you know* if
she is a true widow: she is all alone with
her hope fixed in God, crying her pleas,

* 3:16 Some manuscripts read "God."

prayers, and appeals to God day and night. 6But the woman who is living for pleasure is dead as she stands. 7You should command these things to everyone to keep them free of blame. 8And listen, if someone is not providing for his own relatives and especially his own household, then he is denying the faith and is worse off than an unbeliever.

► Family members have a duty before God to support their relatives. But when a widow has no family to support her, the church must step in to be her surrogate family. Paul, of course, is thinking of those widows who have served faithfully in the ministry of the church. The elderly are easily forgotten, especially those without caring families. The church is called to honor those who have been faithful servants by maintaining relationships with them and helping them when they are in need.

9Now only these should be put on the widow registry: a woman who is at least 60 years old, was a faithful wife to one husband, 10is well thought of for her good works, has raised children, was hospitable, has washed the feet of the saints, has tended to the sick and suffering, and has devoted herself to do good wherever possible. 11Don't add younger women *to the widow roll* because when their desires for pleasure overtake them, they get careless in their devotion to the Anointed One. Their constant thoughts become, "I want to get married," 12and such thoughts disqualify them because they have tossed aside their first commitment *to Him.* 13Plus, they get into the habit of being idle. Not only are they idle, but they *band together and* roam from house to house, gossiping about and meddling into other people's business; they talk about all sorts of things that should never be spoken of. 14That's why I think it's best to have the younger widows remarry, have children, and take care of their households so that the enemy gains no opportunity to come with accusations. 15(*Unfortunately* some have already lined up behind Satan!) 16Tell any woman of faith: if you have a widow in your family, help her so the church is unencumbered and is free to extend aid to the widows who are truly in need of its help.

17Elders who are leading well *should be admired and valued.* Double up on the honor shown them; *care for them well*—especially those *constantly and consistently* teaching the word and preaching. 18For the Scripture agrees, "Don't muzzle the ox while it is treading out *your* grain,"* and, "The worker deserves his wages."*

19Listen, when or if a charge comes against an elder, don't even acknowledge the accusation unless there are two or more witnesses. 20*Bring any believers* who persist in sinning before the community and publicly scold them so that all the rest will know to fear *sin and its consequences.* 21I challenge you—in front of God, Jesus His Anointed, and His select heavenly messengers—to keep these instructions. And don't do anything out of favoritism. 22Don't be too quick to lay hands *upon anyone* or share in the sins of others—stay clean.

23*Concerning your health, Timothy,* don't just drink water; drink a little wine. It is good for your stomach and will help with your frequent ailments.

24Some people's sins are clearly on display *before the world.* They lead the way to the *final* judgment. *But it's not so easy* with other people because their sins trail behind *and don't catch up to them until later.* 25The same is true regarding good works; some are there for all to see. Other people's works can be inconspicuous; but *at the final judgment,* they cannot remain hidden.

6 Tell all who labor under the yoke of slavery to treat their masters with honor *and respect, whether or not their masters deserve it.* This will keep God's name and doctrine from being smeared. 2If their masters are believers, then they should not be insolent toward them just because they are your brothers and sisters. Actually they should be even more determined to serve them because the gains from their good works benefit those who are faithful and loved.

Timothy, teach these *instructions,* and appeal *to those under your ministry to live by them.* 3If others are teaching otherwise and bringing unhealthy conversations to the community, if they are not sticking to the sound words in the teaching

* 5:18 Deuteronomy 25:4 * 5:18 Compare Luke 10:7

of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, if they
are not teaching godly principles—4then
they are swollen with conceit, *filled with
self-importance,* and without any proper
understanding. They probably have a gross
infatuation with controversy and will end-
lessly debate meanings of words. That kind
of talk leads to envy, discord, slander, and
evil mistrust; 5and these people constantly
bicker because they are depraved in their
minds and bereft of the truth. They think
somehow that godliness is the way to get
ahead. 6This is ironic because godliness,
along with contentment, does put us ahead
but not in the ways some imagine. 7You see
we came into this world with nothing, and
nothing is going with us on the way out!
8So as long as we are clothed and fed, we
should be happy. 9But those who chase
riches are constantly falling into tempta-
tion and snares. They are regularly caught
by their own stupid and harmful desires,
dragged down and pulled under into ruin
and destruction. 10For the love of money—
and what it can buy—is the root of all sorts
of evil. Some already have wandered away
from the true faith because they craved
what it had to offer; *but when reaching for
the prize,* they found their *hands and* hearts
pierced with many sorrows.

11*Timothy, don't let this happen to
you*—run away from these things! You are
a man of God. Your quest is for justice,
godliness, faithfulness, love, perseverance,
and gentleness.

Paul asks this young leader to shepherd a divided congregation through one problem after another. He points to a time when Jesus will arrive to set this world straight.

12Fight the good fight of the faith! Cling
to the eternal life you were called to
when you confessed the good confession
before witnesses. 13Before God—the life-
giving Creator of all things—and Jesus the
Anointed, *our Liberating King,* who made
the good confession to Pontius Pilate, I
urge you: 14keep His commandment. Have
a spotless, indisputable record until our
Lord Jesus the Anointed appears *to set
this world straight.* 15In His own perfect
time, He will come—blessed is the only
Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord
of lords. 16He alone possesses immortal-
ity; He makes His home in matchless,
blinding, brilliant light that no one can
approach—no mortal has ever even seen
Him, and no human can. So let it be
that all honor and eternal power are His.
Amen.

17Here's what you say to those
wealthy in regard to this age: "Don't
become high and mighty or place all your
hope on a gamble for riches; instead, fix
your hope on God, the One who richly
provides everything for our enjoyment."
18Tell them to use their wealth for good
things; be rich in good works! If they are
willing to give generously and share every-
thing, 19then they will send ahead a great
treasure for themselves and build their
futures on a solid foundation. As a result,
they will surely take hold of eternal life.

20O Timothy, protect what was
entrusted to you! Walk away from all the
godless, empty voices *out there,* and turn
aside from objections and arguments that
arise from false knowledge. 21(By profess-
ing such knowledge, some are missing the
mark when it comes to *true* faith.)

May God's grace be with you.

2 TIMOTHY

Personal letter to Timothy

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

This is probably the last letter Paul ever writes. His tone is different in this letter as he writes from his prison in Rome, not long before dying a martyr's death. Gone is his typical optimism that he will soon be released; now he is all but certain that he has come to the end of his life. Yet, while there is an air of acceptance of what is to come, there is also a triumphant tone to this last of the letters from Paul to individuals because Paul will face whatever may come with a clean conscience and a clear sense that he has fulfilled the work God had for him to do. He has run the race of faith and run it well. He will cross the finish line a winner ready to receive the welcome, the accolades, and the crown from his King, Jesus. But Paul knows he is not in this race alone. What awaits him is the same victorious destiny that awaits all who love God and long for His kingdom. For Paul, no one longs more and loves greater than Timothy.

In writing to his younger colleague in Ephesus, Paul effectively deputizes him to carry on proclaiming the gospel. As the apostle passes from this world to the next, he wants to be certain that the good news is in good hands. With Timothy he knows that is the case. Paul encourages Timothy to become a leader and teacher who stands above the pettiness that threatens to tear the church apart. But before the martyr's blade severs Paul's head from his body, Paul wants to see Timothy one last time. So Paul asks Timothy to come to Rome before winter sets in to bring a cloak to keep Paul warm in his prison cell and to collect some books and papers for him.

In this letter, Paul reminds Timothy of his rich spiritual heritage and the need to center his attention on the truth that Paul himself taught. False teachers surround the church, upsetting many and harming the whole community. Jewish legalists are trying to divide the believers; Gentile pagans are introducing immorality into the church fellowships; Rome is seeking to destroy their leaders. Timothy is Paul's last and best hope to counter their negative influences. To protect the church, the young leader must avoid their deceptions, follow Paul's example, and be ready to pass the faith along to the next generation of faithful witnesses.

1 Paul, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed *commissioned* by God's will according to the promise of life *found only* in Jesus the Anointed, 2to *you,* my dear child Timothy.

May grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus the Anointed be yours.

3-4*Timothy,* you are constantly in my prayers. Day and night I remember you before God and give thanks to Him whom I serve with a clean conscience, as did my ancestors. I really want to see you, especially when I remember how you cried *the last time we were together*. Yes, I know it would make me joyful *to see you again.* 5What strikes me most is how *natural and* sincere your faith is. I am convinced that the same faith that dwelt in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, abides in you as well. 6This is why I *write to* remind you to stir up the gift of God that *was conveyed* to you when I laid my hands upon you. 7You see, God did not give us a cowardly spirit but a powerful, loving, and disciplined spirit.

God's gift of faith is like a flame, and when the embers of the fire have cooled you must fan them again and keep them ablaze.

8So don't be embarrassed to testify about our Lord or for me, His prisoner. Join us in suffering for the good news by the *strength and* power of God. 9God has *already* saved us and called us to this holy calling—not because of any good works we may have done, but because of His own intention and because eons and eons ago *(before time itself existed)*, He gave us this grace in Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King.* 10And now, *the time has come!* That grace was revealed when our Savior, Jesus the Anointed, appeared; and *through His resurrection* He has wiped out death and brought to light life and immortality by way of this good news. 11I was appointed a preacher, emissary,* and teacher of this message. 12This is exactly why I am suffering. But I am not ashamed because I know Him and I have put my trust in Him. And I am fully certain that He has the ability to protect what I have placed in His care until that day.

13Remember the words that you heard from me. Retain them as the model for *healthy and* sound teaching in the faith and love that are *available* in Jesus the Anointed. 14*As for* the precious thing entrusted to you, protect it with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

► Paul singles out several individuals in this letter, some for praise, others for harsh criticism. Timothy is an example of one who stayed true to Jesus and His emissary, the imprisoned Paul. Later Paul mentions Hymenaeus and Philetus as victims of a cancer within the church who have turned from the truth. Demas, too, is drawn into the attractions of the world, while Alexander the coppersmith opposes their message. With so many who have abandoned and opposed Paul, it's refreshing to hear of Onesiphorus, who—against all odds—has stayed true to Paul and often visits him in prison to keep up his spirits. Clearly the message is that many may fall away, but a few will continue to be strong for the Lord.

15You may know *by now* that all those in Asia have turned their backs on me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16-17But Onesiphorus was not ashamed of my chains. So when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me and found me. May the Lord show mercy to his house because he has often *stopped by to* refresh my *weary* soul. 18And may the Lord shower him with divine mercy on the last day. You are well aware of all he did to serve me in Ephesus.

2 But as for you, my child, be empowered by the grace that is in Jesus, the Anointed One. 2Whatever you heard me teach before an audience of witnesses, I want you to pass along to trustworthy people who have the ability to teach others too. 3As a good soldier of Jesus the Anointed, *be ready to* suffer with me. 4*Remember that* soldiers on active duty don't get wrapped up in civilian matters because they want to satisfy those who recruited them. 5*Look at it another way:* if someone competes as an athlete,

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:11 Literally, apostle

he won't *win the race and* be crowned with the wreath if he breaks the rules. 6And the farmer who exhausts himself *in the field* should be the first to taste his harvest. 7Think about what I am telling you, and let the Lord give you clarity on all of it.

Paul has mentored no one more privately and successfully than Timothy. Now he charges Timothy to pass the faith along to the next generation. Training leaders is priority one.

8Remember Jesus the Anointed, raised from the dead, descended from David's *royal* line. This is *the crux of* my good news! 9This is why I suffer and why I am *bound and* chained like a lawbreaker. But God's word is not in chains! 10That's why I endure everything for the sake of God's chosen: so that they might experience salvation with lasting, eternal glory through Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.* 11Here's a statement you can trust:

If we died with Him,
we will live with Him.
12If we remain *with Him*,
we will reign alongside Him.
If we deny Him,
we will be denied by Him.
13If we are unfaithful,
He remains faithful,
For He is not able to deny Himself.

14Remind others about these things *that I'm telling you.* Warn them before God to stop their useless bickering over words. *After all, splitting hairs* does no good; it only ruins those *forced to* listen *to their meritless arguments.* 15*Timothy*, do everything you can to present yourself to God as *a man who is fully* genuine, a worker unashamed *of your mission,* a guide capable of leading others *along the correct path defined* by the word of truth. 16Stay away from ungodly babbling because it will only lead deeper into a godless lifestyle. 17Once these empty voices start to speak, *Timothy,* they infect and spread; and soon the body is consumed with its cancer.* Hymenaeus and Philetus fell victim to it, 18and they walked away from the truth by claiming that the day of resurrection has already arrived. They are clearly disrupting the faith of some *who are not well grounded.* 19Regardless *of what they do or say*, God's foundation is strong and firmly in place, etched with this seal: "The Lord knows the ones who belong to Him,"* and, "Everyone who invokes the name of the Lord ought to stop doing what they know to be wrong."

20*Look,* in the mansions *of the rich and powerful* you will find everything from silver and gold serving bowls to wooden containers and clay jars; some are used for special occasions—*where honor is important*—others are used for more mundane tasks. 21So *tell them,* if they will clean up their lives and purify themselves from dishonorable teachings *that lead people astray,* then they can become honorable vessels, consecrated and useful to the Master, made ready for every good work *He has in store.*

22*Timothy,* run away from youthful desires. Instead, *direct your passion to* chasing after righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord with pure hearts. 23Excuse yourself from any *conversations that turn into* foolish and uninformed debates because you know they only provoke fights. 24As the Lord's slave, you shouldn't *exhaust yourself in* bickering; instead, be gentle—no matter who you are dealing with—*ready and* able to teach, tolerant without resentment, 25gently instructing those who stand up against you. Besides, the time may come when God grants them a change of heart* so that they can arrive at the full knowledge of truth. 26And if they come to their senses, they can escape the devil's snare and walk freed from his captivity and evil bidding.

3 And know this: in the last days, times will be hard. 2You see, the world will be filled with narcissistic, money-grubbing, pretentious, arrogant, and abusive people. They will rebel against their parents and will be ungrateful, unholy, 3uncaring, coldhearted, accusing, without restraint, savage, and haters of anything good. 4*Expect them to be* treacherous, reckless, swollen with self-importance, and given to loving pleasure more than they love God. 5Even though they may look or act like godly people, they're not. They deny His power. *I tell you:* Stay away from the likes of these. 6They're *snakes* slithering into the houses of vulnerable women, women gaudy with sin, to seduce them. *These reptiles can* capture

* 2:17 Literally, gangrene * 2:19 Numbers 16:5 * 2:25 Literally, repentance

them because these women are weak and easily swayed by their desires. 7They seem always to be learning, but they never seem to gain the full measure of the truth. 8And, just as Jannes and Jambres rose up against Moses,* these *ungodly* people defy the truth. Their minds are corrupt, and their faith is *absolutely* worthless. 9But they won't get too far because their stupidity will be noticed by everyone, just as it was with Jannes and Jambres.

► Paul challenges Timothy to be prepared. Hard times are coming. Things will go from bad to worse, he warns, because pretentious, hostile, hateful, and betraying people are out there. He tells Timothy to stay away from them and to continue to look to Paul's example, enduring in love and recalling how Paul himself has followed Jesus. For if Jesus was persecuted, then what should His followers expect for themselves? In the midst of this warning, Paul encourages Timothy.

10*You have been a good student.* You have closely observed how I have lived. You've followed my instructions, my habits, my purpose, my faith, my patience. You've watched how I love and have seen how I endure. *You have been with me* 11through persecutions and sufferings—remember what they did to me in Antioch? In Iconium and Lystra? I endured all of it, and the Lord rescued me from it all! 12Anyone wishing to live a godly life in Jesus the Anointed will be *hunted down and* persecuted. 13But as for the wicked and the imposters, they will keep leading and following each other further and further away from the truth. 14So surely you ought to stick to what you know is certain. All you have learned comes from people you know and trust 15because since childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which enable you to be wise *and lead* to salvation through faith in Jesus the Anointed. 16All of Scripture is God-breathed; *in its* inspired *voice, we hear* useful teaching, rebuke, correction, *instruction, and* training for a life that is right 17so that God's people may be up to the task ahead and have all they need to accomplish every good work.

4 *And now* I bring you this charge before God and Jesus the Anointed, the one *destined* to judge the living and the dead, at His *glorious* appearance and His kingdom: 2*go out and* preach the word! Go whether it's an opportune time or not! Reprove, warn, and encourage; *but do so* with all the patience and instruction *needed to fulfill your calling* 3because a time will come when some will no longer tolerate sound teaching. Instead, they will live by their own desires; they'll scratch their itching ears by surrounding themselves with teachers who *approve of their lifestyles and* tell them what they want to hear. 4They will turn away from the real truth *you have to offer* because they prefer the sound of *fables and* myths. 5But you *must stay focused and* be alert at all times. Tolerate suffering. Accomplish the *good* work of an evangelist, and complete the ministry to which you have been called.

Paul's message: stay focused, suffer hardships, be confident, do the work. The church has always progressed by faithfulness of her saints.

6For I am already being poured out, *and the last drops* of this drink offering *are all that remain*; it's almost time for me to leave. 7I have fought the good fight, I have *stayed on course and* finished the race, and *through it all,* I have kept believing. 8I look forward to what's in store for me: a crown of righteousness that the Lord—the always right *and just* judge—will give me that day (but it is not only for me, but for all those who love *and long for* His appearing).

9Come to me, *Timothy,* as soon as you can. 10You see, Demas has fallen for this world, abandoned me, and headed off to Thessalonica. Crescens took off for Galatia. Titus has gone to Dalmatia. 11Luke is the only one left. Bring Mark with you because he is useful in this work and will help look after me. 12I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13On your way here, pick up the cloak I left with Carpus in Troas, and bring the scrolls—especially the parchments.

14*Keep your eye out for* Alexander the coppersmith! He came against me with all sorts of evil—may the Lord pay him back accordingly—15so watch your back

* 3:8 Exodus 7:11, 22

because he has gone overboard to oppose
our message.
16 *When it was time* for my first
defense, no one showed up to support
me. Everyone abandoned me (may it not
be held against them) 17 except the Lord.
He stood by me, strengthened me, and
backed the truth I proclaimed with power
so it may be heard by all the non-Jews. He
rescued me, pried open the lion's jaw, *and*
snatched me from its teeth. 18 And *I know*
the Lord will continue to rescue me from
every *trip, trap, snare, and pitfall of* evil and
carry me safely to His heavenly kingdom.
May He be glorified throughout eternity.
Amen.
19 Give my regards to Prisca, Aquila,
and everyone over at Onesiphorus's house.
20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left
Trophimus in Miletus because he was
sick. 21 Try your best to come before winter
blows in. Eubulus says hello and so do
Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the broth-
ers and sisters. 22 May the Lord be with
your spirit, and may His grace be with you.
[Amen.]*

* 4:22 The earliest manuscripts omit this word.

TITUS

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Personal letter to Titus

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

Titus was a young coworker with Paul, a part of the emissary's mission team as he planted churches in Asia Minor and Greece. Because of his affection for and trust in Titus, whom Paul described as his "dear son birthed through our shared faith," Paul often delegated to Titus sensitive and difficult situations. One such situation was in Crete, an island in the Mediterranean with a reputation for dishonesty and thievery that was a haven for pirates. We can infer from this letter that the church on Crete was in its infancy and needed to be taught the basics about church leadership and foundational doctrine. The primary message of this letter is that good works come from sound doctrine, the shared faith of believers, and the resulting character that reflects a life lived serving God. In spite of the serious nature of the subject matter and the Cretans' situation, Paul managed to convey his teachings on leadership, sound teaching, and church order in a warm, conversational style.

Titus is the only book in Scripture where Jesus is specifically addressed as "our great God and Savior, Jesus the Anointed." Three times God is identified as the source of salvation, and three times Jesus is referred to as the instrument of salvation. It is one of the few places where the role that each Person in the Trinity has in salvation is isolated: "God our Savior . . . came to save us . . . made us completely new through the Holy Spirit . . . through Jesus the Anointed."

Paul makes it abundantly clear that we are each in need of redemption, but we cannot achieve it by anything that we do on our own. Rather, it is the work that only God can do that brings us salvation. Then Paul comes back and commands Titus to remind believers to "be constant in doing the right things." The last imperative in the book is for all believers to learn to "do what is good."

Paul trusted Titus to appoint elders, to sort out unfinished business, and to set a good example for everyone; the future of the church on Crete rested on Titus's shoulders. In this personal look into the work of a young church planter, we find courage, wisdom, and a zeal for serving God. We see what Jesus was looking for when He called a few to follow Him. Here in Titus we find what a truly devoted follower of Jesus looks like.

1 Paul, servant of God and emissary* of Jesus, the Anointed One, on behalf of the faith *that is accepted* by God's chosen people and the knowledge of the *undeniable* truth that leads to godliness.

► Paul is ready to defend the truth. He knows it is pure and honorable. He knows that it comes from and leads back to God. In contrast, Paul perceives the constant threat of false teaching that produces chaos, overturns entire families, and is filled with myths and instructions taught by those outside the faith. This counter-truth is filled with lusts and passions that tear down others, and it results in petty debates over family trees with fights and disagreements over the law. The line is clearly drawn between them. Paul leaves no room to sit on the fence; there is no partial truth—the future of the church is at stake.

2 *We rest in this hope we've been given*—the hope that we will live forever with our God—*the hope that* He proclaimed *ages and* ages ago (even before time began). And our God *is no liar*; *He* is not even capable of uttering lies. 3 *So we can be sure that* it is in His exact right time that He released His word *into the world*—through the preaching that God our Savior has commanded into my care.

His word brings into the world the absolute clarity of God's perspective and life-saving knowledge.

4 To you, Titus, my dear son birthed through our shared faith: may grace and peace rest upon you from God the Father and Jesus the Anointed, our Savior.

5 I left you on Crete so you could sort out the chaos and the unfinished business and appoint elders *over communities* in each and every city according to my earlier orders. 6 *Here's what you should look for in an elder:* he should be above suspicion; *if he is married, he should* be the husband of one wife, raise children who believe, and be a person who can't be accused of rough and raucous living. 7 It is necessary that any overseer *you appoint* be blameless, as he is entrusted with God's mission. *Look for someone who* isn't pompous or quick to anger, who is not a drunkard, violent, or chasing after seedy gain *or worldly fame.* 8 *Find a person* who lovingly opens his home to others; who honors goodness; who is thoughtful, fair, devout, self-controlled; and 9 who clings to the faithful word that was taught because he must be able, not only to encourage people with sound teaching, but also to challenge those who are against it.

10 You see antagonists everywhere; they are rebellious, loose-lipped, and deceitful (especially those who are from the circumcised lot). 11 *Their talk must be quashed*—their mouths sealed up because impure teaching is *flying out of their lips and* overturning entire families for the sake of their own squalid gain. 12 *I'll tell you,* even their own prophet was heard saying, "Chronic liars, foul beasts, and lazy gluttons—that's who you'll meet in Crete." 13 And he's right! This is why we have to scold them, sometimes severely, so they will be sound in the faith 14 and be able to ignore Jewish myths as well as any commandments given by those who turn away from the truth.

15 *Listen:* to those who are pure, all things are pure. But to those who are tainted, *stained,* and unbelieving, nothing is pure because their minds and their consciences are polluted. 16 They claim, "I know God," but their actions are a slap to His face. They are wretched, disobedient, and useless to any worthwhile cause.

2 As to you, *Titus*: talk to them; give them a good, healthy diet of solid teaching *so they will know the right way to live.*

2 *Here's what I want you to* teach the older men: enjoy everything in moderation, respect yourselves *and others*, be sensible, and dedicate yourselves to *living an unbroken* faith demonstrated by your love and perseverance.

3 *And here's what I want you to* teach the older women: Be respectful. Steer clear of gossip or drinking too much so that you can teach what is good 4 to young women. *Be a positive example,* showing them what it is to love their husbands and children, and teaching them to

* 1:1 Literally, apostle

5control themselves *in every way* and to be pure. *Train them* to manage the household, to be kind, and to be submissive to their husbands, all of which honor the word of God.

6Encourage the young men in the same way: *in every situation,* they should learn to control themselves.

7-8*Titus, you have to* set a good example for everyone. Go out of your way to do what is right, speak the truth with the weight and authority that come from an honest and pure life. No one can argue with that. Then your enemies will cower in shame because they have nothing bad to say against us.

9Advise all the servants: Work hard for your masters, and be loyal to them. Strive to please. Don't be rude or sarcastic. 10Don't steal or embezzle *your masters' property*. Show them you are trustworthy, and all the credit will go to the teaching of God our Savior.

11*We have cause to celebrate* because the grace of God has appeared, offering *the gift of* salvation to all people. 12*Grace arrives* with its own instruction: run away from anything that leads us away from God; abandon the lusts and passions of this world; live life now in this age *with awareness* and self-control, doing the right thing and keeping yourselves holy. 13*Watch for His return*; expect the blessed hope *we all will share* when our great God and Savior, Jesus the Anointed, appears again. 14He gave His body for our sakes and will not only break us free from *the chains of* wickedness, but He will also prepare a community uncorrupted by the world that He would call His own—people who are passionate about doing the right thing.

► At times Paul can be unrelenting. As he challenged Timothy in the two letters he addressed to him, Paul also challenges Titus to live the truth he teaches. People are drawn toward God, not through bold arguments, but by passionate godliness. We must be passionate about doing the right thing. Our actions tell the story. Our lives are living parables, shouting the mystery of godliness. Paul tells Titus to be bold, to teach with authority, and not to let anyone belittle him. We get a clear picture of a strong, courageous giant of a man. Titus is sent to the people of Crete—a people short on virtue and long on vice—to fashion a church of loving disciples.

15*So, Titus,* tell them all these things. Encourage and teach them with all authority—and rebuke them with the same. *You are a man called to serve, so* don't let anyone belittle you.

3 And remind them of this: respect the rulers and the courts. Obey them. Be ready to do what is good and honorable. 2Don't tear down another person with your words. Instead, keep the peace, and be considerate. Be truly humble toward everyone 3because there was a time when we, too, were foolish, rebellious, and deceived—we were slaves to sensual cravings and pleasures; and we spent our lives being spiteful, envious, hated by many, and hating one another. 4But then *something happened*: God our Savior and His overpowering love and kindness for humankind entered our world; 5He came to save us. It's not that *we earned it* by doing good works or righteous deeds; He came because He is merciful. He brought us *out of our old ways of living* to a new beginning through the washing of regeneration; and He made us completely new through the Holy Spirit, 6who was poured out in abundance through Jesus the Anointed, our Savior. 7*All of this happened* so that through His grace we would be accepted *into God's covenant family* and appointed to be His heirs, full of the hope that comes from *knowing you have* eternal life. 8This is a faithful statement *of what we believe.*

Concerning this, I want you to put it out there boldly so that those who believe in God will be constant in doing the right things, which will benefit all of us. 9*Listen*, don't get trapped in brainless debates; avoid competition over family trees *or pedigrees*; stay away from fights and disagreements over the law. They are a waste of your time. 10If a person is causing divisions *in the community*, warn him once; and if necessary, warn him twice. After that, avoid him completely 11because by then you are sure that you are dealing

with a corrupt, sinful person. He is determined to condemn himself.

A problem ignored is a growing problem. Paul's advice: deal with it. Don't ignore division. For the church to be strong and honor God, the church is to be one.

12 I am sending either Artemas or Tychicus to you. When one of them arrives, try your best to make your way to me at Nicopolis (I plan to spend the winter there). 13 Do what you can to get Zenas (the lawyer) and Apollos on their way; make sure they have everything they need. 14 Our people must learn to get involved when a need arises, particularly when the need is urgent. Teach them to do what is good so they won't become unproductive *members of the community.*

15 Everyone with me sends his greetings. Greet all our friends in the faith. May grace be with all of you. [Amen.]*

* 3:15 Some manuscripts omit this word.

PHILEMON

Personal letter to Philemon of Colossae

From Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

There's a story behind every letter Paul writes, and this is an especially vivid one. While Paul is in prison, he writes to his friend Philemon, a Christian leader in Colossae, about this man's slave Onesimus. Philemon is apparently a well-to-do follower of Jesus, having a house large enough for a church to gather there. He has a good reputation as a man of faith and love. Somewhere he met Paul, and they became good friends and coworkers in Kingdom causes. Onesimus is Philemon's slave who encounters Paul in prison—tradition says that Onesimus is a runaway slave who happens to meet Paul when he is under house arrest—and becomes a believer. For a time, the Lord's imprisoned emissary finds Onesimus to be a useful assistant; but eventually he sends Onesimus back to Philemon with an appeal rather than a command: Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back as more than a slave—as a beloved brother.

Surprisingly, Paul addresses this letter to Philemon and the entire church that gathers in his home. What seems at first to be a private letter is meant for public reading. Perhaps Paul hopes to bring a bit of social pressure on Philemon, or perhaps Paul wants to address the issue of slave treatment to all Christian slave owners. Paul uses the story of the runaway slave to discuss the larger issues of forgiveness and equality. In the kingdom of God, all relationships must exhibit forgiveness and acceptance of each other; and everyone is an equal participant in salvation, regardless of his or her station in life. The history of humankind is stained by the guilt and pain of slavery. May the words of Paul the emissary echo into modern culture so that believers treat all human beings as brothers and sisters in Jesus.

1Paul, a prisoner of Jesus the Anointed
One, with our brother Timothy, to you,
beloved Philemon, our fellow worker; and
2to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that gathers
in your house. 3May grace and peace from
God our Father and the Lord Jesus the
Anointed surround you.

4I am constantly thanking God for
you in my prayers 5because I keep hearing about your love and faith toward our
Lord Jesus and all those set apart for His
purposes. *Here's what I've been praying on your behalf:*

> 6*Thank You, Father, for Philemon.* I pray that as he goes and tells his story of faith, *he would tell everyone so that* they will know for certain all the good that comes *to those who put their trust* in the Anointed One.

7My brother, because you are out there
encouraging and reviving the hearts of fellow saints with such love, this brings great
joy and comfort to me.

8Although I am bold enough in the
Anointed, *our Liberating King,* to insist you
do the right thing, 9instead I choose to
appeal to you on account of love. I do this
for my own sake since I, Paul, am an old
man and am held prisoner because of *my service to* Jesus the Anointed. 10I make this
request on behalf of my child, Onesimus,*
whom I brought to faith during my time in
prison. 11Before, he was useless to you; but
now he is useful to both you and me. 12Listen, I am sending my heart back to you as
I send him to stand before you, *although truly* 13I wished to keep him at my side to
take your place as my helper while I am
bound for the good news. 14But I didn't
want to make this decision without *asking for* your permission. This way, any
goodwill on your part wouldn't be *seen as* forced, but as your *true and* free desire.

15Maybe this is the reason why he
was supposed to be away from you for
this time: so that now you will have him
back forever—16no longer as a slave, but
as more than a slave—as a dear brother.
Yes, he is dear to me, but I suspect he will
come to mean even more to you, both in
the flesh *as a servant* and in the Lord *as a brother*.

The gospel is a powerful social force for good, capable of making rich and poor, slave and free into beloved brothers.

17So if you look upon me as your
partner *in this mission*, then I ask you to
open your heart to him as you would welcome me. 18And if he has wronged you or
owes you anything, charge it to me. 19*Look,*
I'll put it here in my own handwriting: I,
Paul, promise to repay you everything.
(Should I remind you that you owe me
your life?) 20Indeed, brother, I want you
to do me this favor out of obedience to
our Lord. It will refresh my heart in Him.
21This letter comes, written with the confidence that you will not only do what I ask,
but will also go beyond all I have asked.

22One more thing: you should get a
room ready for me as I hope to be released
to you soon in answer to your prayers.
23Epaphras (my fellow prisoner in Jesus,
the Anointed One) greets you, 24as well
as my fellow workers Mark, Aristarchus,
Demas, and Luke.

25May the grace of the Lord Jesus the
Anointed be with your spirit. [Amen.]*

* Verse 10 Literally, useful one * Verse 25 Some early manuscripts omit this word.

HEBREWS

Instruction to Jewish believers

From a leader in the early church

This letter is addressed to Christian believers of Jewish descent in the last half of the first century A.D. Possibly the original audience lived in Rome, since it was written by an unknown leader residing in Italy. For years it was thought that Paul wrote it, but the letter lacks his typical letter-writing features. Still, the themes of the letter, its style, and the reference to Timothy (13:23) suggest that Hebrews comes from somewhere within Paul's circle of friends and coworkers. Because of its tone and structure, some have wondered whether this magnificent epistle may have originally been a sermon that was written down and later circulated as a letter. As Origen said, only God knows who wrote it.

The Jewish Christians faced severe persecution, so severe that some were ready to abandon the faith. The frequent warnings that punctuate the letter indicate that the danger of drifting away is real and imminent. So the author pulls out every argument he can think of to persuade them not to drift away from Jesus. Throughout the letter, he compares the person and work of Jesus to the institutions of the Jewish faith. It may well be that those who are in danger of walking away from faith in Him are going back to their Jewish roots. While it is clear that the writer has appreciation for the Hebrew prophets, the mediation of heavenly messengers, Moses, Joshua, the priesthood, and the temple, he argues that in every way the new covenant brought by Jesus is better than, more than, greater than the old covenant.

Throughout the letter, the author appeals to Scripture itself to demonstrate how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises. At the heart of the letter, he presents Jesus as the Great High Priest, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice once and for all. Although Jesus' death as a sacrifice is discussed in other New Testament writings, it is central in Hebrews. Further, according to this author, all the earlier promises of God are concentrated in His person and work, particularly in His work on the cross. Jeremiah prophesies that God will one day establish a new covenant, creating a permanent relationship with people of faith and erasing completely the guilt of their sins. As a fulfillment of the earlier promises, God's work in reconciling the world through Him is not a temporary measure because Jesus is the final, full, definitive revelation of God.

1 Long ago, at different times and in various ways, God's voice came to our ancestors through the *Hebrew* prophets. 2But in these last days, it has come to us through His Son, the One who has been given dominion over all things and through whom all worlds were made.

3This is the One who—imprinted with God's image, shimmering with His glory—sustains all that exists through the power of His word. He was seated at the right hand of God once He Himself had made the offering that purified *us from* all our sins. 4This Son of God is elevated as far above the heavenly messengers as His holy name is elevated above theirs.

► Most images of angels are influenced by art and pop culture—and are far removed from the Bible. The word "angel" literally means "messenger," and it can refer to either a human being or a heavenly being. The Hebrews author is writing about heavenly messengers.

In the Bible, heavenly messengers have several functions—executors of God's judgment, guardians of God's people, heralds of God's plans. They appear at critical moments to chosen people who play important roles in God's salvation, such as arriving to announce the birth and resurrection of Jesus and to transmit God's law to Moses. They are no more than messengers, created beings, who serve the will of God and His Son. Recognizing their place, they bow before the Son in loving adoration.

5For no heavenly messengers have ever heard God address them with these words *of the psalms*:

You are My Son.
Today I have become Your Father.*

Or *heard Him promise*,

I will be to You a Father,
and You will be My Son.*

6Now, when the Son, the firstborn *of God*, was brought into the world, God said,

Let all My heavenly messengers
worship Him.*

7Concerning them, God said,

I make My heavenly messengers like
the winds,
and My servants like a flame.*

8But to the Son He said,

God, Your throne is eternal;
You will rule Your kingdom with the
scepter of justice.
9You have loved what is right
and hated what is evil;
That is why God, Your God, has
anointed You
with the oil of gladness and lifted
You above Your companions.*

10And *God continues*,

In the beginning, You, Lord, laid the
foundation of the earth
and set the skies above us with
Your own hands.
11*But while* they will someday pass away,
You remain *forever*;
when they wear out like old clothes,
12You will roll them up
and change them into something
new.
But You will never change;
Your years will never come to an
end.*

13Did God ever say to any of the heavenly messengers,

Sit here, at My right hand, *in the seat
of honor;*
and I'll put all Your enemies under
Your feet?*

14*No, of course not.* The heavenly messengers are only spirits and servants, sent out to minister to those who will certainly inherit salvation.

2 That is why we ought to pay even closer attention to the voice that has been speaking so that we will never drift away from it. 2For if the words *of instruction and inspiration* brought by

* 1:5 Psalm 2:7 * 1:5 2 Samuel 7:14 * 1:6 Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint and DSS only) * 1:7 Psalm 104:4
* 1:8-9 Psalm 45:6-7 * 1:10-12 Psalm 102:25-27 * 1:13 Psalm 110:1

heaven's messengers were valid, and *if we live in a universe where* sin and disobedience receive their just rewards, 3then how will we escape *destruction* if we ignore this great salvation? We heard it first from our Lord Jesus, then from those who passed on His teaching. 4God also testifies to this truth by signs and wonders and miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit lighting on those He chooses.

► This letter is punctuated with passages that sound an alarm: danger, both imminent and eternal, is at hand. The real danger is the gentle erosion of rock-solid commitments.

How often it happens! A person makes a decision to follow Jesus. He practically explodes with joy. Then life happens and the invisible forces that shape culture in our world—the idols of consumerism, relativism, and materialism—begin their exacting work to shape us into an image that no longer reflects our Savior. Over and over again, the writer warns us to be careful. Don't neglect this great salvation. Make sure the anchor holds.

5Now clearly God didn't set up the heavenly messengers *to bring the final word or* to rule over the world that is coming. 6I have read something somewhere:

I can't help but wonder why You care
about mortals
or choose to love the son of man.
7-8Though he was born below the
heavenly messengers,
You honored the son of man like
royalty,
crowning him with glory and honor,
Raising him above all earthly things,
placing everything under his feet.*

When God placed everything under the son of man, He didn't leave out anything. Maybe we don't see all that happening yet; 9but what we do see is Jesus, born a little lower than the heavenly messengers, who is now crowned with glory and honor because He *willingly* suffered and died. *And He did that* so that through God's grace, He might taste death on behalf of everyone.

Here is God's Son: Creator, Sustainer, Great High Priest. Jesus has to take on our feeble flesh and suffer a violent death. He suffers for what we need.

10It only makes sense that God, by whom and for whom everything exists, would choose to bring many of us to His side by using suffering to perfect Jesus, *the founder of our faith,* the pioneer of our salvation. 11*As I will show you*, it's important that the One who brings us to God and those who are brought to God become one, *since we are all from one Father*. This is why Jesus was not ashamed to call us His family, 12saying, *in the words of the psalmist*,

I will speak Your Name to My brothers
and sisters
when I praise You in the midst of
the community.*

13And *in the words of Isaiah*,

I will wait for the Eternal One.*

And again,

Look, here I am with the children God
has given Me.*

14Since we, the children, are all creatures of flesh and blood, Jesus took on flesh and blood, so that by dying He could destroy the one who held power over death—the devil—15and destroy the fear of death that has always held people captive.

16So notice—His concern here is not for the welfare of the heavenly messengers, but for the children of Abraham. 17He had to become as human as His sisters and brothers *so that when the time came,* He could become a merciful and faithful high priest of God, called to reconcile a sinful people. 18Since He has also been tested by suffering, He can help us when we are tested.

3 So all of you who are holy partners in a heavenly calling, let's turn our attention to Jesus, the Emissary *of God* and High Priest, who brought us the faith we profess; 2and compare Him to Moses, *who also brought words from God.*

* 2:6-8 Psalm 8:4-6 * 2:12 Psalm 22:22 * 2:13 Isaiah 8:17 * 2:13 Isaiah 8:18

Both of them were faithful to their missions, to the One who called them. 3But we value Jesus more than Moses, in the same way that we value a builder more than the house he builds. 4Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5Moses *brought healing and redemption to his people* as a faithful servant in God's house, and he was a witness to the things that would be spoken later. 6But *Jesus* the Anointed was faithful as a Son of that house. (We become that house, if we're able to hold on to the confident hope we have *in God* until the end.)

► For the first-century Jewish-Christian audience, Moses is the rescuer of Hebrew slaves out of bondage in Egypt—the receiver of God's law and the covenant. They remember how he shepherded the children of Israel safely through the desert for 40 years and led them to the brink of the promised land. He was indeed a remarkable man. Yet what Jesus has accomplished for everyone—not just the Jews—is on a totally different level. Moses was indeed faithful to God and accomplished a great deal as God's servant. Jesus, too, is faithful to God, but He has accomplished what Moses could not because He is God's very own Son.

7Listen now, to the voice of the Holy Spirit *through what the psalmist wrote:*

Today, if you listen to His voice,
8Don't harden your hearts the way they did
in the bitter uprising *at Meribah*
9Where your ancestors tested Me
though they had seen My marvelous power.
10For the 40 years *they traveled on to the land that I had promised them,*
That generation *broke My heart. Grieving and* angry, I said, "Their hearts are unfaithful;
they don't know what I want from them."
11That is why I swore in anger
they would never enter *salvation's* rest.*

12Brothers and sisters, pay close attention so you won't develop an evil and unbelieving heart that causes you to abandon the living God. 13Encourage each other every day—for as long as we can still say "today"—so none of you let the deceitfulness of sin harden your hearts. 14For we have become partners with the Anointed One—if we can just hold on to our confidence until the end.

15Look at the lines *from the psalm* again:

Today, if you listen to His voice,
Don't harden your hearts the way they did
in the bitter uprising *at Meribah.*

16Now who, *exactly, was God talking to then?* Who heard and rebelled? Wasn't it all of those whom Moses led out of Egypt? 17And who made God angry for an entire generation? Wasn't it those who sinned *against Him*, those whose bodies are still buried in the wilderness, *the site of that uprising?* 18It was those disobedient ones who God swore would never enter into salvation's rest. 19And we can see that they couldn't enter because they did not believe.

4 That's why, as long as that promise of entering God's rest remains open to us, we should be careful that none of us seem to fall short ourselves. 2Those people in the wilderness heard *God's* good news, just as we have heard it, but the message they heard didn't do them any good since it wasn't combined with faith. 3We who believe are entering into salvation's rest, as He said,

That is why I swore in anger
they would never enter *salvation's* rest,*

even though God's works were finished from the very creation of the world. 4(For didn't God say that on the seventh day *of creation* He rested from all His works?* 5And doesn't God say in the psalm that they would never enter into *salvation's* rest?*)

* 3:7-11 Psalm 95:7-11 * 4:3 Psalm 95:11 * 4:4 Genesis 2:2 * 4:5 Psalm 95:11

► There is much discussion of "rest" in what we are calling the First Testament of Scripture. God rests on the seventh day after creation. In the Ten Commandments God commands His people to remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy, and do no work. By letting go of daily work, they declared their absolute dependence on God to meet their needs. We do not live by the work of our hands, but by the bread and Word that God supplies.

But a greater rest is yet to come when we will be released from all suffering, and when we will inherit the earth. Jesus embodies this greater rest that still awaits the people of God, a people fashioned through obedience and faith. If some of us fail to enter that rest, it is because we fail to answer the call.

6So *if God prepared a place of rest, and* those who were given the good news didn't enter because they chose disobedience *over faith*, then it remains open for us to enter. 7Once again, God has fixed a day; and that day is "today," as David said so much later when he wrote *in the psalm* quoted earlier:

> Today, if you listen to His voice,
> Don't harden your hearts.*

8Now if Joshua had been able to lead those who followed him into God's rest, would God then have spoken this way? 9There still remains a place of rest, a true Sabbath, for the people of God 10because those who enter into salvation's rest lay down their labors in the same way that God entered into a Sabbath rest from His.

11So let us move forward to enter this rest, so that none of us fall into the kind of faithless disobedience that prevented them from entering. 12The word of God, *you see*, is alive and moving; sharper than a double-edged sword; piercing the divide between soul and spirit, joints and marrow; able to judge the thoughts and will of the heart. 13No creature can hide from God: God sees all. Everyone and everything is exposed, opened for His inspection; and He's the One we will have to explain ourselves to.

By God's word, everything finds a rhythm, a place. It fills, empowers, enlivens, and redeems us. But it also divides and destroys. It pierces and exposes our disobedience and unfaithfulness.

14Since we have a great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God who has passed through the heavens *from death into new life with God,* let us hold tightly to our faith. 15For Jesus is not some high priest who has no sympathy for our weaknesses *and flaws*. He has already been tested in every way that we are tested; but He emerged victorious, without failing God. 16So let us step boldly to the throne of grace, where we can find mercy and grace to help when we need it most.

5 *Remember what I said earlier about the role of the high priest,* even the ones chosen by human beings? The job of every high priest is reconciliation: approaching God on behalf of others and offering Him gifts and sacrifices to repair the damage caused by our sins *against God and each other.* 2The high priest should have compassion for those who are ignorant of the faith and those who fall out of the faith because he also has wrestled with human weakness, 3and so the priest must offer sacrifices both for his sins and for those of the people. 4*The office of high priest and* the honor that goes along with it isn't one that someone just takes. One must be set aside, called by God, just as God called Aaron*, the brother of Moses.*

5In the same way, the Anointed One, *our Liberating King,* didn't call Himself but was appointed to His priestly office by God, who said to Him,

> You are My Son.
> Today I have become Your Father,*

6and who also says elsewhere,

> You are a priest forever—
> in the *honored* order of Melchizedek.*

► Jesus is the Great High Priest because He serves as the ultimate

* 4:7 Psalm 95:7-8 * 5:5 Psalm 2:7 * 5:6 Psalm 110:4

mediator between God and humanity. In this role He serves as both the priest and the sacrifice that atones for sins once and for all. But we are still called to be priests for each other. These are not mutually exclusive ideas.

Whenever you share a cup of cold water in Jesus' name or pray for someone, you're a priest. You're communicating the grace of God. There are times that we need a priest, too, right? If we are to be like Him, we must allow someone else to be a priest for us. There are problems so great and pains so deep and sins so intractable that we need a person of flesh and blood to join us in carrying our concerns to God.

7When Jesus was *on the earth, a man of* flesh *and blood,* He offered up prayers and pleas, groans and tears to the One who could save Him from death. He was heard because He approached God with reverence. 8Although He was a Son, Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. 9And once He was perfected *through that suffering* He became the way of eternal salvation for all those who hear and follow Him, 10for God appointed Him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

11I have a lot more to say about this, but it may be hard for you to follow since you've become dull in your understanding. 12By this time, you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet I feel like you want me to reteach you the most basic things that God wants you to know. It's almost like you're *a baby again, coddled at your mother's breast,* nursing, not ready for solid food. 13No one who lives on milk alone can know the ins and outs of what it means to be righteous *and pursue justice*; that's because he is only a baby. 14But solid food is for those who have come of age, for those who have learned through practice to distinguish good from evil.

6 So let's push on toward a more perfect understanding and move beyond just the basic teachings of the Anointed One. There's no reason to rehash the fundamentals: repenting from *what you loved in* your old dead lives, believing in God *as our Creator and Redeemer*, 2teaching about baptism,* *setting aside those called to service through* the *ritual* laying on of hands, the coming resurrection of those who have died, and God's final judgment *of all people for all time.* 3No, we will move on toward perfection, if God wills it.

► It's clear that Jesus wanted His people to grow and mature in faith. Those who don't move beyond the basics—tasting the gifts and powers of the new creation, partaking in the Spirit and the word of God—and then fall away bring shame to Jesus and produce nothing but briars and brambles. There is no stagnant life in the Kingdom. Either you grow and produce a blessing or you languish and descend into a curse. Be warned.

4-6It is impossible to restore the changed heart of the one who has fallen from faith—who has already been enlightened, has tasted the gift of new life from God, has shared in the power of the Holy Spirit, and has known the goodness of God's revelation and the powers of the coming age. If such a person falls away, it's as though that one were crucifying the Son of God all over again and holding Him up to ridicule. 7*You see*, God blesses the ground that drinks of the rain and then produces a bountiful crop for those who cultivate it. 8But land that produces nothing but thorns and brambles? That land is worthless and in danger of being cursed, burned to the bare earth.

9But *listen*, my friends—we don't mean to discourage you completely with such talk. We are convinced that you are made for better things, the things of salvation, 10because God is not unjust *or unfair*. He won't overlook the work you have done or the love you have carried to each other in His name while doing His work, as you are still doing. 11We want you all to continue working until the end so that you'll realize the certainty that comes with hope 12and not grow lazy. We want you to walk

* 6:2 Literally, immersion, in a rite of initiation and purification

Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most mysterious figures in Scripture. He appears for the first time in Genesis 14:17-20 as Abraham returns from battle against Chedorlaomer and his allies. The name "Melchizedek" shows up again in Psalm 110, a song of David that is widely used to celebrate the coronation of the Davidic kings in Jerusalem. When God installs His king upon the throne of Jerusalem, He promises to vanquish his enemies and establish him as an eternal priest according to the honored order of Melchizedek.

But who was Melchizedek? Here Jesus is often referred to as "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." This mysterious Melchizedek, king of righteousness and peace, is a precursor to the Prince of Peace. In his brief appearances in Genesis and in Psalm 110, he opens a window into the mystery of God and His plan to redeem the world. The tradition about Melchizedek helps the early church understand Jesus' role as priest and king even if He doesn't seem to fit the traditional categories.

in the footsteps of the faithful *who came before you,* from whom you can learn to be steadfast in pursuing the promises *of God.*

13Remember when God made His promise to Abraham? He had to swear by Himself, there being no one greater:
14"Surely I will bless you and multiply your descendants."* 15And after Abraham had endured with patience, he obtained the promise he had hoped for. 16When swearing an oath to confirm what they are saying, humans swear by someone greater than themselves and so bring their arguments to an end. 17In the same way, when God wanted to confirm His promise as true and unchangeable, He swore an oath to the heirs of that promise. 18So God has given us two unchanging things: *His promise and His oath.* These prove that it is impossible for God to lie. As a result, we who come to God for refuge might be encouraged to seize that hope that is set before us. 19That hope is real and true, an anchor to steady our *restless* souls, a hope that leads us back behind the curtain *to where God is (as the high priests did in the days when reconciliation flowed from sacrifices in the temple)* 20and back into the place where Jesus, who went ahead on our behalf, has entered since He has become a High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

7 *In the Book of Genesis, we read about when* Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he returned from defeating King *Chedorlaomer* and his allies. Melchizedek blessed our ancestor, and
2Abraham gave him a tenth of everything captured in the battle.*

Let's look more closely at Melchizedek. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; and *his title*, king of Salem, means "king of peace." 3The Scriptures don't name his mother or father or descendants, and they don't record his birth or his death. We could say he's like the Son of God: eternal, a priest forever.

4And just imagine how great this man was, that even our *great and honorable* patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils. 5Compare him to the priests *who serve in our temple,* the descendants of Levi, who were given a commandment in the law *of Moses to collect one-tenth of the income of the tribes of Israel.* The priests took that tithe from their own people, even though they were also descended from Abraham. 6But this man, *Melchizedek*, who did not belong to that Levite ancestry, collected a tenth part of Abraham's income; and although Abraham had received the promises, it was Melchizedek who blessed Abraham. 7Now I don't have to tell you that it is the lesser one who receives a blessing from the greater. 8*In the case of the priests descended from Levi*, they are mortal men who receive a tithe *of one-tenth*; but the Scriptures record no death of *Melchizedek,* the one who received Abraham's tithe. 9I guess you could even say that Levi, who receives our tithes, originally paid tithes through Abraham 10because he was still unborn and only a part of his ancestor when Abraham met Melchizedek.

So Melchizedek must be considered superior even to the patriarch Abraham.

* 6:14 Genesis 22:17 * 7:2 Genesis 14:17-20

11If a perfect method *of reconciling with God*—a perfect priesthood—had been found in the sons of Levi (a priesthood that communicated God's law to the people), then why *would the Scriptures* speak of another priest, a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, instead of, say, from the order of Aaron? What would be the need for it? *It would reflect a new way of relating to God* 12because when there is a change in the priesthood there must be a corresponding change in the law as well. 13We're talking about someone who comes from another tribe, from which no member has ever served at God's altar. 14It's clear that *Jesus*, our Lord, descended from the tribe of Judah; but Moses never spoke about priests from that tribe. 15Doesn't it seem obvious? *Jesus is* a priest who resembles Melchizedek *in so many ways*; 16He is someone who has become a priest, not because of some requirement about human lineage, but because of the power of a life without end. 17*Remember, the psalmist* says,

You are a priest forever—
in the *honored* order of
Melchizedek.*

18Because the earlier commandment was weak and did not reconcile us to God effectively, it was set aside—19after all, the law could not make anyone or anything perfect. God has now introduced a new and better hope, through which we may draw near to Him, 20and confirmed it by swearing to it. 21The *Levite order of* priests took office without an oath, but this man *Jesus* became a priest through God's oath:

The Eternal One has sworn an oath
and cannot change His mind:
You are a priest forever.*

22So we can see that Jesus has become the guarantee of a *new and* better covenant. 23Further, the prior priesthood *of the sons of Levi* has included many priests because death cut short their service, 24but Jesus holds His priesthood permanently because He lives His resurrected life forever. 25From such a vantage, He is able to save those who approach God through Him for all time because He will forever live to be their advocate *in the presence of God.*

26It is only fitting that we should have a High Priest who is devoted to God, blameless, pure, *compassionate toward but* separate from sinners, and exalted by God to the highest place of honor. 27Unlike other high priests, He does not first need to make atonement every day for His own sins, and only then for His people's, because He already made atonement, reconciling us with God once and forever when He offered Himself as a sacrifice. 28The law made imperfect men high priests; but after that law was given, God swore an oath that made His perfected Son a high priest for all time.

8 So let me sum up what we've covered so far, *for there is much we have said:* we have a High Priest, *a perfect Priest* who sits *in the place of honor* in the highest heavens, at the right hand of the throne of the Majestic One, 2a Minister within the *heavenly* sanctuary set up by the Lord, not by human hands.

3*As I have said*, it is the role of every high priest to offer gifts and sacrifices *to God,* so clearly this Priest of ours must have something to offer as well. 4If He were on earth, then He would not be a priest at all because there are already priests who can offer gifts according to the law *of Moses* 5in a sanctuary that is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. *We know this because* God admonished Moses as he set up the tent for the Lord's sanctuary: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I showed you on the mountain."* 6But now Jesus has taken on a new and improved priestly ministry; and in that respect, He has been made the Mediator of a better covenant established on better promises. 7Remember, if the first covenant had been able to reconcile everyone to God, there would be no reason for a second covenant. 8God found fault with the priests when He said *through the prophet Jeremiah*,

"Look! The time is coming," the Eternal
Lord says,
"when I will bring about a new
covenant with the people of
Israel and Judah.
9It will not be like the covenant I made
with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
and led them out of *slavery in* the
land of Egypt.
They did not remain faithful to that
covenant,
so," the Eternal One says, "I turned
away from them.

* 7:17 Psalm 110:4 * 7:21 Psalm 110:4 * 8:5 Exodus 25:40

10But when those days are over," the
Eternal One says, "I will make
this *kind of* covenant with the
people of Israel:
I will put My laws on their minds
and write them upon their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be My people.
11*In those days*, they won't need to teach
each other *My ways*
or to say to each other, 'Know the
Eternal.'
In those days, all will know Me,
from the least to the greatest.
12I will be merciful when they fail,
and I will erase their sins *and*
wicked acts out of My memory
as though they had never existed."*

13With the words "a new covenant," God made the first covenant old, and what is old and no longer effective will soon fade away completely.

► Jeremiah is known as the prophet of the new covenant. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Jeremiah heard the voice of God and saw what God had planned: a new day. A new law inscribed in the mind and written on the heart. A new and abiding knowledge of God. A new covenant where mercy runs deep and sins are forgiven and forgotten.

This hope of a new heart is found even in the midst of the Mosaic Covenant. Moses foretells the unfaithfulness of the people and also tells them of God's promise to restore their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

9 Even that *first* covenant had *rules and* regulations about how to worship and *how to set up* an earthly sanctuary *for God*. 2*In the Book of Exodus,** *we read how* the first tent was set aside for worship—we call it the holy place—how inside it they placed an oil lamp, a table, and the bread that was consecrated *to God*. 3Behind a second *dividing* curtain, there was another tent which is called the most holy place. 4In there they placed the golden incense altar and the golden ark of the covenant. Inside the ark were the golden urn that contained manna *(the miraculous food God gave our ancestors in the desert)*, Aaron's rod that budded,* and the tablets of the covenant *that Moses brought down from the mountain*. 5Above the ark were the *golden images of* heavenly beings* of glory who shadowed the mercy seat.

I cannot go into any greater detail about this now. 6When all is prepared as it is supposed to be, the priests go back and forth daily into the first tent to carry out the duties described in the law. 7But once a year, the high priest goes alone into that second tent, the most holy place, with blood to offer for himself and the unwitting errors of the people. 8As long as that first tent is standing, the Holy Spirit shows us, the way into the most holy place has not yet been revealed to us. 9That first tent symbolizes the present time, when gifts and sacrifices can be offered; but it can't change the *heart and* conscience of the worshiper. 10These gifts and sacrifices deal only with regulations for the body—food and drink and various kinds of *ritual* cleansings necessary until the time comes to make things truly right.

11When the Anointed One arrived as High Priest of the good things that are to come, *He entered* through a greater and more perfect sanctuary that was not part of the earthly creation or made by human hands. 12He entered once for all time into the most holy place—entering, not with the blood of goats or calves *or some other prescribed animal*, but offering His own blood and thus obtaining redemption for us for all time. 13*Think about it:* if the blood of bulls or of goats, or the sprinkling of ashes from a heifer, restores the defiled to bodily cleanliness *and wholeness*; 14then how much more powerful is the blood of the Anointed One, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself *as a* spotless *sacrifice* to God, purifying your conscience from the dead things *of the world* to the service of the living God?

15This is why Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant: through His death, He delivered us from the sins that we had built up under the first covenant, and His death has made it possible for all who are called to receive God's promised inheritance. 16For whenever there is a testament—a will—the death of the one who made it must be confirmed 17because a will takes effect only at the death of

* 8:8-12 Jeremiah 31:31-34 * 9:2 Exodus 25–26 * 9:4 Numbers 17:1-13 * 9:5 Greek *cheroubin*

In chapter 9 we are reminded that what is most real, what is most true, is the unseen reality. The writer tells us that the temple in Jerusalem, the holiest place on earth, was merely a copy or shadow of another place, the heavenly temple. Whatever took place in this shadowy temple could not change the realities of alienation from God, sin, and death.

Every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would don his priestly garb and enter the most holy place in the temple. His task was profound, his duty dangerous: he must appear before God carrying the sins of his people. All the sins of Israel were concentrated in him as he carried the blood of the sacrifice into the divine presence. But there was another day, a Day of Atonement unlike any other, when Jesus concentrated in Himself the sins of the world, hanging on a cross not far from the temple's holiest chamber. Indeed, for a time, He became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). But unlike the high priest, the crucified and risen Jesus entered the true temple of heaven and was ushered into the divine presence. At that moment, everything changed.

its maker; it has no validity as long as
the maker is still alive. 18Even the first
testament—the first covenant—required
blood to be put into action. 19When
Moses had given all the laws of God to the
people, he took the blood of calves and of
goats, water, hyssop, and scarlet wool; and
he sprinkled the scroll and all the people,
20telling them, "This is the blood of the
covenant that God has commanded for
us."* 21In the same way, he also sprinkled
blood upon the sanctuary and upon the
vessels used in worship. 22Under the law,
it's almost the case that everything is purified in connection with blood; without the
shedding of blood, sin cannot be forgiven.

23*Since what was given in the old covenant was* the earthly sketch of the heavenly reality, this was sufficient to cleanse
the earthly sanctuary; but in heaven, a
more perfect sacrifice was needed. 24The
Anointed One did not enter into handcrafted sacred spaces—imperfect copies of
heavenly originals—but into heaven itself,
where He stands in the presence of God
on our behalf. 25There He does not offer
Himself over and over as a sacrifice (as the
high priest on earth does when he enters
the most holy place each year with blood
other than his own) 26because that would
require His repeated suffering since the
beginning of the world. No, He has
appeared once now, at the end of the age,
to put away sin forever by offering Himself
as a sacrifice.

27Just as mortals are appointed to die
once and then to experience a judgment,
28so the Anointed One, *our Liberating King,*
was offered once *in death* to bear the sins
of many and will appear a second time,
not to deal again with sin, but to rescue
those who eagerly await His return.

He who embodied the sins of the world carries His own blood into the holy presence.

10 We have seen how the law is
simply a shadow of the good
things to come. Since it is not
the perfect form of these ultimate realities,
the offering year after year of these imperfect sacrifices cannot bring perfection to
those who come forward to worship. 2If
they had served this purpose, wouldn't the
repetition of these sacrifices have become
unnecessary? If they had worked—and
cleansed the worshipers—then one
sacrifice would have taken away their
consciousness of sin. 3But these sacrifices
actually remind us that we sin *again and
again,* year after year. 4In the end, the
blood of bulls and of goats is powerless to
take away sins. 5So when Jesus came into
the world, He said,

Sacrifices and offerings were not what
You wanted,
but instead a body that You
prepared for Me.
6Burnt offerings and sin offerings
were not what pleased You.
7Then I said, "See, I have come to do
Your will, God,
as it is inscribed of Me in the scroll
of the book."*

8Now when it says that God doesn't want
and takes no real pleasure in sacrifices,

* 9:20 Exodus 24:8 * 10:5-7 Psalm 40:6-8

burnt offerings, and sin offerings (even
though the law calls for them), [9]and fol-
lows this with "See, I have come to do
Your will,"* He effectively takes away the
first—*animal sacrifice*—in order to estab-
lish the second, *more perfect sacrifice*. [10]By
God's will, we are made holy through the
offering of the body of Jesus the Anointed
once and for all time.

[11]*In the first covenant,* every day every
officiating priest stands at his post serving,
offering over and over those same sacri-
fices that can never take away sin. [12]But
after He stepped up to offer His single
sacrifice for sins for all time, He sat down
in the position of honor at the right hand of
God. [13]Since then, He has been waiting for
the day when He rests His feet on His ene-
mies' backs,* *as the psalm says*. [14]With one
perfect offering, Jesus has perfected forever
those who are being made holy, [15]as the
Holy Spirit keeps testifying to us *through
the prophet Jeremiah*. After he says,

[16]"But when those days are over," says
the Eternal One, "I will make
this *kind of* covenant with the
people *of Israel*:
I will put My laws in their hearts
and write them upon their minds,"*

then He adds,

[17]I will erase their sins and wicked acts
out of My memory
as though they had never existed.*

[18]When there is forgiveness such as this,
there is no longer any need to make an
offering for sin.

[19]So, my friends, Jesus by His blood
gives us courage to enter the most holy
place. [20]He has created for us a new and
living way through the curtain, that is,
through His flesh. [21]Since we have a great
High Priest who presides over the house
of God, [22]let us draw near with true hearts
full of faith, with hearts rinsed clean of any
evil conscience, and with bodies cleansed
with pure water. [23]Let us hold strong to
the confession of our hope, never waver-
ing, since the One who promised it to us
is faithful. [24]Let us consider how to inspire
each other to greater love and to right-
teous deeds, [25]not forgetting to gather as
a community, as some have forgotten, but
encouraging each other, especially as the
day *of His return* approaches.

► The word translated "church" in English Bibles means literally "assembly of the called"; it implies that members have said "yes" to God's call in their lives. We assemble because we are called into being by God Himself. Some people, for reasons only they know, choose to live their Christian faiths in isolation. When they do, they cut themselves off from the gifts, encouragement, and vitality of others. And perhaps, just as tragically, they deprive the church of the grace and life God has invested in them.

[26]Now if we willfully persist in sin after
receiving such knowledge of the truth,
then there is no sacrifice left for those
sins—[27]only the fearful prospect of judg-
ment and a fierce fire that will consume
God's adversaries. [28]*Remember that* those
who depart from the law of Moses are put
to death without mercy based on the tes-
timony of two or three witnesses.* [29]Just
think how much more severe the punish-
ment will be for those who have turned
their backs on the Son of God, trampled
on the blood of the covenant by which He
made them holy, and outraged the Spirit of
grace *with their contempt*. [30]For we know
the God who said, "Vengeance belongs to
Me—I will repay,"* also said, "The Eternal
One will judge His people."* [31]It is truly a
frightening thing to be on the wrong side
of the living God.

[32]Instead, think back to the days after
you were first enlightened *and understood
who Jesus was*: when you endured all sorts
of suffering *in the name of the Lord*, [33]when
people held you up for public scorn
and ridicule, or when they abused your
partners and companions in the faith.
[34]Remember how you had compassion for
those in prison and how you cheerfully
accepted the seizure of your possessions,
knowing that you have a far greater and
more enduring possession. [35]Remember
this, and do not abandon your confidence,
which will lead to rich rewards. [36]Simply
endure, for when you have done as God
requires of you, you will receive the prom-
ise. [37]*As the prophet Habakkuk said*,

* 10:9 Psalm 40:7 * 10:13 Psalm 110:1 * 10:16 Jeremiah 31:33 * 10:17 Jeremiah 31:34 * 10:28 Deuteronomy 17:6
* 10:30 Deuteronomy 32:35 * 10:30 Deuteronomy 32:36

In a little while, *only a little longer,*
the One who is coming will come
without delay.
38But My righteous one must live by
faith,
for if he gives up his commitment,
My soul will have no pleasure in him.*

39*My friends*, we are not those who give up hope and so are lost; but we are of the company who live by faith and so are saved.

11 Faith is the assurance of things you have hoped for, the absolute conviction that there are realities you've never seen. 2It was by faith that our forebears were approved. 3Through faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God; everything we now see was fashioned from that which is invisible.

Faith begins as hope and indeed is unseen; so many doubt that it is real. What follows is the proof that faith is a reality that can be trusted.

4By faith Abel presented to God a sacrifice more acceptable than *his brother* Cain's. *By faith* Abel learned he was righteous, as God Himself testified by approving his offering. And by faith he still speaks, although his voice was silenced by death.

5By faith Enoch was carried up *into heaven* so that he did not see death; no one could find him because God had taken him. Before he was taken up, it was said of him that he had pleased God. 6Without faith no one can please God because the one coming to God must believe He exists, and He rewards those who come seeking.

7By faith Noah respected God's warning regarding *the flood—the likes of* which no one had ever seen—and built an ark that saved his family. In this he condemned the world and inherited the righteousness that comes by faith.

8By faith Abraham heard God's call to travel to a place he would one day receive as an inheritance; and he obeyed, not knowing where God's call would take him. 9By faith he journeyed to the land of the promise as a foreigner; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, his fellow heirs to the promise 10because Abraham looked ahead to a city with foundations, a city laid out and built by God.

11By faith *Abraham's wife* Sarah became fertile long after menopause because she believed God would be faithful to His promise. 12So from this man, who was almost at death's door, God brought forth descendants, as many as the stars in the sky and as impossible to count as the sands of the shore.

13All these I have mentioned died in faith without receiving the full promises, although they saw the fulfillment as though from a distance. These people accepted and confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on this earth 14because people who speak like this make it plain that they are still seeking a homeland. 15If this was only a bit of nostalgia for a time and place they left behind, then certainly they might have turned around and returned. 16But such saints as these look forward to a far better place, a heavenly country. So God is not ashamed to be called their God because He has prepared a *heavenly* city for them.

17By faith Abraham, when he endured God's testing, offered *his beloved son* Isaac *as a sacrifice.* The one who had received God's promise was willing to offer his only son; 18God had told him, "It is through Isaac that your descendants will bear your name,"* 19and he concluded that God was capable of raising him from the dead, which, figuratively, is indeed what happened.

20By faith Isaac spoke blessings upon his sons, Jacob and Esau, concerning things yet to come.

21By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed the sons of *his son* Joseph, bowing in worship as he leaned upon his staff.*

22By faith Joseph, at his life's end, predicted that the children of Israel would make an exodus from Egypt; and he gave instructions that his bones *be buried in the land they would someday reach.*

23By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born because they saw that he was handsome; and they did not fear Pharaoh's directive *that all male Hebrew children were to be slain.*

24By faith Moses, when he was grown, refused to be identified solely as the son of Pharaoh's daughter 25and chose instead to share the sufferings of the people of God, not just living in sin and ease for a time. 26He considered the abuse *that he and the people of God had* suffered in anticipation of the Anointed One more valuable than

* 10:37-38 Habakkuk 2:3-4 * 11:18 Genesis 21:12 * 11:21 Genesis 47:31

all the riches of Egypt because he looked ahead to the coming reward.

27By faith Moses left Egypt, unafraid of Pharaoh's wrath and moving forward as though he could see the invisible God. 28Through faith, he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of blood *on the doorposts among the Hebrews* so that the destroyer of the firstborn would pass over their homes without harming them. 29By faith the people crossed through the Red Sea as if they were walking on dry land, although the pursuing Egyptian *soldiers* were drowned when they tried to follow.

30By faith the walls of Jericho toppled after the people had circled them for seven days. 31By faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the *Hebrew* spies *into her home* so that she did not perish with the unbelievers.

32I could speak more *of faith*; I could talk until time itself ran out. If I continued, I could speak *of the examples* of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and all the prophets. 33*I could give accounts of* people alive with faith who conquered kingdoms, brought justice, obtained promises, and closed the mouths of hungry lions. 34*I could tell you how people of faith* doused raging fires, escaped the edge of the sword, made the weak strong, and—stoking great valor among the champions of God—sent opposing armies into panicked flight.

35I could speak of faith bringing women their loved ones back from death and how the faithful accepted torture instead of earthly deliverance because they believed they would obtain a better *life in the* resurrection. 36Others suffered mockery and whippings; they were placed in chains and in prisons. 37The faithful were stoned, sawn in two,* killed by the sword, clothed only in sheepskins and goatskins; they were penniless, afflicted, and tormented. 38The world was not worthy of these saints. They wandered across deserts, crossed mountains, and lived in the caves, cracks, and crevasses of the earth.

► Stories of faith and faithfulness are central to the First Testament. The writer of Hebrews recalls some of the most memorable examples of how people of faith lived their lives. But what is faith? Faith is more than belief; it is trust, assurance, and firm conviction. Ironically most of those who lived by faith never fully realized the promises God had made. Like us they journeyed as strangers and exiles, longing for another country. We should remember their patient faith when we face prolonged hardships and allow the trials we face to strengthen our faith rather than destroy it. If we are comfortable here and don't face suffering for our faith, perhaps we aren't fully living by faith and looking forward to a future hope.

39These, though commended by God for their great faith, did not receive what was promised. 40That promise has awaited us, who receive the better thing that God has provided *in these last days*, so that with us, our forebears might finally see the promise completed.

12 So since we stand surrounded by *all those who have gone before,* an enormous cloud of witnesses, let us drop every extra weight, every sin that clings to us *and slackens our pace,* and let us run with endurance the long race set before us.

We may feel alone, but we aren't. We are surrounded by an army of witnesses. They have run the race of faith and finished well. It is now our turn.

2Now stay focused on Jesus, who designed and perfected our faith. He endured the cross and ignored the shame *of that death* because He focused on the joy that was set before Him; and now He is seated beside God on the throne, *a place of honor.*

3Consider *the life of* the One who endured such *personal attacks and* hostility from sinners so that you will not grow weary or lose heart. 4Among you, in your striving against sin, none has resisted *the pressure* to the point of death, as He did.

God "disciplines" His "disciples." God is training us not just to live here and now, but to have life in the age to come, to share His life and holiness.

* 11:37 Some early manuscripts read "sawn in two." Other early manuscripts read "tempted." Later manuscripts have both.

5Indeed, you seem to have forgotten the
proverb directed to you as children:

My child, do not ignore the instruction
that comes from the Lord,
or lose heart when He steps in to
correct you;
6For the Lord disciplines those He loves,
and He corrects each one He takes
as His own.*

7Endure hardship as God's discipline *and rejoice* that He is treating you as His children, for what child doesn't experience discipline from a parent? 8But if you are not experiencing the correction that all true children receive, then it may be that you are not His children after all. 9Remember, when our human parents disciplined us, we respected them. *If that was true,* shouldn't we respect and live under the correction of the Father of all spirits even more? 10Our parents corrected us for a time as seemed good to them, but God only corrects us to our good so that we may share in His holiness.

11When punishment is happening, it never seems pleasant, only painful. Later, though, it yields the peaceful fruit called righteousness to everyone who has been trained by it. 12So lift up your hands that are dangling and brace your weakened knees. 13Make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame *in you* won't be put out of joint, but will heal.

14Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness, since no one will see God without it. 15Watch carefully that no one falls short of God's favor, that no well of bitterness springs up to trouble you and throw many others off the path. 16Watch that no one becomes wicked and vile like Esau, *the son of Isaac,* who for a single meal sold his invaluable birthright. 17You know *from the stories of the patriarchs* that later, when he wished to claim his blessing, he was turned away. He could not reverse his action even though he shed bitter tears over it.

► The Bible is a brutally honest book. It contains stories of liars, murderers, and adulterers; and these are the good guys. If we read the Bible looking only for positive role models, we'll be quickly disappointed. But if we are honest with ourselves and confess our own faults, we will find in Scripture, particularly in the First Testament, that we have much in common with many broken saints of the past. But we must not stay broken. We must follow their path to transformation through repentance and faith. Repentance means a change of heart, a change of mind, and ultimately a change of how we live. God's grace comes to us and enables us to turn away from sin and to turn back to Him.

18You have not come to the place that can be touched *(as Israel did at Mount Sinai)—to a mountain crowned* with blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and a windstorm—19or to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of a voice—a voice and message so harsh that the people begged not to hear another word. 20(They could not bear the command that was given: that if even a beast touches the mountain, it must be stoned. 21The sight was so terrible that even Moses said, "I am trembling with fear.")*

22No, instead you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to heavenly messengers unnumbered, *to a joyful feast,* 23to the assembly of the firstborn registered as heaven's citizens, to God the righteous Judge of all, and to the spirits of all the righteous who have been perfected. 24You have come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant *between God and humanity*, and to His sprinkled blood, which speaks a greater word than the blood of Abel *crying out from the earth.*

25See that you don't turn away from the One who is speaking; for if the ones who heard and refused the One who spoke on earth faced punishment, then how much more will we suffer if we turn away from the One speaking from heaven—26the One whose voice in earlier times shook the earth now makes another promise: "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens"?* 27The phrase, "Yet once more," means that those things that can be shaken will be removed and taken away, namely, the *first* creation. As a result, those things that remain cannot be shaken. 28Therefore, let us all be thankful

* 12:5-6 Proverbs 3:11-12 * 12:20-21 Exodus 19:12-13; Deuteronomy 9:19 * 12:26 Haggai 2:6, 21

that we are a part of an unshakable Kingdom and offer to God worship that pleases Him and reflects the awe and reverence we have toward Him, 29for He is like a fierce fire that consumes everything.*

13 Let love continue among you. 2Don't forget to extend your hospitality to all—even to strangers—for *as you know,* some have unknowingly shown kindness to heavenly messengers in this way. 3Remember those imprisoned *for their beliefs* as if you were their cellmate; and care for any who suffer harsh treatment, as you are all one body.

4Hold marriage in high esteem, all of you, and keep the marriage bed pure because God will judge those who commit sexual sins.

5Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have because He has said, "I will never leave you; I will always be by your side."* 6Because of this promise, we may boldly say,

The Lord is my help—
I won't be afraid of anything.
How can anyone harm me?*

7Listen to your leaders, who have spoken God's word to you. Notice the fruits of their lives and mirror their faith.

8Jesus the Anointed One is always the same: yesterday, today, and forever. 9Do not be carried away by diverse and strange ways of believing or worshiping. It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by *regulations about* what you can eat (which do no good even for those who observe them). 10We approach an altar from which those who stand before the altar in the tent have no right to eat. 11*In the past,* the bodies of those animals whose blood was carried into the sanctuary by the high priest to take away sin were all burned outside the camp. 12(In the same way, Jesus suffered and bled outside the city walls *of Jerusalem* to sanctify the people.)

► If we are honest, we have to admit that coming to Jesus and entering into His church ruins us—at least as far as this world is concerned. If we identify with Him in His suffering and rejection, we become a reproachful irritation to the powers that rule this culture. If we ever felt at home in this world—if we ever sensed that we belonged—then we would wake up one day to discover that we will never be at home again until we enter the city of God. By entering through Jesus, we become citizens of another city, subjects of another king. As long as we are here, we should live as resident aliens longing to go home.

13Let's then go out to Him and resolve to bear the insult and abuse that He endured. 14For as long as we are here, we do not live in any permanent city, but are looking for the city that is to come.

15Through Jesus, then, let us keep offering to God our own sacrifice, the praise of lips that confess His name without ceasing. 16Let's not neglect what is good and share what we have, for these sacrifices also please God.

17Listen to your leaders and submit to their authority *over the community,* for they are on constant watch to protect your souls and someday they must give account. Give them reason to be joyful and not to regret their duty, for that will be of no good to you.

18-19Pray for us, for we have no doubt that our consciences are clean and that we seek to live honestly in all things. But please pray for me that I may be restored to you even more quickly.

20Now may the God of peace, who brought the great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, back from the dead through the blood of the new everlasting covenant, 21perfect you in every good work as you work God's will. May God do in you *only* those things that are pleasing in His sight through Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King,* to whom we give glory always and forever. Amen.

22Please, brothers and sisters, pay attention to this word of exhortation, for I have written only a few words to you.

23I want to tell you that our brother Timothy has been set free; and if he arrives soon, he will come with me when I see you next.

24Give my greetings to your leaders and to all of God's people. Those of Italy greet you.

25May grace always be with you.

* 12:29 Deuteronomy 4:24 * 13:5 Deuteronomy 31:6 * 13:6 Psalm 118:6

JAMES

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Letter to Jewish believers

From James, the brother of Jesus

What must it have been like to grow up with Jesus as a brother? Now there's a reason for some serious sibling rivalry! In a devout Jewish home during the first century, the Scriptures are recited from memory, and the faith is celebrated in festivals that provide a rhythm to life. Then one day at the synagogue Jesus, a lay person, gets up and starts preaching, healing the sick, and casting out demons. Some people in the community are calling Him a lunatic. Others think He has made a deal with the devil. Even Jesus' own family tries to interrupt His public displays on several occasions because they want to protect Him and guard the family from shame.

As an adult son, it is James's responsibility to defend the family honor. At first, James is not convinced that his brother is the Savior. So what turns this skeptic into a passionate believer and the prominent leader of the Jerusalem church? After the crucifixion, when he sees the risen Jesus with his own eyes, James's doubts disappear. Later, at a time when the church is divided over how to incorporate Gentile believers into the formerly all-Jewish group, James steps forward and shows great leadership. He boldly says, "So here is my counsel: we should not burden these outsiders who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). Thus James endorses Paul's ministry, and with his leadership the brother of Jesus enables the spread of Christianity to the world.

In this letter, James is writing to his fellow Jewish Christians scattered throughout the world in the first century. He is concerned with preserving a connection between his Jewish heritage and the movement begun by Jesus. James does not see himself as a leader of a new religion, but as a Jew who follows the Jesus the Anointed, the Liberating King. Like Peter and Paul, James views the gospel as the fulfillment of promises in the Hebrew Scriptures. But now, through the work of Jesus, outsiders are invited to follow as well. James takes honoring the law very seriously; in this letter, he encourages all believers to simply practice what they preach.

1 James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, to the twelve tribes *of Israel* who are spread across the earth: I send you my warmest welcome!

2-4Don't run from tests and hardships, brothers and sisters. *As difficult as they are, you will ultimately* find joy in them; if you embrace them, your faith will blossom under pressure *and teach you true patience* as you endure. *And true patience brought on by* endurance will equip you to complete the long journey *and cross the finish line*—mature, complete, and wanting nothing. 5If you don't have all the wisdom needed *for this journey,* then all you have to do is ask God for it; and God will grant all that you need. He gives lavishly and never scolds you for asking.

► Wisdom, as James understands it, is the ability to live life well and make good decisions. Wisdom doesn't come from old age or hard knocks. Wisdom begins with knowing and depending absolutely on God, who is never stingy when it comes to wisdom for those who seek it. He supplies all the wisdom we need when we ask. But when we try to go it alone—without God—trouble is around the corner.

6The key is that your request be anchored by your single-minded commitment *to God.* Those who depend only on their own judgment are like *those lost on* the seas, carried away by any wave or picked up by any wind. 7Those *adrift on their own wisdom* shouldn't assume the Lord will *rescue them or* bring them anything. 8*The splinter of* divided loyalty *shatters your compass and* leaves you dizzy and confused.

9If you are a brother of humble means, celebrate the fact that God has raised you up. 10If you are rich *and seemingly invincible,* savor the humble reality that you are a mere mortal who will vanish like a flower that withers in the field. 11The sun rises with a blazing heat that *dries the earth and* causes the flower to wither and fall to the ground and its beauty to fade and die. In the same way, the rich will fall and die in the midst of their busy lives.

12Happy is the person who can hold up under the trials of life. *At the right time,* he'll know God's sweet approval and will be crowned with life. As God has promised, the crown awaits all who love Him.

13No one who is tempted should *ever be confused and* say that God is testing him. The One who created us is free from evil and can't be tempted, so He doesn't tempt anyone. 14-15When a person is carried away with desire, lured by lust, and when desire becomes the focus and takes control, it gives birth to sin. *When* sin becomes fully grown, it produces death.

If you give in to temptation and desire, then sin is born. If you give in to sin long enough, it overpowers you and costs you your life.

16My dearly loved brothers and sisters, don't be misled. 17Every good gift bestowed, every perfect gift received comes *to us* from above, courtesy of the Father of lights. He *is consistent.* He won't change His mind or play tricks in the shadows. 18We have a special role in His plan. He calls us to life by His message of truth so that we will show the rest of His creatures *His goodness and love.*

19Listen, open your ears, harness your desire to speak, and don't get worked up into a rage so easily, my brothers and sisters. 20Human anger *is a futile exercise that* will never produce God's kind of justice *in this world.* 21So walk out on your corrupt liaison with smut and depraved living, and humbly welcome the word *of truth that will blossom like the seed* of salvation planted in your souls.

22Put the word into action. If you think hearing is what matters most, you are going to find you have been deceived.

► God the Father is the giver of all things and is looking for every opportunity to bless us. But many people have difficulty trusting and receiving good things, even when those things come from God. The problem is that we not only have trouble trusting God's work in our lives, but we also don't always respond to God's voice. People often hear the Scriptures but don't really listen. People store truths in their brains but never put them to

use. For James, the only good religion is religion lived out every day.

23-24If some fail to do what God requires, it's as if they forget the word as soon as they hear it. One minute they look in the mirror, and the next they forget who they are and what they look like. 25However, it is possible to open your eyes and take in the beautiful, perfect truth found in God's law of liberty *and live by it*. If you pursue that path and actually do what God has commanded, then you will avoid *the many distractions that lead to* an amnesia of all true things and you will be blessed.

26If you *put yourself on a pedestal,* thinking you have become a role model in all things religious, but you can't control your mouth, then think again. Your mouth exposes your heart, and your religion is useless. 27Real, true religion from God the Father's perspective is about caring for the orphans and widows who suffer needlessly and resisting the evil influence of the world.

2 My brothers and sisters, *I know you've heard this before, but* stop playing favorites! Do not try to blend the genuine faith of our glorious Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, *with your silly pretentiousness.* 2If an affluent gentleman enters your gathering wearing the finest clothes and priceless jewelry, *don't trip over each other trying to welcome him.* And if a penniless bum crawls in with his shabby clothes *and a stench fills the room, don't look away or pretend you didn't notice—offer him a seat up front, next to you.* 3-4If you tell the wealthy man, "Come sit by me; there's plenty of room," but tell the vagrant, "Oh, these seats are saved. Go over there," then you'll be judging *God's children* out of evil motives.

5My dear brothers and sisters, listen: God has picked the poor of this world to become *unfathomably* rich in faith and ultimately to inherit the Kingdom, which He has pledged to those who love Him. 6*By favoring the rich,* you have mocked the poor. *And, correct me if I'm wrong,* but isn't it the rich who step on you while climbing the ladder of success? And isn't it the rich who *take advantage of you and* drag you into court? 7Aren't they the ones mocking the noble name *of our God,* the One calling us?

► We are often mesmerized by the rich, powerful, and beautiful people of the world. We dream of associating with them; but when we focus our attention on the fashionable people of this world, it is often at the expense of those who need it the most.

Ignoring the needy and favoring the wealthy is completely contrary to the example Jesus modeled for us while walking on earth. God often chooses those who are the poorest materially to be the richest spiritually. We should welcome everyone equally into God's kingdom, even if it means upsetting boundaries like class and race. The rule is simple: we should treat others in the same way we want to be treated. God does not play favorites, and neither should we.

8*Remember His call, and* live by the royal law found in Scripture*:* love others as you love yourself.* You'll be doing very well if you can get this down. 9But if you show favoritism—*paying attention to those who can help you in some way, while ignoring those who seem to need all the help*—you'll be sinning and condemned by the law. 10For if a person could keep all of the laws and yet break just one; it would be like breaking them all. 11The same God who said, "Do not commit adultery,"* also says, "Do not murder."* If you break either of these commands, you're a lawbreaker, *no matter how you look at it.* 12So live your life in such a way that acknowledges that one day you will be judged. But the law that judges also gives freedom, 13although you can't expect to be shown mercy if you refuse to show mercy. *But hear this:* mercy always wins against judgment! *Thank God!*

14Brothers and sisters, it doesn't make any sense to say you have faith and act in a way that denies that faith. *Mere talk never gets you very far, and* a commitment to Jesus only in words will not save you. 15It would be like seeing a brother or sister without any clothes *out in the cold* and begging for food, and 16saying, "Shalom, *friend,* you should get inside where it's warm and eat something," but doing

* 2:8 Leviticus 19:18 * 2:11 Exodus 20:14 * 2:11 Exodus 20:13

James' focus on works is frequently cited as a contradiction to other messages in the Bible. On the one hand, it appears James is saying that salvation is achieved by works; on the other, writers such as Paul emphasize that salvation comes by faith alone, not works of the law (Galatians 2).

Look carefully and you'll see that Paul and James are talking about different issues. Paul is in the middle of a debate with Jewish Christians over whether Gentiles must live like Jews to enter the family of faith. He says that no one is made right with God by performing the works of the law. Instead, all people are made right by faith, thanks to God's grace. For James the situation is entirely different. The works he is talking about refer to God's people helping the poor, not whether non-Jews must live like Jews. He's concerned about a shallow, insincere, and hypocritical faith.

Paul describes the root of salvation; a person is saved by God's grace received through faith. James is explaining the fruit of salvation; saving faith is a faith that works.

nothing about his needs—*leaving him cold and alone on the street.* What good would your words alone do? 17The same is true with faith. Without actions, *faith is useless. By itself,* it's *as good as* dead. 18I know what you're thinking: "OK, you have faith. And I have actions. Now let's see your faith without works, and I'll show you a faith that works."

Don't you realize that faith without works is useless, like a glove without a hand or a hat without a head?

19Do you think that just believing there's one God is going to get you anywhere? The demons believe that, too, and it terrifies them! 20*The fact is,* faith has to show itself through works performed in faith. If you don't recognize that, then you're an empty soul. 21Wasn't our father Abraham made right with God by laying his son Isaac on the altar? 22The faith *in his heart* was made known in his behavior. In fact, his commitment was perfected by his obedience. 23That's what Scripture means when it says, "Abraham entrusted himself to God, and God credited him with righteousness."* *And living a faithful life* earned Abraham the title of "God's friend."* 24*Just like our father in the faith,* we are made right with God through good works, not simply by what we believe or think. 25Even Rahab the prostitute was made right with God by hiding the spies and aiding in their escape.* 26Removing action from faith is like removing breath from a body. All you have left is a corpse.

3 My brothers and sisters, do not encourage a large number of you to become teachers because teachers will be held to a higher standard. 2We all stumble along the way. If a person never speaks hurtful words *or shouts in anger or profanity,* then he has achieved perfection. The one who can control his tongue can also control the rest of his body. 3It's like when we place a metal bit into a horse's mouth to ride it; we can control its entire body *with the slightest movement of our hands.* 4Have you ever seen a massive ship *sailing effortlessly across the water*? *Despite its immense size* and the fact that it is propelled by mighty winds, a small rudder directs the ship in any direction the pilot chooses. 5It's just the same with our tongues! It's a small muscle, capable of marvelous undertakings.

And do you know how many forest fires begin *with a single ember* from a small campfire? 6The tongue is a *blazing* fire seeking to ignite an entire world of vices. The tongue is unique among all parts of the body because it is capable of corrupting the whole body. *If that were not enough,* it ignites *and consumes* the course of creation with a fuel that originates in hell itself. 7Humanity is capable of taming every bird and beast in existence, even reptiles and sea creatures *great and small.* 8But no man has ever demonstrated the ability to tame his own tongue! It is a spring of restless evil, brimming with toxic poisons. 9*Ironically* this same tongue can be *both an instrument* of blessing to our Lord and Father and *a weapon* that hurls curses upon others who are

* 2:23 Genesis 15:6 * 2:23 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8 * 2:25 Joshua 2:1-16

created in God's own image. 10One mouth streams forth both blessings and curses. My brothers and sisters, this is not how it should be. 11Does a spring gush crystal clear freshwater and moments later spurt out bitter salt water? 12My brothers and sisters, does a fig tree produce olives? Is there a grapevine capable of growing figs? Can salt water give way to freshwater?

13Who in your community is understanding and wise? Let his example, which is marked by wisdom and gentleness, blaze a trail for others. 14If your heart is one that bleeds dark streams of jealousy and selfishness, do not be so proud that you ignore your depraved state. 15The wisdom of this world should never be mistaken for heavenly wisdom; it originates below in the earthly realms, with the demons. 16Any place where you find jealousy and selfish ambition, you will discover chaos and evil thriving under its rule. 17Heavenly wisdom centers on purity, peace, gentleness, deference, mercy, and other good fruits untainted by hypocrisy. 18The seed that flowers into righteousness will always be planted in peace by those who embrace peace.

Worldly wisdom may promise the good life, but it leads to chaos and destruction every time. Ultimately true wisdom comes from God.

4 Where do you think your fighting and *endless* conflict come from? Don't you think that they originate in the *constant pursuit of* gratification that rages inside each of you *like an uncontrolled militia*? 2You crave something that you do not possess, so you murder to get it. You desire the things you cannot earn, so you *sue others and* fight for what you want. You do not have because you have chosen not to ask. 3And when you do ask, you still do not get what you want because your motives are all wrong—because you continually focus on self-indulgence. 4You are adulterers. Don't you know that making friends with this corrupt world order is open aggression toward God? So anyone who aligns with this bogus world system is declaring war against the one true God. 5Do you think it is empty rhetoric when the Scriptures say, "The spirit that lives in us is addicted to envy and jealousy"?* 6*You may think that the situation is hopeless,* but God gives us more grace *when we turn away from our own interests.* That's why Scripture says,

> God opposes the proud,
> but He pours out grace on the humble.*

7So submit yourselves to the one true God and fight against the devil *and his schemes.* If you do, he will run away *in failure.* 8Come close to the one true God, and He will draw close to you. Wash your hands; you have dirtied them in sin. Cleanse your heart, because your mind is split down the middle, *your love for God on one side and selfish pursuits on the other.*

Since the beginning, our loving Creator has been pursuing us, drawing us closer to Him. He invites us to move closer to Him so we can be fully His.

9Now is the time to lament, to grieve, and to cry. Dissolve your laughter into sobbing, and exchange your joy for depression. 10Lay yourself *bare, facedown to the ground,* in humility before the Lord; and He will lift your head *so you can stand tall.* 11My brothers and sisters, do not assault each other with criticism. If you decide your job is to accuse and judge another believer, then you are a self-appointed critic and judge of the law; if so, then you are no longer a doer of the law *and subject to its rule*; you stand over it as a judge. 12*Know this*—there is One who stands supreme as Judge and Lawgiver. He alone is able to save and to destroy, so who are you *to step in and try* to judge another?

13Listen carefully, those of you who *make your plans and* say, "We are traveling to this city in the next few days. We'll stay there for one year while our business explodes and revenue is up." 14The reality is you have no idea where your life will take you tomorrow. You are like a mist that appears one moment and then vanishes another. 15It would be best to say, "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream." 16But your current speech indicates an arrogance *that does not acknowledge the One who controls the universe,* and this kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. 17So if you know the right way to live and ignore it, it is sin—*plain and simple.*

* 4:5 Genesis 6:5 * 4:6 Proverbs 3:34

5 Hey, you rich folk, misery is on its
way; so cry and moan 2*because* you
will watch your riches rot before
your eyes as the moths devour your fine
clothes. 3Your stockpile of silver and gold
is tarnished and corroded, and this rust
will stand up in the final judgment and
testify against you. It will eat your flesh
like fire *and become a permanent and
painful reminder that* you have hoarded
your wealth through these last days. 4Lis-
ten. You held back a just wage from the
laborers who mowed your fields, and that
money is crying out against you, *demand-
ing that justice be done.* The cries of the
people who harvested your crops *and
made you a profit* have fallen upon the ears
of the supreme Lord of heavenly armies.
5Your life on the earth has been one of lux-
ury, pleasure, and endless consumption;
you have feasted to your hearts' content
on animals you slaughtered, but now the
day of slaughter comes *for you.* 6You have
condemned and murdered the righteous
man, and he did not defend himself.

7For this reason, my brothers and
sisters, be patient as you wait for the
return of the Lord. Look! The farmer
knows how to wait patiently for the land
to produce *vegetables and fruits. He cannot
harvest a freshly planted seed.* Instead, he
waits for the early and the late showers *to
nourish the soil.* 8You need this same kind
of patience, *so in the meantime,* strengthen
your resolve because the Lord will be
coming soon.

9Brothers and sisters, don't waste
your breath complaining about one
another. If you judge others, you will
be judged yourself. Be very careful! *You
will face* the one true Judge who is right
outside the door. 10The prophets who
declared the word of the Lord are your
role models, my brothers and sisters, for
what it means to live patiently in the face
of suffering. 11Look, we bless and honor
the memory of those who persevered
under hardship. Remember how Job
endured and how the Lord orchestrated
the triumph of his final circumstances as
a grand display of His mercy and compas-
sion.

12It is even more important, my
brothers and sisters, that you remember
not to make a vow by the heavens or the
earth or by anything. When you say "yes,"
it should always mean "yes," and "no"
should always mean "no." *If you can keep
your word,* you will avoid judgment.

13Are any in your community suffer-
ing? They should pray. Are any celebrat-
ing? They should sing praises *to God.* 14Are
any sick? They should call the elders of
your church and ask them to pray. They
will *gather around and* anoint them with
oil in the name of the Lord. 15Prayers
offered in faith will restore them from sick-
ness *and bring them to health.* The Lord
will lift them up *from the floor of despair;*
and if the sickness is due to sin, then
God will forgive their sins. 16So own up to
your sins to one another and pray for one
another. In the end, you may be healed.
Your prayers are powerful when they are
rooted in a righteous life. 17*Remember*
Elijah? He was a man, no different from
us. He prayed with great intensity asking
God to withhold the rain; God *answered
his prayers and* did not allow a single drop
of rain to fall for three and a half years. 18It
did not rain until Elijah prayed again *for
God to open the skies,* when the rain came
down and the earth produced a great crop.

► Why should we bother to pray if God already knows what we are going to ask for? Prayer involves so much more than making personal requests. It connects us with God and works to bring our wills into conformity with His.

How, then, should we pray? First, James tells us to pray in community, not just by ourselves and for ourselves. When we pray together, life is shared and community is born. We also confess our sins, not just to God, but to each other. Through this vulnerable transparency, God knits souls together in authentic community, and we discover the true benefit of prayer.

19Brothers and sisters, if someone you
know loses his way and rebels *against God,
pursue him in love and* bring him back to
the truth. 20Know this: If you turn a sinner
back from the error of his ways, then you
will rescue him from the grips of death
and cover *the pain and consequences of*
untold sins.

1 PETER

Instruction to the church scattered

From Peter, the apostle to Jewish Christians

This letter is written by Peter, a fisherman from Galilee who became one of the most prominent leaders of the early church. Though his name is Simon, Jesus gave him the nickname "Peter," which means "rock." Jesus said Peter would be the rock or foundation the church would be built on. Although Peter knows he is a key leader in the movement, he is humble enough to understand that Jesus is actually the cornerstone, the One who holds the church together. That's why the image of a temple, crafted from stone, touches Peter so deeply. As the "rock," Peter urges his listeners to come to Jesus, the cornerstone, and join Him in building a new temple and forming a new priesthood where spiritual sacrifices are offered to God.

Peter addresses Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Whether he knows these churches personally, it is impossible to determine. But as one of Jesus' original disciples, a member of "the twelve," his stature and reputation are such that he can gain a hearing as the churches gather. He says they are "living as aliens" because he knows they are having a difficult time relating to the pagan world around them. Like strangers on a journey in a culture and land not their own, these early Christians feel out of step with everyone else. In times of persecution, these Christians come to identify themselves as aliens and sojourners even among their own people.

Writing this letter to encourage believers who were going through intense persecution, Peter shares the lessons he learned from his own oppression. Peter writes this letter "from Babylon," probably a cryptic designation for Rome, the imperial capital where the fires of persecution burn the hottest. According to him, followers of Jesus should not be surprised by the fiery ordeals that come their way. In fact, when they experience social ostracism, imprisonment, torture, and even death, they are participating in the ongoing sufferings of Jesus. So Peter calls them to entrust themselves to God and to have courage in the face of persecution. Suffering that lacks meaning or purpose is suffering without hope, so Peter tries to infuse them with hope by reminding them of who they are and urging them to imitate the One who calls them.

1 Peter, an emissary* of Jesus the Anointed One, to God's chosen people living as aliens scattered *among the unbelievers* in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. 2*I am sending this letter to those* who have been selected and destined by God the Father and made holy by *God* the Spirit that you may be obedient to Jesus the Anointed and *purified* by the sprinkling of His blood. May grace and peace beyond all reckoning be yours.

3Blessed is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! Because He has raised Jesus the Anointed from death, through His great mercy we have been reborn into a living hope—4reborn for an eternal inheritance, held in reserve in heaven, that will never fade or fail. 5Through faith, God's power is *standing watch,* protecting you for a salvation that you will see completely at the end of things. 6You should greatly rejoice *in what is waiting for you,* even if now for a little while you have to suffer various trials. 7*Suffering tests* your faith which is more valuable than gold (remember that gold, although it is perishable, is tested by fire) so that if it is found genuine, you can receive praise, honor, and glory when Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King,* is revealed at last.

Early Christians stand apart from the culture and suffer social stigmas and physical persecution at times. Peter challenges them to remain faithful to Jesus who also suffered for not conforming.

8Although you haven't seen Jesus, you *still* love Him. Although you don't yet see Him, you do believe in Him and celebrate with a joy that is glorious and beyond words. 9You are receiving the salvation of your souls as the result of your faith.

10The prophets who spoke of this *outpouring of* grace upon you diligently searched and inquired *of the Lord* about this salvation: 11to whom and to what time was the indwelling Spirit of the Anointed referring when He told them about the suffering of the Anointed and the honor that would follow it? 12The Spirit revealed to them they were not serving themselves but you. And you have learned from those who told you the good news by the Spirit that was sent down from heaven. Even the heavenly messengers would like to explore this news.

13So *get yourselves ready,* prepare your minds to act, control yourselves, and look forward in hope as you focus on the grace that comes when Jesus the Anointed *returns and* is completely revealed to you. 14Be like obedient children as you put aside the desires you used to pursue when you didn't know better. 15Since the One who called you is holy, be holy in all you do. 16For the Scripture says, "You are to be holy, for I am holy."* 17If you call on the Father who judges everyone without partiality according to their actions, then you should live in reverence and awe while you live out the days of your exile.

18You know that a price was paid to redeem you from following the empty ways handed on to you by your ancestors; it was not paid with things that perish (like silver and gold), 19but with the precious blood of the Anointed, who was like a perfect and unblemished sacrificial lamb. 20God determined to send Him before the world began, but He came *into the world* in these last days for your sake. 21Through Him, you've been brought to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him for the very reason that your faith and hope are in Him.

22Now that you have *taken care to* purify your souls through your submission to the truth, you can experience real love for each other. So love each other deeply from a [pure]* heart. 23You have been reborn—not from seed that eventually dies but from seed that is eternal—through the word of God that lives and endures forever. 24For *as Isaiah said,*

> All life is like the grass,
> and its glory like a flower;
> The grass will wither *and die,*
> and the flower falls,
> 25But the word of the Lord will endure
> forever.*

This is the word that has been preached to you.

2 So get rid of hatefulness and deception, of insincerity and jealousy and slander. 2Be like newborn babies, crying out for spiritual milk that will help you grow into salvation 3if you have tasted *and found* the Lord to be good.

4Come to Him—the living stone—who was rejected by people but *accepted*

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:16 Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7 * 1:22 Some manuscripts omit "pure." * 1:24-25 Isaiah 40:6b-8

by God as chosen and precious. 5Like living stones, let yourselves be assembled into a spiritual house, a holy order of priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices that will be acceptable to God through Jesus the Anointed. 6For it says in the words *of the prophet Isaiah,*

> See here—I am laying in Zion a stone,
> a cornerstone, chosen and precious;
> Whoever depends upon Him will never
> be disgraced.*

7To you who believe *and depend on Him,* He is precious; but to you who don't, *remember the words of the psalmist:*

> The stone that the builders rejected
> has been laid as the cornerstone—
> the very stone *that holds*
> *together the entire foundation,**

8and of *Isaiah:*

> A stone that blocks their way,
> a rock that trips them.*

They stumble because they don't follow the word of God, as they were destined to do.

9But you are a chosen people, *set aside to be* a royal order of priests, a holy nation, God's own; so that you may proclaim the wondrous acts of the One who called you out of *inky* darkness into shimmering light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received it.

11Beloved, remember *you don't belong in this world.* You are resident aliens living in exile, so resist those desires of the flesh that battle against the soul. 12Live honorably among the outsiders so that, even when some may be inclined to call you criminals, when they see your good works, they might give glory to God when He returns in judgment.

13For the Lord's sake, accept the decrees and laws of all the various human institutions, whether they come from the highest human ruler 14or agents he sends to punish those who do wrong and to reward those who do well. 15You see, it is God's will that by doing what is right *and good* you should hush the gabbing ignorance of the foolish. 16Live as those who are free and not as those who use their freedom as a pretext for evil, but live as God's servants. 17Respect everyone. Love the community of believers. Reverence God. Honor your ruler.

► The word "submission" evokes concerns about sexism, racism, and dehumanization. Unfortunately there have been good reasons to draw such conclusions. The true purpose of biblical submission, however, is not to sanction any type of inequality but to honor Jesus even in the most difficult circumstances. Offering an attitude of humility toward those who are undeserving of it mirrors the unmerited favor God graciously gives to us. When submission is modeled evenly by all believers—male and female, young and old—it is no longer enslaving, but liberating.

18*If you are a* slave, submit yourself to the master who has authority over you, whether he is kind and gentle or harsh *as he deals with you.* 19For grace is clearly at work when a person accepts undeserved pain and suffering and does so because he is mindful of God. 20For what credit is there in enduring punishment you deserve? But if you do what is right and yet are punished and endure it patiently, God will be pleased with you. 21-22For you were called to this *kind of life, as Isaiah said,*

> He did no wrong deed,
> and no evil word came from His
> mouth.*

Many believers face intense persecution, but western Christians tend not to experience anything beyond social pressure. Are we merely pursuing comfort, or are we willing to swim against culture?

The Anointed One suffered for us and left us His example so that we could follow in His steps. 23When He was verbally abused, He didn't return the abuse; when He suffered, He didn't make threats *to cause suffering in return*; instead, He trusted that

* 2:6 Isaiah 28:16 * 2:7 Psalm 118:22 * 2:8 Isaiah 8:14 * 2:21-22 Isaiah 53:9

all would be put right by the One who is just when He judges. 24He took on our sins in His body *when He died* on the cross* so that we, being dead to sin, can live for righteousness. *As the Scripture says,* "Through His wounds, you were healed."* 25For there was a time when you were like sheep that wandered from the fold, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your lives.

Peter calls all believers to humility, submission, and service: everyone to God, citizens to rulers, slaves to masters, wives to husbands, and younger to elders.

3 1-2In the same way, wives, you should patiently accept the authority of your husbands. This is so that even if they don't obey God's word, as they observe your pure respectful behavior, they may be persuaded without a word by the way you live. 3Don't focus on decorating your exterior by doing your hair or putting on fancy jewelry or wearing fashionable clothes; 4let your adornment be what's inside—*the real you,* the lasting beauty of a gracious and quiet spirit, in which God delights. 5This is how, long ago, holy women who put their hope in God made themselves beautiful: by respecting the authority of their husbands. 6Consider how Sarah, *our mother,* obeyed *her husband,* Abraham, and called him "lord," and you will be her daughters as long as you boldly do what is right without fear *and without anxiety*.

7In the same way, husbands, as you live with your wives, understand *the situations* women *face* as the weaker vessel. *Each of you should respect your wife* and value her as an equal heir in the gracious gift of life. Do this so that nothing will get in the way of your prayers.

8Finally, all of you, be like-minded and show sympathy, love, compassion, and humility to and for each other—9not paying back evil with evil or insult with insult, but repaying the bad with a blessing. It was this you were called to do, so that you might inherit a blessing. 10*It is written in the psalms,*

If you love life
and want to live a good, long time,
Then be careful what you say.
Don't tell lies or spread gossip or
talk about improper things.
11Walk away from the evil *things in the world—just leave them behind,*
and do what is right,
and *always* seek peace and pursue it.
12For the Lord watches over the righteous,
and His ears are attuned to their prayers.
But His face is set against *His enemies*;
He will punish evildoers.*

13Why would anyone harm you if you eagerly do good? 14Even if you should suffer for doing what is right, you will receive a blessing. Don't let them frighten you. Don't be intimidated, 15-16but exalt Him as Lord in your heart. Always be ready to offer a defense, humbly and respectfully, when someone asks why you live in hope. Keep your conscience clear so that those who ridicule your good conduct in the Anointed and say bad things about you will be put to shame.

► Peter urges us always to be ready to give a reason for the hope that lives within us. But it is important that it be done not with arrogance and contempt, but with gentleness and love—the same virtues that should guide our responses to any hostile challenge. This is one way we can glorify Jesus as King over all our lives—by exalting Him with both our emotions and our intellect.

17For if it is the will of God that you suffer, then it is better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong. 18The Anointed One suffered for sins once for all time—the righteous *suffering* for the unrighteous—so that He might bring us to God. Though He died in the flesh, He was made alive again through the Spirit. 19And in the Spirit, He went and preached to those spirits held captive. 20*It was these* who long ago lived in disobedience while God waited patiently as Noah was building the ark. At that time, only a tiny band—eight people—was spared from the flood.

21The water *through which the ark safely passed* symbolizes now the ceremonial washing through baptism* *that initiates* you into salvation. You are saved

* 2:24 Literally, tree * 2:24 Isaiah 53:5 * 3:10-12 Psalm 34:12-16 * 3:21 Literally, immersion, in a rite of initiation and purification

not because it cleanses your body of filth
but because of your appeal to God from a
good conscience, through the resurrection
of Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.*
22Now He has entered heaven and sits at
the right hand of God as heavenly messen-
gers and authorities and powers submit to
His supremacy.

4 Since the Anointed suffered in the flesh, prepare yourselves to do the same—anyone who has suffered in the flesh *for the Lord* is no longer in the grip of sin—2so that you may live the rest of your life on earth *controlled* not by earthly desires but by the will of God.

► The reality of suffering in the world causes many to question the existence of an all-powerful and all-loving God. A God of power and love is expected to be both able and willing to remove suffering from our lives. Ultimately, God will make all things new and end suffering, but for now God allows it and calls us to rejoice in the midst of it. Though we may not understand it, pain and suffering have a purpose in God's plan, and our Creator is not immune to it. Through Jesus God enters into our suffering; now we are called to enter into His.

3You have already wasted enough time
living like those outsiders in the society
around you: losing yourselves in sex, in
addictions and desires, in drinking and
lawless idolatry, in *giving your time and*
allegiance to things that are not godly.
4When you don't play the same games
they do, they notice that you are living by
different rules. That's why they say such
terrible things about you. 5Someday they,
too, will have to give an account *of them-
selves* to the One who judges the living
and the dead. 6(This is why the good news
had to be brought to those who are dead
so that although they are judged in the
flesh, they might live in the spirit in the
way that pleases God.)

7We are coming to the end of all
things, so be serious and keep your wits
about you in order to pray *more forcefully.*
8Most of all, love each other steadily and
unselfishly, because love makes up for
many faults. 9Show hospitality to each
other without complaint. 10Use whatever
gift you've received for *the good of* one
another so that you can show yourselves
to be good stewards of God's grace in
all its varieties. 11If you're called upon to
talk, speak as though God put the words
in your mouth; if you're called upon to
serve others, serve as though you had the
strength of God behind you. In these ways,
God may be glorified in all you do through
Jesus the Anointed, to whom belongs
glory and power, now and forever. Amen.

12Dear ones, don't be surprised when
you experience your trial by fire. It is not
something strange and unusual, 13but
it is something you should rejoice in. In
it you share the Anointed's sufferings,
and you will be that much more joyful
when His glory is revealed. 14If anyone
condemns you for following *Jesus as* the
Anointed One, consider yourself blessed.
The glorious Spirit of God rests on you.
15But none of you should ever merit suf-
fering like those who have murdered or
stolen, meddled in the affairs of others or
done evil things. 16But if you should suffer
for being a Christian, don't think of it as
a disgrace, *as it would be if you had done
wrong.* Praise God that you're permitted to
carry this name.

People often suffer because of poor decisions that result in shame, but the people of God face persecution for their faithfulness that leads to honor and glory.

17For the time for judgment has come,
and it is beginning with the household of
God. If it is starting with us, what will hap-
pen to those who have rejected God's good
news? 18*It is written in Proverbs,*

If it is hard for the righteous ones to be
saved,
what will happen to the ungodly
and the sinners?*

19So even if you should suffer now for
doing God's will, continue doing good and
trust your futures to the judgment and
mercy of a faithful Creator.

5 Now for the elders *of the church.* I want to encourage you. *As you know,* I am an elder, too, like you. I have

* 4:18 Proverbs 11:31

witnessed *firsthand* the sufferings of the Anointed One as well as shared in the glories which are soon to be revealed. 2*When you* shepherd the flock God has given you, watch over them not because you have to but because you want to. For this is how God would want it not because you're being compensated somehow but because you are eager to watch over them. 3Don't lead them as if you were a dictator, but lead your flock by example; 4and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will be crowned with honor that will shine brightly forever. 5You who are younger *in the faith*: do as your elders *and leaders* ask. All of you should treat each other with humility, *for as it says in Proverbs*,

God opposes the proud
but offers grace to the humble.*

6So bow down under God's strong hand; then when the time comes, God will lift you up. 7Since God cares for you, let Him carry all your burdens and worries.

► Humility is rarely a virtue that our culture values. We're trained from an early age to show our strengths and hide our weaknesses. This type of thinking also spills over into our models of leadership, as we learn to dictate to others how they should perform. Peter, however, says that we should be humble in our relationships with one another and not lead as dictators. In fact, this humility before one another and God is actually the position of the greatest strength. Our enemy desires to consume us, but we find strength to resist him when we are dependent upon God for His strength.

8*Most importantly,* be disciplined and stay on guard. Your enemy the devil is prowling around outside like a roaring lion, just waiting *and hoping for the chance* to devour someone. 9Resist him and be strong in your faith, knowing that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are fellow sufferers with you. 10After you have suffered for a little while, the God of grace who has called you [to His everlasting presence]* through Jesus the Anointed will restore you, support you, strengthen you, and ground you. 11For all power belongs to God, now and forever. Amen.

12Silvanus,* whom I consider a trustworthy and faithful brother, is carrying this brief letter to encourage you and to testify that here is the true grace of God. Hold on to it.

13The church *here* in Babylon* chosen *by God* together with you, sends you greetings. So does my son *in the faith* Mark.

14Greet each other with a kiss of love, and may peace come to all who follow *Jesus* the Anointed.

* 5:5 Proverbs 3:34 * 5:10 Early manuscripts omit this portion. * 5:12 Silvanus is better known in Acts as Silas.
* 5:13 A cryptic designation for Rome

2 PETER

Instruction to the church scattered

From Peter, the apostle to Jewish Christians

Later tradition credits this letter to Peter—one of "the twelve," an eyewitness to much of Jesus' public ministry, and the same disciple who (according to tradition) when sentenced to die requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same way his Lord did. Initially there were questions about this letter, so it was one of the last letters accepted and made part of the New Testament canon. Peter writes this second letter to the same churches he addresses in 1 Peter. But the address here is more generic, which suggests that he expects this letter to be read broadly to anyone who shares his faith in Jesus.

Peter begins by celebrating God's power and the true knowledge of God, which leads to salvation. For him salvation consists of escaping the corruption that characterizes this world and sharing in God's very nature. But believers must cooperate with God's work in them in order to live fully into the promises God has for those who believe. Virtue, knowledge, self-control, godliness, and love: these are the characteristics that form the life of any true believer.

At the heart of the letter is a warning against the growing influence of false teachers who have infiltrated the churches. With their greed, sensuality, arrogance, and hatred for authority, these false believers are undermining the church. Peter looks back over Jewish history and notices that God did not spare the disobedient in the past, so God's judgment on the present false teachers is sure. Some of the false teachers are mocking the hope that Jesus will return again, but Peter assures his audience that any delay in Jesus' return has to do with God's patience: He wishes for all to change their ways and enter the Kingdom. The day of the Lord will come, he writes, like a thief in the night, and the old world will give way to a new world as only God can create it.

1 Simon Peter, a servant and emissary* of Jesus the Anointed One, to those who have received the same precious faith we share through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus the Anointed.
2 I wish you a full measure of grace and peace *as you grow* in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3 His divine power has given us everything we need to experience life and to reflect God's true nature through the knowledge of the One who called us by His glory and virtue. 4 Through these things, we have received God's great and valuable promises, so we might escape the corruption of worldly desires and share in the divine nature.

► God took the first step to rescue us from this corrupt world. He has granted us His power, revealed to us true knowledge, and spoken to us great promises. He has done all this for a reason: that we might participate in His own nature and reflect His own life. But we are not passive observers of God's saving actions. We must receive His grace, grow in knowledge, and join Him in this work of redemption.

5 To achieve this, you will need to add virtue to your faith, and then knowledge to your virtue; 6 to knowledge, add discipline; to discipline, add endurance; to endurance, add godliness; 7 to godliness, add affection for others as sisters and brothers; and to affection, *at last,* add love. 8 For if you possess these traits and multiply them, then you will never be ineffective or unproductive in your relationship with our Lord Jesus the Anointed; 9 but if you don't have these qualities, then you will be nearsighted and blind, forgetting that your past sins have been washed away. 10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, work that much harder to confirm that God has called you and claimed you. If you do this, then you will never fall along the way; 11 and you can be sure that you will be richly welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King.*

12 That is why I will keep reminding you of these things, even though I know that you believe them and have made these truths a part of your lives; 13 as long as I draw breath, I know it is right for me to keep on stirring you up with these reminders. 14 I know that soon I must *die and* lay down this *old* body that's been my home—our Lord Jesus the Anointed has told me so. 15 *But before my exodus from this life,* I want to be certain you will be able to call these things to mind anytime you need them even after I am gone.

Faith does not rest upon cleverly devised fables invented by creative minds; it rests upon the testimonies of eyewitnesses who faithfully pass down what they see and hear to others.

16 For *I want to remind you that* when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, we were relying on what our eyes had seen of His *glorious* majesty, not on cleverly told fables. 17 You see, God the Father lavished honor and glory upon Jesus when the voice of the Majestic Glory echoed *from heaven* and said, "This is My beloved Son, and My favor rests on Him."* 18 *We witnessed this*—we ourselves heard this voice from heaven—when we were with Jesus on that holy mountain. 19 We have a fuller confirmation of the message of the prophets. You would do well to pay close attention to this word; it is like a light that shines for you in the darkness of night until the day dawns when the morning star rises in your own hearts.

Peter and two other disciples see Jesus transfigured. This event and the heavenly voice confirm Jesus' true identity and are a prelude to the greatest miracle of all—the resurrection.

20 But notice first that no prophecy found in Scripture is a matter of the prophet's own interpretation. 21 Prophecy has never been a product of human initiative, but it comes when men *and women* are moved to speak on behalf of God by the Holy Spirit.

2 Just as false prophets rose up *in the past* among *God's* people, false teachers will rise up *in the future* among you. They will slip in with their destructive opinions, denying the very Master who bought their freedom and dooming themselves to destruction swiftly, 2 but not before they attract others by their

* 1:1 Literally, apostle * 1:17 Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

unbridled and immoral behavior. Because of them *and their ways*, others will criticize *and condemn* the path of truth *we walk as seedy and disreputable.* 3These *false teachers* will follow their greed and exploit you with their fabrications, but *be assured that* their judgment was pronounced long ago and their destruction does not sleep.

New Testament writers warn the church to watch out for false teachers. Peter faults them primarily for their immoral lifestyles rather than for doctrinal differences.

4For God did not spare the heavenly beings who sinned, but He cast them into the dark pits* of hell* to be kept until the time of judgment; 5and He did not spare the ancient world, but He sent a flood swirling over the ungodly (although He did save Noah, God's herald for what is right, with seven other *members of his family*); 6and God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, reducing them to ash as a lesson of what He will do with the ungodly in the days to come 7-8(although again He did rescue Lot, a person who did what was right in God's eyes and who was distressed by the immorality *and the lawlessness* of the society around him. Day after day, the sights and sounds of their lawlessness were like daggers into that good man's soul). 9*If all this happened in the past,* it shows clearly the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from their trials and how to hold the wicked in punishment until the day of judgment.

► Is God different in the New Testament from what He is in the First Testament? In the First Testament, God seems prone to judgment; but some feel God is more concerned about love in the New Testament. However, the central and most repeated affirmation about God's character in the First Testament is that He is gracious and compassionate (Exodus 34:6-7). And the New Testament clearly does not ignore the idea of God's judgment, as this text shows. His judgment will come, but it is delayed by God's patient mercy.

10And above all, it shows He will punish those who let the desires of their bodies rule them and who have no respect for authority. People like this are so bold and willful that they aren't even afraid of offending heavenly beings, 11although the heavenly messengers—in spite of the fact that they have greater strength and power—make no such accusations against these people before the Lord. 12These people who speak ill of what they do not understand are no different from animals—without sense, operating only on their instincts, born to be captured and killed—and they will be destroyed just like those animals, 13receiving the penalty for their evil acts. They waste their days in *parties and* carousing. As they feast with you, these stains and blemishes *on your community* are feasting on their deceptions.* 14Their eyes are always looking for their next adulterous conquests; their appetites for sin cannot be satisfied. They seduce the unwary soul, and greed is the only lesson they have learned by heart. God's curse lies upon them. 15They have veered off the right road and gotten lost, following in the steps of Balaam, the son of Beor, *the false prophet.* Balaam loved the reward he could get by doing evil, 16but he was rebuked for crossing the line into sin; his own speechless donkey scolded him in a human voice, *an amazing miracle* that reined in the prophet's insanity.*

17These *people I'm talking about* are *nothing but* dried-up springs, mists driven by fierce winds; the deepest darkness has been set aside for them. 18They speak *in loud voices* empty and arrogant. They exploit the desires of the flesh, *take advantage of* sensual natures, to entangle people who have just escaped from those who live by deception. 19They claim to offer them freedom, but they themselves are enslaved by corruption because whatever a person gives in to soon becomes his master. 20Those who have been pulled out of the cesspool of worldly desires through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Anointed One, yet have found themselves mired in it again are worse off than they were before. 21They would have been better off never knowing the way of righteousness than to have known it and then abandoned the sacred commandment they had previously received *and dived back into the muck!* 22In their cases, the words from Proverbs hold true: "The dog goes back

* 2:4 Other manuscripts read "into chains of darkness." * 2:4 Literally, Tartarus * 2:13 Other manuscripts read "in their love feasts." * 2:16 Numbers 22–24

to his own vomit,"* and *as the Greeks say,* "The sow is washed to wallow in the mud."

3 This is now, my dear friends, my second letter to you. In both of them, I *have tried to* inspire you to a sincere *and pure* way of thinking by reminding you *of what you already know.* 2Remember the words spoken earlier by God's holy prophets and the commandment that our Lord and Savior *gave to you* through your emissaries.* 3Above all, be sure to remember that in the last days mockers will come, following their own desires and taunting you, 4saying, "So what happened to the promised *second* coming of Jesus? For everything keeps going just the way it has since our ancestors fell asleep *in death*; since the beginning of creation, nothing's changed."

These believers face persecution every day and eagerly await the day when Jesus will return and judge their enemies. But what is taking so long?

5*When they make fun of you,* it's as if the scoffers are deliberately forgetting that long ago when God spoke the word, the heavens came into existence and the earth formed from water and by water. 6The waters *later* flooded and destroyed that world. 7By that same word, the heavens and earth *we see* now are being reserved for *destruction by* fire, preserved until the time comes for the godless on the day of judgment.

8Don't imagine, dear friends, *that God's timetable is the same as ours; as the psalm says,* for with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day.*

► Scoffers use the delay in His second coming to question if He is going to return at all. Peter responds by saying that God's perspective on time is not like ours. What seems long from a finite, human perspective is incredibly short from an eternal one. Peter also describes how God is not slow, but patient. God wants to allow the time needed for as many sinners as possible to turn from their sinful ways. Unlike some depictions of God as vindictive and enjoying inflicting punishment on people, the God we see here desires that all be saved and not destroyed. If we had true spiritual insight, we would not be amazed by the severity of eternal judgment but by the intensity of God's mercy.

9*Now* the Lord is not slow about enacting His promise—slow is how some people want to characterize it—*no, He is not slow* but patient *and merciful* to you, not wanting anyone to be destroyed, but wanting everyone to turn away from following his own path and to turn toward God's.*

10The day of the Lord will come *unexpectedly* like a thief in the night; and on that day, the sky will vanish with a roar, the elements will melt with intense heat, and the earth and all the works done on it will be seen as they truly are.* 11Knowing that one day all this will come to pass, think what sort of people you ought to be—how you should be living faithful and godly lives, 12waiting *hopefully* for and hastening the coming of God's day when the heavens will vanish in flames and the elements melt away with intense heat. 13*What will happen next,* and what we hope for, is what God promised: a new heaven and a new earth where justice reigns.

14So, my friends, while we wait for the day of the Lord, work hard to live in peace, without flaw or blemish; 15and look at the patience of the Lord as your salvation. Our dearly loved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, has written about this. 16He says *essentially* the same in all of his letters, although uneducated and unstable readers misinterpret the difficult passages, just as they always misread Scripture, to their *spiritual* ruin.

17So *hear my final words,* my friends. Now that I have warned you about what's ahead, keep up your guard and don't let unprincipled people pull you away from the sure ground *of the truth* with their lies and misunderstandings. 18Instead, grow in grace and in the *true* knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Anointed, to whom be glory, now and until the coming of the new age. Amen.

* 2:22 Proverbs 26:11 * 3:2 Literally, apostles * 3:8 An allusion to Psalm 90:4 * 3:9 Literally, repent * 3:10 Other manuscripts read "be burned up."

1 JOHN

Instructions to believers everywhere

From John, the apostle

This letter was written by John the emissary, one of Jesus' earliest followers. Before he became a disciple, John worked as a fisherman with his father Zebedee and his brother James on the Sea of Galilee. Once he joined Jesus, John became one of Jesus' closest friends, part of an inner circle within "the twelve" that included Peter, Andrew, and James. But out of all the disciples, it seems that John had the closest relationship with Jesus. He was known as "the disciple loved by Jesus" (John 19:26; 21:7, 20).

John writes this letter from Ephesus, a bustling seaside city whose ruins are now found in Western Turkey. Although 1 John is classified as a letter, it doesn't have all the elements of a letter written in its day. It has no typical opening or closing. In fact, it is not written to one person or church in particular, but is directed to several different churches made up mainly of non-Jews. He writes this letter as an old man, after serving in ministry for a very long time. He uses a tender, fatherly tone toward people he views as his spiritual "little children"—the new generation of Christians who have not seen Jesus with their own eyes as John did.

John begins this letter much as he does his Gospel. In both writings, he opens by stressing the eternal nature of Jesus. He explains how Jesus was with the Father from the beginning, before the creation of the world and before He was revealed to the world in human flesh. John then describes God as light and encourages believers to walk in the light by stepping away from the darkness of sin. Like other New Testament writers, he also warns believers to beware of false teachers who deny the true identity of Jesus. But most of all, John focuses on love—how God lavishes His love on His children and how they are to do the same to one another. The love of God must overwhelm the believer's desire for the material things of this life. John goes so far as to say, "Don't fall in love with this *corrupt* world or *worship* the things it can offer. Those who love its corrupt ways don't have the Father's love living within them" (2:15).

1 We want to tell you about the One
who was from the beginning. We have
seen Him with our own eyes, heard
Him with our own ears, and touched
Him with our own hands. This One is *the
manifestation of* the life-giving Voice, 2and
He showed us real life, *eternal life*. We
have seen it *all, and we can't keep what* we
witnessed *quiet*—we have to share it with
you. *We are inviting you to experience* eter-
nal life through the One who was with the
Father and came down to us. 3What we
saw and heard we pass on to you so that
you, too, will be connected with us inti-
mately *and become family.* Our family is
united by our connection with the Father
and His Son Jesus, the Anointed One; 4and
we write all this because retelling this
story fulfills our* joy.

5What we are telling you now is the
very message we heard from Him: God is
pure light, undimmed by darkness of any
kind. 6If we say we have an intimate con-
nection with the Father but we continue
stumbling around in darkness, then we are
lying because we do not live according to
truth. 7If we walk *step by step* in the light,
where the Father is, then we are ultimately
connected to each other *through the sac-
rifice of* Jesus His Son. His blood purifies
us from all our sins. 8If we go around brag-
ging, "We have no sin," then we are fooling
ourselves and are strangers to the truth.
9But if we own up to our sins, God shows
that He is faithful and just by forgiving us
of our sins and purifying us from the pol-
lution of all the bad things we have done.
10If we say, "We have not sinned," then
we depict God as a liar and *show that* we
have not let His word find its way into our
hearts.

► The word "sin" has virtually disap-
peared from modern conversation.
Afraid of sounding judgmental, we
call sin something else—a mistake,
an addiction, a tendency, a bad
decision—and ignore it as normal
and natural behavior. But John is call-
ing the church to a radical holiness
where those in the church will regularly
remember their sins and seek God's
forgiveness. Each sin, small and large,
injures us or someone else; it imprints
on our soul, makes us imperfect, and
separates us from the perfect God. If
we confess our sins to God each day,
then He will purify our hearts and draw
us closer to Him.

2 *You are* my little children, so I
am writing these things to help
you avoid sin. If, however, any
believer does sin, we have a *high-powered*
defense lawyer—Jesus the Anointed, the
righteous—*arguing on our behalf* before
the Father. 2It was through His sacrificial
death that our sins were atoned. But He
did not stop there—He died for the sins of
the whole world.

► John is affectionately addressing this
letter to his "little children," and he is
writing to help them avoid sin and the
pain and guilt that come with it. The
glamour of decadent lifestyles devoid
of God is often advertised as the
epitome of joy and freedom. But what
are often conveniently left out of these
portrayals are the agonizing conse-
quences of such destructive lifestyles.
Meaningful pleasure comes not when
we are enslaved by the empty prom-
ises of the world, but when we are liv-
ing in loving obedience to God.

3We know we have joined Him in an inti-
mate relationship because we live out His
commands. 4If someone claims, "I am in
an intimate relationship with Him," but
this big talker doesn't live out His com-
mands, then this individual is a liar and
a stranger to the truth. 5But if someone
responds to and obeys His word, then
God's love has truly taken root and filled
him. This is how we know we are in an
intimate relationship with Him: 6anyone
who says, "I live in intimacy with Him,"
should walk the path Jesus walked.

7My loved ones, *in one sense,* I am not
writing a new command for you. I am only
reminding you of the old command. It's a
word you already know, a word that has
existed from the beginning. 8However, in
another sense, I am writing a new com-
mand for you. The new command is the

* 1:4 Other manuscripts read "your."

truth that He lived; and now you are living it, too, because the darkness is fading and the true light is already shining *among you*.

9Anyone who says, "I live in the light," but hates his brother or sister is still living in the shadows. 10Anyone who loves his brother or sister lives in the light and will not trip *because his conscience is clear*. 11But anyone who hates his brother is in the darkness, stumbling around with no idea where he is going, blinded by the darkness.

We are deeply loved by God. When we turn and love those members of our faith family whom God loves, we are set apart and different from the world.

12I am writing to you, my children, because your sins have been forgiven by the authority of His name.

13I am writing to you, fathers *and mothers*, because you have known Him *as the Creator*, as the One who started everything.

I am writing to you, young people, because *He has given* you *the power to* conquer the evil one.

14I have written to you, my children, because you have known the Father.

I have written to you, fathers *and mothers*, because you have known Him, the Creator.

I have written to you, young people, because the voice of God remains *and is heard* among you. *Remember that* you have conquered the evil one.

15Don't fall in love with this *corrupt* world or *worship* the things it can offer. Those who love its corrupt ways don't have the Father's love living within them. 16All the things the world can offer to you—the allure of pleasure, the passion to have things, and the pompous sense of superiority—do not come from the Father. These are *the rotten fruits* of this world. 17This *corrupt* world is already wasting away, as are its selfish desires. But the person really doing God's will—*that person* will never cease to be.

18My children, this is the final hour. You have heard that the antiChrist, *the greatest enemy to His kingdom,* is coming, but in fact, many antiChrists are already here. This development tells us how late it really is. 19A group has left us, but they were not part of our family. If they were truly our brothers and sisters, they would have remained *for the duration* with us. When they left, they made it *ever so* obvious that they were not part of us.

20You have been given an anointing, *a special touch* from the Holy One. You know *the truth*.* 21I am not writing to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it. You know that no lie belongs to the truth. 22The liar is the one who says, "Jesus is not really the Anointed One." This is the antiChrist, the one denying both the Father and the Son. 23Anyone who denies the Son does not know the Father. The one affirming the Son enjoys an intimate relationship with the Father as well.

24Let *the good news*, the story you have heard from the beginning of your journey, live in *and take hold of* you. If that happens *and you focus on the good news*, then you will always remain in a relationship with the Son and the Father. 25This is what He promised us: eternal life.

26I also am writing to warn you about some who are attempting to deceive you. 27You have an anointing. You received it from Him, and His anointing remains on you. You do not need any other teacher. But as His anointing instructs you in all *the essentials* (all the truth uncontaminated by darkness and lies), it teaches you this: "Remain connected to Him."

28So now, my little children, live in Him, so that whenever He is revealed, we will have confidence and not have *to hang our heads in* shame before Him when He comes. 29If you know that He is just *and faithful*, then you also know that everyone who lives *faithfully* and acts justly has been born into a new life through Him.

3 Consider the kind of extravagant love the Father has lavished on us—He calls us children of God! It's true; we are His *beloved* children. And in the same way the world didn't recognize Him, the world does not recognize us either.

► When we feel like we are not good enough to be loved by God, we should remember that God's love is greater than our doubts. We must silence the sounds of condemnation so we can hear the voice of God's loving

* 2:20 Other manuscripts read "all things."

assurance and remember that He has selected us to be part of His family.

[2]My loved ones, *we have been adopted into God's family; and* we are officially His children now. The full picture of our destiny is not yet clear, but we know this much: when Jesus appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is. [3]All those who focus their hopes on Him *and His coming* seek to purify themselves just as He is pure.

[4]Everyone who lives a life of habitual sin is living in moral anarchy. That's what sin is. [5]You realize that He came to eradicate sins, that there is not the slightest bit of sin in Him. [6]The ones who live in *an intimate relationship with* Him do not persist in sin, but anyone who persists in sin has not seen and does not know the real Jesus.

[7]Children, don't let anyone pull one over on you. The one doing the right thing is just imitating Jesus, the Righteous One.

If you are wondering if your faith is authentic, take a look at your life. Are you doing what is right?

[8]The one persisting in sin belongs to the diabolical one, who has been all about sin from the beginning. That is why the Son of God came into our world: to destroy the plague of destruction inflicted *on the world* by the diabolical one.

[9]Everyone who has been born into God's family avoids sin *as a lifestyle* because the genes of God's children come from God Himself. Therefore, a child of God can't live a life of persistent sin. [10]So it is not hard to figure out who are the children of God and who are the children of the diabolical one: those who lack right standing and those who don't show love for one another do not belong to God.

[11]The central truth—the one you have heard since the beginning *of your faith*—is that we must love one another. [12]Please do not act like Cain, who was of the evil one. He *brutally* murdered his own brother.* Why would he do something so despicable? Because his life was devoted to evil *and selfishness,* and his brother chose to do what is right.

[13]Brothers and sisters, don't be shocked if the *corrupt* world despises you. [14]We know that we have crossed over from death to real life because we are devoted to true love for our brothers and sisters. Anyone who does not love lives among corpses.

Do you ever wonder if you are just silently sleeping through days, months, and years? There is one indicator of real life: true love for others.

[15]Everyone who hates other members of God's family is a murderer. Does a murderer possess the *beautiful* life that never ends? No. [16]We know what true love looks like because of Jesus. He gave His life for us, and He calls us to give our lives for our brothers and sisters.

[17]If a person owns the kinds of things we need to make it in the world but refuses to share with those in need, is it even possible that God's love lives in him? [18]My little children, don't just talk about love as an idea or a theory. Make it your true way of life, and live in *the pattern of gracious* love.

[19-20]There is a sure way for us to know that we belong to the truth. Even though our inner thoughts may condemn us *with storms of guilt and constant reminders of our failures,* we can know in our hearts that in His presence God Himself is greater than any accusation. He knows all things. [21]My loved ones, if our hearts cannot condemn us, then we can stand with confidence before God. [22]Whatever we may ask, we receive it from Him because we follow His commands and take the path that pleases Him. [23]His command is clear: believe in the name of His Son, Jesus the Anointed, and love one another as He commanded. [24]The one who follows His teaching and walks this path lives in an intimate relationship with God. How do we know that He lives in us? By the gift of His Spirit.

4 My loved ones, *I warn you*: do not trust every spirit. Instead, examine them carefully to determine if they come from God, because the *corrupt* world is filled with *the voices of* many false prophets. [2]Here is how you know God's Spirit: if a spirit affirms *the truth* that Jesus the Anointed, *our Liberating King,* has come in human flesh, then that spirit is from God. [3]If a spirit does not affirm

* 3:12 Genesis 4:8

How can the words of prophets be tested to discover the truth? The most important question is whether they acknowledge that Jesus is fully God and fully human. In the first century, many people were so convinced that this material world was corrupt and evil that they couldn't imagine how a perfect God could wrap Himself in imperfect skin. Many today still function as if the physical world is a bad thing; this understanding is demonstrated when they downplay the hope of bodily resurrection and emphasize the heavenly destination of souls. Implicitly, this belittles Jesus' own incarnation and resurrection.

On the other hand, many people accept Jesus' humanity but deny His divinity. He may have been a great teacher, they say, but certainly not the incarnation of God. However, Jesus made bold claims about who He was and what He came to do. These are not the things a great teacher would have said or done if they had not been true. It is fair to say that no other life has drawn so much scrutiny, and no other life has ever elicited such praise.

the true nature of Jesus *the Anointed,* then that spirit does not come from God and is, in fact, the spirit of the antiChrist.* You have heard about its coming; in fact it is already active in the world. 4My children, you have come from God and have conquered these spirits because the One who lives within you is greater than the one in this world. 5But they are of this world, and they articulate the views of the *corrupt* world, which the world understands. 6We come from God, and those who know God hear us. Whoever is not from God will not listen to us. This is the way we discern the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.

7My loved ones, let us devote ourselves to loving one another. Love comes straight from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and truly knows God. 8Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

9Because of this, the love of God is a reality among us: God sent His only Son into the world so that we could find *true* life through Him. 10This is *the embodiment of true* love: not that we have loved God *first*, but that He loved us and sent His *unique* Son *on a special mission* to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11So, my loved ones, if God loved us so *sacrificially*, surely we should love one another. 12No one has ever seen God *with human eyes*; but if we love one another, God *truly* lives in us. Consequently God's love has accomplished its mission among us.

13How can we be sure that He *truly* lives in us and that we *truly* live in Him? *By one fact:* He has given us His Spirit. 14We have watched *what God has done,* and we stand ready to provide eyewitness testimonies to the reality that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15If anyone unites with our confession that Jesus is God's own Son, then God truly lives in that person and that person lives in God. 16We have experienced and we have entrusted our lives to the love of God in us.

God is love. Anyone who lives *faithfully* in love also lives *faithfully* in God, and God lives in him. 17This love is fulfilled with us, so that on the day of judgment we have confidence based on our identification with Jesus in this world. 18Love will never invoke fear. Perfect love expels fear, particularly the fear of punishment. The one who fears *punishment* has not been completed through love.

19We love because He has first loved us. 20If someone claims, "I love God," but hates his brother or sister, then he is a liar. Anyone who does not love a brother or sister, whom he has seen, cannot possibly love God, whom he has never seen. 21He gave us a *clear* command, that all who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.

It's easy to say "I love God," but genuine love reflects God's love. If we belong to God, then we will love each other regardless of how hard love is.

5 Everyone who trusts Jesus as the *long-awaited* Anointed One is a child of God, and everyone who loves the Father cannot help but love the child fathered by Him. 2Then how do we know

* 4:3 Literally, one who opposes the Anointed One and His kingdom

if we truly love God's children? We love them if we love God and keep His commands. 3You see, to love God means that we keep His commands, and His commands don't weigh us down. 4Everything that has been fathered by God overcomes the *corrupt* world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith.

5-6Who is the person conquering the world? It is the one who truly trusts that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus the Anointed is the One who came by water and blood—not by the water only, but by the water and the blood.

► Just as we do not get to choose our biological brothers and sisters, we do not get to choose our spiritual brothers and sisters either. But what comes along with loving the Father is loving all His other children—even the really annoying ones! While it might seem to be easier to go off and live in isolation rather than put up with those we are not naturally attracted to, there are responsibilities that come with living in a spiritual family. We reflect our worship of God by living in respect with our Christian brothers and sisters. How we treat the people around us on a daily basis is the real test of our love for God.

The Spirit of God testifies to this truth because the Spirit is the truth. 7So there are three testifying witnesses: 8the Spirit, the water, and the blood. All three are in total agreement. 9If we accept the testimonies of people, then we must realize the testimony of God is greater *than that of any person.* God certified *the truth* about His own Son. 10Anyone who trusts the Son of God has this truthful testimony at the core of his being. Anyone who does not trust God calls God a liar because he ignores God's truthful testimony regarding His own Son. 11And this is the truth: God has given us *the gift of* eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12If you have the Son, you have eternal life. If you do not have the Son of God, you are not acquainted with *true* life.

13I am writing all of this to you who have entrusted your lives to the Son of God—so you will realize eternal life already is yours. 14We live in the bold confidence that God hears our voices when we ask for things that fit His plan. 15And if we have no doubt that He hears our voices, we can be assured that He moves in response to our call.

16*In this regard,* if you notice a brother or sister *in faith* making moral missteps and blunders, disregarding and disobeying God *even to the point of God* removing this one *from the body* by death, then pray for that person; and God will grant him life on this journey. *But to be clear,* there is a sin that is ultimately fatal *and leads to death.* I am not talking about praying for that fatal sin, 17but I am talking about all those wrongs and sins that plague God's family that don't lead to death.

18We all know that everyone fathered by God will not make sin *a way of life* because God protects His children *from the evil one,* and the evil one can't touch them. 19Have confidence in the fact that we belong to God, but also know that the world around us is in the grips of the evil one. 20We also can be sure of the fact that the Son of God has come and given us a mind so that we may know Him as *the embodiment of all that is* true. We live in this truth, in His Son Jesus, the Anointed One. He is the True God and eternal life.

21My little children, keep away from idols.

► John's final bit of pastoral advice sounds an alarm against idolatry. If we look carefully at our culture and into our own hearts, we will find we are ultimately concerned about ourselves, our entertainment, our comforts, and our wallets. None of these are worthy of our highest devotion; but we put more time, energy, money, and emotion into these than we do into the one true God. So John's warning should be heeded: watch out for the steady impulse to love other things more than God.

2 JOHN

Letter to a lady and her children

From John, the apostle

John, the emissary of Jesus, writes this second letter shortly after his first. But unlike his first letter, where he jumps into the heart of the matter with a direct witness about Jesus, John begins this brief letter in the customary way by stating who is writing the letter and to whom it is written. He describes himself as "the elder." This is probably an affectionate title his readers know him by, referring both to his old age and to his authority as an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. As with his first letter, the recipients are not completely disclosed. John is writing to "a lady . . . along with her children." Since he doesn't list any of their names, it is possible that he is using the phrase to signify a church and its members. Regardless of the specific recipient, this letter addresses the concerns of all believers, not just a few individuals, just as his first letter did.

Two major themes stand out in the letter: love and truth. Even though John emphasized love in his first letter, he proves its importance by expounding on it in this one. He describes love as measurable action—not sentimental emotion or academic theory. He says love is accomplished when we obey the teachings of Jesus. Next he warns of the danger of false teachers, as he did in his first letter. False teachers who deny that Jesus is both fully God and fully human are not to be tolerated. Welcoming them in any way, especially with hospitality, promotes their deceptive plans.

John sees love and truth embodied flawlessly in the person of Jesus. He wants to encourage his readers to reflect the true love of God by knowing who Jesus is, resisting false teachers, and serving each other selflessly.

1 *I,* the elder, to *you,* a lady chosen *by God*
along with her children. I truly love *all of*
you and *am confident that* all who know
the truth share in my love for you. 2 The
truth, which lives *faithfully* within all of us
and will be with us for all eternity, is the
basis *for our abounding love.* 3 May grace,
mercy, and peace from God the Father
and Jesus the Anointed, the Father's own
Son, surround you *and be with you always*
in truth and love.

4 I was so filled with joy to hear sto-
ries about your children walking in truth,
in the very way the Father called us to
live. 5 So now, dear lady, I am asking you
to live by the command that we love one
another. I'm not writing to you some new
commandment; it's one we received in the
beginning *from our Lord.* 6 Love is defined
by our obedience to His commands. This
is the same command you have known
about from the very beginning; you must
live by it. 7 The *corrupt* world is filled with
liars and frauds who deny the reality that
Jesus the Anointed has come *into the world*
as a man of flesh *and blood.* These people
are deceivers and antiChrists.* 8 Ensure
that you do not lose what we have worked
for so that you will be fully rewarded.

9 Any person who drifts away and fails
to live in the teachings of the Anointed
One, *our Liberating King,* does not have
God. But the person who lives in this
teaching will have both the Father and the
Son. 10 If any person comes to you with a
teaching that does not align with the true
message *of Jesus,* do not welcome that
person into your house or greet him *as*
you would a true brother. 11 Anyone who
welcomes this person has become a part-
ner in advancing his wicked agenda.

12 I have so much more to tell you, but
I would rather meet with you personally
than try to capture these sentiments by
ink on paper. I hope to come and see you
so that our joy will be complete.

13 The children of your chosen sister
send you warm greetings.

* Verse 7 Literally, those who oppose the Anointed One and His kingdom

3 JOHN

Letter to believers in the first century

From John, the apostle

The elder John writes this third letter specifically to a dear friend of his named Gaius. John wants to commend Gaius for his outstanding Christian lifestyle, so John sends this uplifting personal word to Gaius and his community. What most impresses John about Gaius is how this church leader regularly opens up his home to house, feed, and encourage traveling ministers. At this time, many prophets, missionaries, and teachers travel from place to place to serve new congregations. Given the Christian perspective on love, it is appropriate for them to rely on the generosity of their fellow believers. While John's second letter stresses the importance of refusing hospitality to false teachers, John's third emphasizes the importance of showing hospitality to true ones.

John contrasts the hospitable behavior of Gaius with the selfish behavior of a man named Diotrephes. Diotrephes is a controlling leader within the church who refuses to welcome ministers into his home and forces out any members of the church who are caught helping them. John urges Gaius to avoid being influenced by the bad example of Diotrephes. He explains that welcoming ministers into believers' homes is about more than just hospitality—it is about reflecting the goodness of God.

John closes his letter by praising another man named Demetrius; it is likely that he carries the letter to Gaius from the elder. John assures Gaius that unlike Diotrephes, Demetrius is a man of truth who may be trusted. Just like John's two previous letters, this letter focuses on living the truth found in Jesus by serving others in love. We don't have to travel full-time to spread the message of Jesus. Being generous with our time, money, and energy from our very own homes is a powerful way to serve God and fellow believers.

1 *I,* the elder, to Gaius, who is much loved
by all and loved in truth by me.
2 My beloved friend, I pray that every-
thing is going well for you and that your
body is as healthy as your soul is prosper-
ous. 3 I was thrilled when the brothers and
sisters came and told me stories of your
faithfulness as you continue to walk in
the truth. 4 The greatest joy in my life is
hearing how my children are walking in
the truth.
5 My friend, you demonstrate your
faithfulness in all the things you do for the
brothers and sisters; even when they are
strangers to you, *you treat them as family*.
6 These *friends* tell the *entire* church how
you have extended your hand to them in
love. You will do well to send them on in
a way that is in keeping with God. 7 They
have gone out to serve under the banner
of the Name, and they do not accept gifts
from those outside our faith community.
8 We should give people like this our full
support so that we can share in this work
for the truth.
9 I wrote some things specifically to
the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to
be the one up front, rejects us. 10 If I come,
you can be sure that I will call him out and
draw attention to his actions. He assails
us with lies and deceit. As if that were not
enough, he does not welcome the travel-
ing missionaries *into his home*. Instead, he
hinders any who do so and expels them
from the church.
11 Dear friend, don't follow his evil
ways. Instead, imitate the good *and right-
teous* life. The one doing what is good
belongs to God, but those who pursue evil
have never even laid eyes on God.
12 Demetrius has a good reputa-
tion with everyone *we know*. The truth
stands on his side, and we add our unre-
served recommendation *to the long list
of accounts on his behalf*. You can rest
assured that we are telling the truth.
13 There is so much I would like to say
to you, but I do not want to say it with ink
and pen. 14 I expect us to be together soon
and talk about these things face-to-face.
15 May you experience true peace. I
send you greetings from the fellow believ-
ers here. Greet all our friends there per-
sonally.

JUDE

Letter to Christians everywhere

From Jude, a Christian leader

Although this letter is named for its author rather than for its recipients, identifying this "Jude" is a bit of a challenge since Jude (or Judas) was a common name at the time. Because the hero of the Maccabean wars bore the name Judas, Jewish parents often named their boys Judas during this period. The author describes himself as a servant of the Anointed Jesus and the brother of James. But which James? That, too, was a common name. Church tradition suggests that he was James, the brother of Jesus, the head of the Jerusalem church, and the author of the letter James. If so, this makes Jude the second New Testament letter written by a family member of Jesus. During Jesus' public ministry, Jude was not a disciple of Jesus. As with other members of His family, Jude likely became a follower of Jesus after the resurrection when the crucified and risen Jesus appeared to His followers and family.

Jude writes this letter in the last half of the first century A.D. to an audience facing critical problems related to the influx of false teachers in their church. These false teachers are not out in the world where they may be easily avoided; they have infiltrated the church and are making inroads into the leadership of the young and vulnerable community. He writes this letter to encourage believers to keep up the struggle for the true faith. Some things are worth fighting for, and the truth of the gospel is one of them. Jude has often seen God's grace perverted by those who want to turn freedom into a license to sin. This was a common problem then, and it remains one now. If God is loving and forgiving, and if God's grace is free, then it is easy to take His goodness for granted. Jude counters that to do so denies our central confession: Jesus is Lord and Master.

After urging his audience to fight for the true faith, Jude looks back over a number of stories from the Bible and Jewish tradition that demonstrate how God's judgment has fallen upon those who disobey Him. In the same way, vile characters have slithered into Christian congregations in various places and are dismantling the spiritual communities by grumbling, faultfinding, and promoting sexual perversion. Yet Jude is hopeful that if true believers will pray in the Spirit and continue in God's love, these defectors will be judged and defeated.

A careful comparison of this letter and Peter's second letter demonstrates a lot of common ideas and themes. Clearly the audiences for both letters were facing similar troubles. The problem of false teaching in the church was not just an ancient problem. Even today, Jude's authoritative counsel holds.

[1]Jude, a slave of Jesus the Anointed and a brother of James, to *you*, the ones whom God our Father loves and has called and whom Jesus, the Anointed One, has kept. [2]Kindness, peace, love—may they never stop blooming in you and from you.

[3]Friends, I have been trying to write you about our common salvation. *But these days my heart is troubled,* and I am compelled to write to you and encourage you to continue struggling for the faith that was entrusted to the saints once and for all. [4]Vile men have slithered in among us. Depraved souls who stand condemned have made a mockery of the grace given to us, using it as a pretext for a life of excess, lived without any thought of God. These *poor fools* have denied Jesus the Anointed, our one Lord and Master.

[5]You have heard the stories many times, *and the Spirit has enlightened you about their meaning,* but you still need to be reminded. Remember when the Lord saved our ancestors from the land in Egypt? *He breathed life into their earthen lungs* and took back the life from those who did not believe. [6]And God has kept the *rebellious* heavenly messengers bound and chained in utter darkness—*shadowy gloom*—until the time when His judgment arrives, because they failed to keep their rightful positions and abandoned their appointed realms. [7]Sodom and Gomorrah and all their neighbors were defeated by their own sexual perversions as they pursued the strange and unnatural impulses of the flesh. Let these who *went their own way and* are experiencing the eternal heat *of God's vengeance*—a punishment by fire—be a warning to you.

[8]*These stories are examples to help you understand the fate of* those dreamers who have *slipped in and* defiled your community, rejected those in charge, and insulted the glorious majesty of the heavenly messengers. [9]Even their chief, Michael, when disputing with the devil over Moses' body, did not offer his own taunting judgment against him. Michael simply said, "May the Lord's rebuke fall on you."*

[10]The deceivers among you despise what they do not understand; they live without reason like animals, reacting only with primal instincts; and their ways are corrupting them. [11]Woe to these *deceivers*! *They are doomed!* They have followed in the footsteps of *their father* Cain, sold their souls for profit into Balaam's deceit, and suffered the devastation of Korah's rebellion.

[12]These men are cold stones on the warm hearth of your love feasts as they glut themselves without fear, thinking only of their own benefit. They are waterless clouds, carried away by the wind; autumn's lonely and barren trees, twice dead, uprooted; [13]violent waves of the sea *breaking over the bow*, foaming with shame; *lost and* wandering stars destined to live forever in gloomy darkness.

[14]During the seventh generation after Adam, the prophet Enoch said, "Look! The Lord came, and with Him tens of thousands of His holy messengers [15]to judge wicked men and convict the impious and ungodly for all they have said and all the hard things they have done against the Holy One." [16]These men are complainers who look long and hard to find the faults of other men. They are led by their own lustful desires *like fools down the path of destruction.* They are arrogant liars who want only to get ahead of others.

[17]But you, friends, remember the words of the emissaries* of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King:* [18]"At the end of time, some will ridicule *the faithful* and follow their lusts *to the grave*." [19]These are the men among you—those who divide friends, those concerned ultimately with this world, those without the Spirit. [20-21]You, however, should stand firm in the love of God, constructing a life within the holy faith, praying the Spirit's prayer, as you wait eagerly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, which *leads* to eternal life.

[22]Keep being kind to those who waver *in this faith*. [23]Pursue those who are singed by the flames *of God's wrath,* and bring them safely *to Him*. Show mercy to others with fear, despising every garment soiled by the *weakness of human* flesh.

[24]Now to the One who can keep you upright and plant you firmly in His presence—clean, unmarked, and joyful in the light of His glory—[25]to the *one and* only God, our Savior, through Jesus the Anointed our Lord, be glory and greatness and might and authority; just as it has been since before He created time, may it continue now and into eternity. Amen.

* Verse 9 Zechariah 3:2 * Verse 17 Literally, apostles

REVELATION

Letter to the seven churches

From John, the apostle

On the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, a prophet named John writes to congregations of faithful but frightened Christians in Asia Minor. Under the dim light of an oil lamp, John paints a picture of the vision he was given of the world that is and that is to come. This book of letters and visions is to be sent to the hardy churches that have stood strong through persecutions, heresies, and many temptations. However, knocking at the door are Satan and his forces. They are encroaching on the domain of God's kingdom.

Satan's minions, led by the beast and the false prophet, are ready to battle the armies of heaven. This war that begins in the celestial realm spills over to the world below. While the nations of earth rally around the banner of the evil one, heavenly messengers prepare for a battle that has all of creation at stake.

Still, as John knows, the Lamb-King has already vanquished evil in the world. John's ink-stained hands write of the One who is renewing all of creation and establishing an everlasting order. God has Rome and all the powers that rule the earth on a short leash. Soon the nations of the earth will see the All Powerful, the One who has given His life for the many. This is the future as it has been unveiled to John.

John writes of what he sees and hears in his vision. Sometimes he hears one thing but turns to see something altogether different. Sometimes he sees multiple images of the same event as if he is viewing it from different perspectives. These visions are dynamic; they far exceed contemporary imagery and are far superior to what can be produced on film or through television. John's apocalyptic images challenge the imagination. The imagery in Revelation involves numbers, word pictures, and symbols that held religious and political significance for the churches in Asia Minor. Many of the images come from the Hebrew prophetic literature of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, as well as other non-ancient Jewish texts. John's audience did not need a guide to interpret the ciphers; each image was relevant to them. However, those living in a twenty-first-century context must decipher these images to understand what they meant for John's world and what they mean today.

Prologue

1 This is the revelation of Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King: an account of visions and a heavenly journey.* God granted this to Him so He would show His followers the realities that *are already breaking into the world and* soon will be fulfilled. Through His heavenly messenger, He revealed to His servant John *signs and insight into these mysteries.*
2 John, *in turn,* gave witness to the word of God and to the *glorious* truth revealed about Jesus, the Anointed One, *the Chosen Ruler,* by *carefully* describing everything he saw.

3 Blessings come to those who read *and proclaim* these words aloud; blessings come to those who listen closely and put the prophetic words recorded here into practice. The finale is approaching.

4 *I,* John, to the seven churches in Asia:

May you experience God's favor *and rest* in the peace that comes from the One who is, the One who was, and the One who is coming; from the seven Spirits, *the Perfect Spirit,* constantly before God's throne; 5 and from Jesus the Anointed, the Witness who is *true and* faithful, the first to emerge from death's cold womb, the *chosen* Ruler over all the kings *and rulers* of the earth.

To the One who loves us and liberated us from *the grip of* our evil deeds through His very own blood 6 and who established us to be *His* kingdom and priests for God, His Father. May glory and power be His throughout all the ages. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds, *in glory*.
He will capture every eye,
Even of those who pierced Him through.
All the nations of the earth will be pierced with grief when He appears.

Yes, may all this be *done according to His plan*. Amen.

Lord God: 8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, [the very beginning and the very end,]* the One who is, the One who was, and the One who is coming: the All Powerful.

9 I, John, your brother who shares with you *this journey* in persecution and the *establishment of the* Kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because *of the ministry* of the word of God and my testimony about Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day *(the first day of the week),* and I heard a voice behind me. It sounded like the blast of a trumpet.

A Voice: 11 [I am the Alpha and the Omega, the very beginning and the very end.]* Make a book of what you see, write it down, and send it to the seven churches [which are in Asia]*: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

12 When I turned around to see what sort of voice this was that was addressing me, I saw seven golden lampstands. 13 And among the lampstands, I saw One like the Son of Man *right in front of me* dressed in a long robe. Across His chest was draped a golden sash. 14 His head and hair were pure white, white as wool and white as snow; His eyes blazed like a fiery flame; 15 His feet gleamed like brightly polished bronze, purified *to perfection* in a furnace; His voice *filled the air and* sounded like a roaring waterfall. 16 He held seven stars in His right hand, from His mouth darted a sharp double-edged sword, and His face shone a brilliant light, like the blinding sun.

The Son of Man is none other than the risen Jesus shining in glory, moving among the lampstands.

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet. It was as though I were dead. But He *reached down and* placed His right hand on me.

The One: This is not the time for fear; I am the First and the Last, 18 and *I am* the living One. I entered the realm of the dead; but see, I am alive now and for all the ages—even ages to come. [Amen.]* I possess the keys *to open the prison* of death and hades.

19 Now write down all you have seen—all that is and all that will be.
20 Regarding the mystery of the seven stars you saw in My right hand and of the seven golden lampstands*:* the seven stars are the *heavenly* messengers who

* 1:8 Most manuscripts omit this portion. * 1:11 Early manuscripts omit this portion. * 1:11 Most manuscripts omit this portion. * 1:18 The earliest manuscripts omit "Amen."

preside over the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches *themselves*.

► As the story unfolds, we're told that the lampstands signify the churches. During harsh times of persecution, the faithful often wonder where their Master is. Is He even aware of what they are experiencing? John's vision confirms what the gospel already teaches: Jesus is present with them even in their suffering, moving among those who dare to bear the light. Lampstands, of course, are not the light. They only carry the light. The true Light that has come into the world is none other than Jesus, the Son of Man (John 8:28).

Letter to Ephesus

2 **The One:** Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Ephesus. "These are the words of the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks *and moves* among the golden lampstands:

2"I know your deeds, your *tireless* labor, and your patient endurance. I know you do not tolerate those who do evil. Furthermore, you have *diligently* tested those who claim to be emissaries,* and *you have found that they* are not *true witnesses.* You have *correctly* found them to be false. 3*I know* you are patiently enduring and holding firm on behalf of My name. You have not become faint.

4"However, I have this against you: you have abandoned your first love. 5Do you remember what it was like before you fell? *It's time to* rethink and change your ways;* go back to how you first acted. *However*, if you do not return,* I will come quickly* and *personally* remove your lampstand from its place. 6But you do have this to your credit: you despise the deeds of the Nicolaitans *and how they concede to evil.* I also hate what they do.

7"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches. I will allow the one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death* to eat from the tree of life found in God's *lush* paradise."

Letter to Smyrna

8Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Smyrna. "These are the words of the First and the Last, the One who was dead and returned to life:

9"I know [your deeds and]* the difficult ordeal you are enduring and your poverty, although you are actually rich. I am aware of the offensive accusations preached by those who call themselves 'Jews.' But these people are not the Jews *they pretend to be*; they are actually the congregation of Satan. 10In the face of suffering, do not fear. Watch; the devil will throw some of you into prison shortly so that you might be tested, and you will endure great affliction for 10 days. Be faithful throughout your life, until the day you die, and I will give you the *victor's* wreath of life.

11"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches. The one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death* will escape the second death."

Letter to Pergamum

12Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Pergamum. "These are the words of the One with the sharp double-edged sword:

13"I know [your deeds and]* where you live. It is where Satan, *the adversary,* has established his throne. You have stayed true to My name, and you did not deny your trust in Me even in the *eventful* days of My faithful witness, Antipas. He was killed among you *in that place* where Satan dwells.

14"However, I have a few matters against you: some *who live* among you hold to the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to set up a stumbling block before the people of Israel.* *As a result,* some among you are eating food prepared for idol worship and committing immoral sexual acts. 15You have others who are holding firm to the teaching

* 2:2 Literally, apostles * 2:5 Literally, repent * 2:5 Literally, repent * 2:5 Some manuscripts omit "quickly." * 2:9 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 2:13 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion. * 2:14 Numbers 22–24

of the Nicolaitans. 16Therefore, change your ways and turn to Me.* If you do not, I will quickly come to where you live and will battle them with the sword of My mouth.

17"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches. To the one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death*, I will feed you with hidden manna and give you a white stone. Upon this stone, a new name is engraved. No one knows this name except for its recipient."

Letter to Thyatira

18Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Thyatira. "These are the words of the Son of God, the One whose eyes blaze like flames of fire and whose feet gleam like brightly polished bronze:

19"I know your deeds, love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. Your labors greatly increase *in quality* as you travel along this journey.

20"However, I have this against you: you have tolerated that woman Jezebel, who is a self-anointed prophetess and who misleads My followers to commit immoral sexual acts and to eat food prepared for idol worship. 21I have provided her enough time to turn away* *from her indecency*, but she refuses to turn from these immoral acts. 22Watch; I will throw her back into her sickbed with those who committed adultery with her, and I will make *them a bed of* great affliction if they do not abandon her indiscretions and turn* *to follow Me*. 23I will *punish her by* striking her children dead. Through this all the churches will know I am the One who *relentlessly* explores the mind and heart, and I will deal with each of you as you deserve according to your acts.

24"I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, those who have not held to the teachings *of Jezebel* and who remain ignorant of *the real meaning of what is called* the deep things of Satan, I will not burden you with anything more. 25Just keep on task, and keep the faith until I return.

26"And as for those who conquer *through faithfulness even unto death* and continue to labor with Me until the *close of the* final curtain,

I will give them authority over the nations.
27And they will rule the nations with an iron scepter,
as fragile clay jars are shattered to pieces.*

As I received this authority from My Father, 28I will bestow the morning star to the victor.

29"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to *all* the churches."

► For centuries many Jews had been scattered throughout the known world, exiled to the lands east of the Jordan River from the promised land by powerful invading nations. After Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, even more Jews left Judea, this time crossing the Mediterranean looking for some place far from Roman cruelty. That's why, as John writes these letters to churches in Asia Minor, he recalls some of the most infamous characters from Israel's past—Balaam, Balak, and Jezebel. The ordeals facing John's churches are not all that different from those Israel faced hundreds of years before. Many of the same struggles plague churches in the West to this day. The names may change, but the problems confronting God's faithful do not.

Letter to Sardis

3 **The One:** Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Sardis. "These are the words of the One who has the seven Spirits of God, *the Perfect Spirit,* and the One who holds the seven stars:

"I know the things you do—you've claimed a reputation of life, but you are actually dead. 2Wake up *from your death-sleep,* and strengthen what remains *of the life you have been given* that is in danger of death. I have judged your deeds as far from complete in the sight of My God. 3Therefore, remember what you have received and heard; *it's time to*

* 2:16 Literally, repent * 2:21 Literally, repent * 2:22 Literally, repent * 2:26-27 Psalm 2:8-9

keep these instructions and turn back from your ways.* If you do not wake up *from this sleep, I will come in judgment.* I will creep up on you like a thief—you will have no way of knowing when I will come. 4But there are a few in Sardis who don't have the stain *of evil works* on their clothes. They will walk alongside Me in white, *spotless garments* because they have been proven worthy.

5"The one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death* will be clothed in white garments, and I will *certainly* not erase that person's name from the book of life. I will acknowledge this person's name before My Father and before His heavenly messengers.

6"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches."

Letter to Philadelphia

7Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Philadelphia. "These are the words of the holy One, the true One, and the One who possesses the key of David, which opens *the possibilities* so that no one can shut them. The One who closes *all options* so that no one can open:

8"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door, which no one can shut. *I have done this* because you have limited strength, yet you have obeyed My word and have not denied My name. 9Watch, and I will make those of the congregation of Satan—those who call themselves 'Jews' but are not because they lie—come before you penitent, falling at your feet. Then they will know how much I have loved you. 10Because you have obeyed My instructions to endure and be patient, I will protect you from the time of trial which will come upon the whole earth and put everyone in it to the test. 11I will soon return. Hold tight to what you have so that no one can take away your *victor's* wreath.

12"As for the one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death*, I will plant that person as a pillar in the temple of My God, and that person will never have to leave *the presence of God. Moreover,* I will inscribe this person with the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, New Jerusalem—which descends out of heaven from My God—and My own new name.

God's intention for the world is this: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." This is fulfilled by those who are faithful to Him.

13"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches."

Letter to Laodicea

14Write *down My words, and send them* to the messenger of the church in Laodicea. "These are the words of the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of God's creation:

15"I know your works. You are neither cold *with apathy* nor hot *with passion.* It would be better if you were one or the other, *but you are neither.* 16So because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17You claim, 'I am rich, I have accumulated riches, and I need nothing'; but you do not realize that you are miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked. 18So here is what I suggest you do: buy *true gold* from Me (gold refined by fire so that you can be *truly* rich), white garments (to cover you so that you can keep the shame of your nakedness from showing), and eye ointment (to treat your eyes so that you may see clearly).

19"Those I love I also correct and discipline. Therefore, be shamelessly committed *to Me,* and turn back.* 20Now pay attention; I am standing at the door and knocking. If any of you hear My voice and open the door, then I will come in to *visit with* you and to share a meal at your table, and you will be with Me.

21"The one who conquers *through faithfulness even unto death* I will place next to Me on My throne, just as I Myself conquered and took a place *of honor* with My Father on His throne.

22"Let the person who is able to hear, listen to *and follow* what the Spirit proclaims to all the churches."

4 After I wrote down these messages, I saw a door standing open in heaven and heard again the first voice that sounded like a trumpet.

* 3:3 Literally, repent * 3:19 Literally, repent

A Voice: Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.

John's next vision begins when he sees an open door in heaven. What happens next would be impossible for John to imagine.

2Immediately I was *caught up* in the Spirit, and I saw a throne that stood in heaven and One seated on the throne. 3The One enthroned gleamed like jasper and carnelian, and a rainbow encircled the throne with an emerald glow. 4Encircling that *great* throne were twenty-four *smaller* thrones with twenty-four elders clothed in white robes with wreaths fashioned of gold on their heads. 5Out of the *great* throne came flashes of lightning, sounds of voices, and peals of thunder. In front of the great throne, seven torches were ablaze, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6Also in front of the throne was a glassy sea of shimmering crystal.

In the midst of the throne and encircling the throne were four living creatures, covered all over with eyes, front to back. 7The first living creature was like a lion, the second creature was like an ox, the third creature had a face like the face of a human, and the fourth creature was like an eagle in full flight. 8These four living creatures, each of which had six wings and was covered with eyes—eyes on the outside and on the inside—did not cease chanting. All day and night *they were singing.*

Four Living Creatures: Holy, holy, holy
Is the Lord God who is the All Powerful,
who was, and who is, and who is coming.

9And when the living creatures declared glory and honor and thanksgiving to the One seated on the throne, the One who lives throughout all the ages, 10the twenty-four elders fell prostrate before the One seated on the throne, worshiped the One who lives throughout all the ages, cast their *golden* wreaths before the throne, and chanted *to Him.*

24 Elders: 11Worthy are You, O Lord;
worthy are You, O God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
You *alone* created all things,
and through Your will *and by Your design,* they exist and were created.

► Throughout this book of letters and visions, numbers play an important role. Numbers and their multiples are signs of great mysterious realities. The Son of Man moves among seven lampstands and holds seven stars in His right hand because the number "seven" represents perfection and completeness. Another important number is "twelve" because it represents the people of God. The children of Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and Jesus called "the twelve" to follow Him and embody the new covenant. The number "twelve" and multiples of "twelve" recur throughout the book to signify the people of God, so here the twenty-four elders (12 + 12) signify the people of God, both the old and new covenants.

5 And then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One seated upon the throne, a scroll written both on the inside and on the outside. It had been sealed with seven seals. 2Then a mighty heavenly messenger proclaimed with a loud voice,

Mighty Messenger: Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?

3No creature *of creation* in all heaven, on all the earth, or even under the earth could open the scroll or look into its *mysteries.* 4Then I began to *mourn and* weep bitterly because no creature *of creation* was found who was worthy to open the scroll or to look into its *mysteries.* 5Then one of the elders consoled me.

One of the 24 Elders: Stop weeping. Look there—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. He has conquered and is able to break its seven seals and open the scroll.

6I looked, and between the throne and the four living creatures and the *twenty-four* elders stood a Lamb who appeared to have been slaughtered. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes (the eyes are the seven Spirits of God sent out over all the earth).

► John hears that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has arrived and will open the seals to reveal the scroll's mysteries. But when he turns to see the Lion, he sees a Lamb instead. Not everything is as it appears. The Lamb stands, even though He has been slaughtered as a sacrifice, because He has been resurrected from the dead. And now in his vision, John sees things as they truly are: the Lamb-King has seven horns and seven eyes, signifying the perfect power and perfect sight He possesses to rule the world.

7The Lamb came and took the scroll from
the right hand of the One seated upon the
throne. 8And when He took it, the four living
creatures and twenty-four elders fell pros-
trate before the Lamb. *They worshiped Him,
and* each one held a harp and golden bowls
filled with incense (the prayers of God's holy
people). 9Then they sang a new song.

Four Living Creatures and 24 Elders:
You are worthy to receive the scroll,
to break its seals,
Because You were slain. With Your
blood, You redeemed for God
people from every tribe and
language, people from every
race and nation.
10You have made them a kingdom; You
have appointed them priests to
serve our God,
and they* will rule upon the earth.

11When I looked *again,* I heard the voices
of heavenly messengers (numbering myri-
ads of myriads and thousands of thou-
sands). They surrounded the throne, the
living creatures, and the elders.

Thousands of Messengers *(with a great voice)*:
12Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.
Worthy is the Lamb to receive authority
and wealth and wisdom and
greatness
And honor and glory and praise.

13Then I heard every creature in heaven
and on earth and beneath the earth and in
the sea and all things in them echoing *the
messengers.*

Every Creature: To the One who sits on
the throne and to the Lamb
Be blessing and honor and glory and
power
Throughout the ages.

14And the four living creatures kept on
repeating:

Four Living Creatures: Amen. *Amen.*

And the elders fell down and worshiped
[Him who lives forever].*

6 Then I saw the Lamb break the first
of the seven seals, and I heard one of
the four living creatures call out with
a thundering voice.

First Living Creature: Come!

2Then I looked, and what a sight! There
was a white horse carrying a rider with a
bow. He wore a wreath and came riding
like a conqueror, intent on complete vic-
tory.
3The Lamb broke the second seal,
and the second living creature called out.

Second Living Creature: Come!

4Then another horse, fiery red, sped forth.
Its rider was granted the power to steal
peace from the earth and received a large
sword so that people would slaughter
each other.
5The Lamb broke the third seal, and
the third living creature called out.

Third Living Creature: Come!

Then I looked; and behold, there was a
black horse! Its rider held in his hand a
balance scale. 6And I heard a voice ema-
nating from the middle of the four living
creatures.

A Voice: A quart* of wheat for a whole
day's wage,* three quarts of barley for a
whole day's wage, but do not harm the
olive oil and the wine!

7And when the Lamb broke the fourth
seal, the fourth living creature called out.

Fourth Living Creature: Come!

* 5:10 Other manuscripts read "we." * 5:14 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 6:6 Greek, *choinix*, a Roman unit of measure * 6:6 Literally, denarius

8I looked; and behold, there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades accompanied him. Together they were granted authority over one-fourth of the earth to kill with weapons, with famine, with disease, and with wild animals that roamed the earth.

► The breaking of the seals releases the four riders and a series of disasters and plagues. Even though what follows appears to be extreme violence unleashed against the earth and its inhabitants, there is a limitation to what follows. Death and Hades have the authority to kill, but their authority extends only to one-fourth of the earth. The slaughtered souls cry out for vengeance, but they will have to wait a little longer until more martyrs are killed for their testimony.

9When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the *heavenly* altar the souls of those murdered for holding fast to the word of God and their testimony. 10They cried out in a great, *singular* voice.

Murder Victims: How much longer, O Lord, the holy One, the true One, until You pronounce judgment on the inhabitants of the earth? Until You avenge our blood?

11Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest for a little while longer—soon their number would be complete. In a little while, more of their fellow servants, brothers, *and sisters* would be murdered as they had been.

12When the Lamb broke the sixth seal, a great earthquake shook the earth and the sun *grew dark and* became black (like mourning sackcloth) and the full moon became red like blood. 13The stars of heaven fell to earth as a fig tree drops its fruit during a *winter* storm. 14The sky snapped back as a scroll when it is rolled up. Every mountain was shaken off its foundation, and every island melted into the sea. 15The rulers of the earth, the important and the great, the generals, the wealthy and the powerful, the slave and the free person, all hid themselves in the caves and among the mountains' rocks. 16They pleaded with loud *suicidal* requests to the rocks and mountains.

People of the Earth: Fall on us. Hide us from the *fierce* presence of the One who sits on the throne, from the wrath of the Lamb. 17The great day of their* wrath has come. Who can withstand it?

7 After this *vision*, I saw four heavenly messengers standing at the four corners of the earth. They were holding back the four winds so that the earth would not be *overcome by violent, rushing* winds blowing over the land or over the sea or blowing down any tree. 2Then I saw a *fifth* messenger, coming up with the sun as it was rising *in the east*, carrying the seal of the living God. He called with a *great and* loud voice to the four messengers who had authority to harm the earth and its seas.

Fifth Messenger: 3Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we seal the servants of our God *with a mark of ownership* on their foreheads.

4-8Then I heard that 144,000 would receive the seal, that is 12,000 from every tribe of Israel: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

9After *I heard about* these *who would be sealed*, I looked and saw a huge crowd of people, which no one could *even begin to* count, representing every nation and tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and waving palm branches. 10They cried out with one loud voice.

Crowd: Salvation comes only from our God, who sits upon the throne, and from the Lamb.

► John hears that 144,000 people out of Israel are destined to be sealed, but then he turns to see an innumerable multitude from every people group in the world. What he sees reveals the truth of what he hears: the number

* 6:17 Other manuscripts read "His."

"144,000" is not an exact count of who will be saved but is a symbolic number (12 x 12 x 1000). "Twelve" is a number that signifies all the people of God, from both the Old and New Testaments. In reality, between the sixth and seventh seal, there is an interlude, an opportunity for people from every nation to enter into the people of God, to receive God's mark, and to take their places among the redeemed.

11 All the heavenly messengers stood up,
encircling the throne and the elders and
the four living creatures, and they fell
prostrate before the throne and worshiped
God.

Heavenly Messengers, Elders, and Living Creatures: 12 Amen!
Praise and glory and wisdom
And thanksgiving and honor
And power and might
Be to our God on and on throughout
all the ages. Amen.

One of the Elders *(to me)*: 13 Who are these people clothed in white robes, and where have they come from?

John: 14 Sir, surely you know *the answer to your own questions.*

One of the Elders: These are coming from the *time of* great suffering and affliction. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, cleansing them *pure* white.

15 Responding *out of a heart filled with praise,* they congregate before the throne of God
and constantly worship Him day and night in His temple.
The One seated on the throne will *always* live among them.
16 They will never be hungry or thirsty again.
The sun or blazing heat will never scorch them,
17 Because the Lamb *who stands* at the center of the throne is their shepherd *and they are His sheep,*
and He will lead them to the water of life.
And God will dry every tear from their eyes.

8 When the Lamb cracked open the seventh *and final* seal, *a great* silence filled all heaven *penetrating everything* for about half an hour. 2 Then I saw seven heavenly messengers, the ones who stand before God, receive seven trumpets.

3 An *eighth* messenger came and stood before the altar carrying a golden censer. He received a large portion of incense to complement the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar *that sits* in front of the throne. 4 From the hand of the *eighth* messenger, the smoke of the incense mixed with the prayers of God's people and billowed up before God. 5 The messenger filled the censer with fiery *coals* from the altar and cast it upon the earth, causing *a great commotion of* thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Throughout the ages God's people have been asking Him for justice in their prayers and laments. Now, in response to these, God pours out His judgment.

6 The seven heavenly messengers raised the seven trumpets and prepared to sound them.

7 The first messenger sounded *his trumpet*, and a blast of hail and fire mixed with blood was cast down to the earth. *As a result,* one-third of the land was set ablaze, one-third of the trees were burned, and all the green grass was scorched.

8 The second messenger sounded *his trumpet*, and something like a great mountain, *with bright flames of* burning fire, was cast into the sea. *As a result,* one-third of the sea turned into blood, 9 one-third of the living sea creatures died, and one-third of the ships were obliterated.

10-11 The third messenger sounded *his trumpet*, and a great star called Wormwood dropped out of heaven, flaming like a torch as it fell on one-third of the rivers and the springs. *As a result,* one-third of the waters turned *bitter like the herb* wormwood so that many people died from the *poisonous* bitter waters.

12 The fourth messenger sounded *his trumpet*, and one-third of the sun, one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars were darkened. *As a result,* one-third of their light *flickered and* failed. For one-third of the day, *the sun* did not shine; and likewise for one-third of the night, *the moon and stars* did not give their light.

13Then I saw an eagle flying through
midheaven, and I heard it cry with a loud
voice.

Eagle: Woe, woe, woe—*horror, disaster, and calamity*—to the earth dwellers! The rest of the trumpet blasts from the last three messengers are about to sound.

When the trumpets blast, another cycle of disasters begin. Each calamity affects one-third of the earth, its inhabitants, and the heavenly lights. Time flies as the disasters intensify.

9 Then the fifth messenger sounded *his trumpet.* I saw a star that had dropped out of heaven to earth. He received the key *that unlocks the shaft leading* to the abyss, *the pit that falls away to nothingness;* and 2he opened *the shaft to* the abyss. *Huge columns of* smoke rose from the depths of the cavern—*a black, ugly* smoke as if from a great furnace so that the sun was darkened and the air was thickened by the *blanket of* smoke from the shaft. 3From the smoke, locusts appeared *and swarmed* upon the earth. They were given power, like the power of scorpions on the earth. 4-5However, they were instructed not to damage any grasses, plants, or trees that grow from the earth. Instead, they were given power for five months to torture, but not to kill, the people without the seal of God upon their foreheads. The torment they inflicted was like the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. 6During those days, people will seek any way possible to kill themselves, but death will not befriend them. They will long to die *and end their miseries*, but death will elude them.

7The locusts looked like horses *clad in armor,* ready for battle. They wore golden wreaths on their heads, and their faces appeared human 8with hair as *long as* women's hair, but they had teeth as *sharp as* lions' teeth. 9They had armor that appeared to be iron plated; and when their wings flapped, they sounded like an army of horse-drawn chariots rushing into battle. 10They have tails like scorpions with stingers, and the power invested in them to inflict torture on people for five months lies in their tails. 11They were ruled by the messenger of the abyss, whose Hebrew name is Abaddon and whose Greek name is Apollyon, *both meaning "the Destroyer."*

12The first disaster has occurred; there are two more disasters to come.

13Then the sixth messenger sounded *his trumpet;* and I heard a voice from the four corners of the golden altar that is before God, 14commanding the sixth messenger with the trumpet.

A Voice: Set loose the four messengers who are bound *in chains* at the great river Euphrates.

15Then the four messengers, who had been held *in chains* until the hour and the day and the month and the year when they would kill one-third of humanity, were released.

16I heard that 200 million soldiers rode in the cavalry. 17This is how these horses and their riders appeared in my vision: the riders wore breastplates of fiery red, smoky blue,* and sulfur yellow. The heads of the horses seemed to be like the heads of lions; they breathed fire and smoke and sulfur from their mouths, 18killing one-third of humanity with the three plagues coming out of their mouths. 19The *lethal* power of these horses was not only in their mouths but also in their tails because their tails, which resembled snakes, had heads that inflicted injury.

20The rest of humanity, those not killed by these plagues, did not rethink their course and turn away* from the devices of their own making. *Despite all these calamities,* they continued worshiping demons and idols crafted in gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood. *They bowed down to images* which cannot see or hear or walk. 21They failed to turn away* from their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immoralities, and their thefts.

God's judgment is not only to punish. He wants people to turn to Him for all their needs, but they often look anywhere else for aid and remain in rebellion.

10 Then I saw another extremely powerful messenger descending out of heaven. He wore a cloud wrapped around him, and a rainbow was covering his head. His face *shone* like the sun, and his legs *blazed* like columns of fire. 2In his hand, he held a little scroll that had been unrolled. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on

* 9:17 Literally, jacinth, a semiprecious blue stone * 9:20 Literally, repent * 9:21 Literally, repent

dry land; [3]then he shouted with a voice that sounded like a roaring lion. When he cried out, the seven thunders answered with their own rumbling voices. [4]As I was about to record the thunders' answer, a voice from heaven stopped me.

A Voice: Seal up all the seven thunders have spoken; do not write it down!

[5]Then the messenger, whom I saw standing on the sea and on the dry land, raised his right hand into heaven [6]and swore *an oath* to the Eternal One—who always lives, who created heaven, earth, the sea, and all that is in them.

Heavenly Messenger: Time has run out. [7]Whenever the days arrive and the seventh messenger sounds his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished just as He announced to His servants, the prophets.

[8]Again, the voice I heard from heaven addressed me.

A Voice: Go. Take the *little* scroll that is unrolled in the hand of the messenger standing both on the sea and on the dry land.

[9]I then went to the messenger and asked him to give me the little scroll.

Heavenly Messenger: Take it, and eat it. Although in your mouth it will be sweet to taste, sweet as honey, it will become bitter when it reaches your stomach.

[10]I took the little scroll from the hand of the messenger and ate it. In my mouth, it was sweet like honey, but my stomach became bitter after I swallowed it.

Heavenly Messengers *(repeating)*: [11]Once again, you are to prophesy about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

► The scroll John eats is taken from the hand of the powerful messenger who announces the fulfillment of all the prophecies. Just as it did for the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel (2:8–3:4), the scroll represents the message John is required to proclaim; but first he must take it in and it must become a part of him. Initially it tastes sweet, but as it settles deep within him, it becomes bitter. God's message is always bittersweet. It is sweet joy for those who turn to God, but bitter sadness for those who do not accept it.

11 Then I received a measuring rod. It resembled a staff, and I was commanded *to take measurements.*

A Voice: Get up, and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship in it. [2]However, do not measure the court outside of the temple. Separate that area out because it has been handed over to the nations. They will trample over the holy city for 42 months. [3]I will authorize my two witnesses to prophesy for 1,260 days dressed in sackcloth, *the clothes that mourners wear*.

[4]These *two witnesses* are the two olive trees and two lampstands standing in front of the Lord of the earth. [5]If anyone wishes to harm the witnesses, fire spews out of the witnesses' mouths and consumes their foe *in flames.* Anyone who wishes to harm them is *destined* to die this way. [6]They have the authority to shut up the sky so that no rain may fall during the time of their prophecies. They also have authority to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with any plague whenever they desire.

► The two witnesses bear a striking resemblance to the faithful prophets of Israel and the faithful martyrs of the churches. Together they stand speaking God's message as the nations rant and rave and trample the holy city. The lampstands, which signify the churches, are not the light, but they welcome the light and present it to the world. The olive tree, even today, is a symbol of Israel. Olive trees supply the oil for the lamps so that they may burn brightly in the darkness. For a season, the two witnesses enjoy God's protection, but a time is coming when they will fall victim to the nations and then lie silent.

7On the day they finish their testimony,
the beast from the abyss will declare war
on them and win victory by killing them.
8Their dead bodies will lie in the street of
the great city (which, spiritually speaking,
is called Sodom and Egypt) where their
Lord was crucified. 9For three and a half
days, representatives of the peoples and
ethnicities, languages and nations stare
down at their lifeless bodies and refuse
them a proper burial. 10Because these
two prophets tormented the earth dwell-
ers *by speaking God's message*, the people
will rejoice over their dead bodies and
celebrate their deaths by exchanging gifts
with one another.

11At the end of the three and a half
days, the spirit of life that comes from
God entered their corpses, *raising them,*
and they stood *again* on their feet. Those
who looked on were terrified by what they
saw. 12Then they heard a great voice from
heaven.

A Voice: Come up here!

Their enemies watched *the spectacle* as the
witnesses ascended into heaven in a cloud.

13In that same hour, a great earth-
quake shook *the earth* causing one-tenth
of the city to crumble *into dust,* and 7,000
people were killed in the earthquake. Then
the rest *who were left alive,* quaking in fear,
turned and glorified the God of heaven.

14The second disaster has passed;
watch as the third disaster comes quickly.

15The seventh messenger sounded
his trumpet, and great voices in heaven
confessed:

Voices from Heaven: The kingdom of
the world has given way to the
kingdom of our Lord
and of His Anointed One.
He will reign throughout the ages.

► When the seventh messenger blows his trumpet, the kingdom of this world comes to an end. The rule and reign of God and His Anointed has arrived in full to eclipse the rogue kings who rebelled against the Creator and mocked His good name. God's kingdom entered our world in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It slipped in almost unnoticed beneath the noses of the powers that be. It grows silently as a seed in the earth until it fills the cosmos.

Today Christians live between the times: we live as aliens and strangers rescued from this present darkness, but we also live as citizens who long for the Kingdom that is to come. Until then we are to seek His kingdom and help carve out the territories for Him.

16Then the twenty-four elders, who sit
before God on their thrones, fell prostrate
and worshiped God.

24 Elders: 17We give You thanks, Lord
God, the All Powerful,
who is and who was.
For You have wielded Your great power
and have begun Your reign.
18The nations have raged *against You*,
but Your wrath has *finally* come.
It is now time to judge *all of* the
dead,
To give a just reward to Your servants,
the prophets,
and to the saints and all who honor
Your name,
both the small and the great,
And to destroy those who cause
destruction to the earth.

19Then God's temple in heaven was
opened up, and His covenant chest could
be seen within His temple. Lightning
flashed *all around*. Noises and thunder
rumbled. The earth trembled. Heavy hail-
stones fell *from the sky*.

12 *As I looked,* a great sign
appeared in heaven: a woman
came into view clothed in
the radiance of the sun, *standing* with
the moon under her feet, and she was
crowned with a wreath of twelve stars
on her head. 2She was *painfully* pregnant
and was crying out in the agony of labor.
3Then a second sign appeared in heaven,
ominous, foreboding: a great red dragon,
with seven crowned heads and ten horns.
4The dragon's tail brushed one-third of the
stars from the sky and hurled them down
to the earth. The dragon crouched in front
of the laboring woman, waiting to devour
her child the moment it was born.

5She gave birth to a male child, who
is *destined* to rule the nations with an
iron scepter. *Before the dragon could bite*

and devour her son, the child was whisked away and brought to God and His throne. 6The woman fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a place *of refuge and safety* where she could find sustenance for 1,260 days.

► The sign that appears in the vision is of a celestial woman who gives birth to a son. While it's possible this could refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus, it is also possible this is a symbol of God's chosen people. The faithful remnant of Israel is the womb that carried the Lord and delivered Him to the world. While the great red dragon does his best to destroy and devour Him, God has another plan. Since then, the dragon and his minions have done their best to harangue and persecute the woman's children. But again he does not have the final word.

7A battle broke out in heaven. Michael, along with his heavenly messengers, clashed against the dragon. The dragon and his messengers returned the fight, 8but they did not prevail and were defeated. *As a result,* there was no place left for them in heaven. 9So the great dragon, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was cast down to the earth along with his messengers. 10Then I heard a great voice in heaven.

A Voice: Now the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of His Anointed One have come.
For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who relentlessly accuses them day and night before our God,
has been cast down *and silenced.*
11By the blood of the Lamb
and the word of their witnesses,
they have become victorious over him,
For they did not hold on to their lives, even under threat of death.
12Therefore, rejoice, all you heavens;
celebrate, all you who live in them.
But disaster will befall the earth and the sea,
for the devil has come down to your spheres,
And he is incredibly angry
because he knows his time is nearly over.

13When the dragon realized he had been cast down to the earth, he pursued the mother of the male infant. 14In order to escape the serpent, she was given the two wings of the great eagle to fly *deeper* into the wilderness to her own special place where she would find sustenance for a time, and times, and half a time. 15Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a *raging* river that chased after the woman, *trying* to sweep her away in the flood. 16But the earth came to her rescue. It opened its *gaping* mouth and swallowed the river that spewed from the dragon's mouth. 17*As a result,* the dragon was enraged at the woman and went away to make war on the rest of her children—those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus.

18And [the dragon]* stood *waiting* on the sand of the seashore.

13 I saw a beast with ten horns and seven heads rising out of the *blackness of the* sea. On its horns hung ten crowns, and on its heads were inscribed blasphemous names. 2This beast was like a leopard, its feet were like the claws of a bear, and its mouth was like the jaws of a lion. The dragon bestowed it with his power and his throne and his great authority. 3One of the beast's heads appeared to have suffered a fatal blow, but its mortal wound had *somehow* been healed. Amazed *at the miracle and its power,* all the earth followed the beast. 4People worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast *because of its power.*

Earth: Who can match the beast? Who can fight against it?

► The beast emerges from the murky waters resembling the dragon; but it has other features, too, that resemble the four beasts as described in

* 12:18 Some late manuscripts read "I."

Daniel 7. Daniel, in his visions, learns that the beasts represent the empires that terrorized Israel and the rest of the world: the Babylonians, Persians, Medes, and Greeks. Prophetic images are difficult to identify. The beast in John's vision could be none other than the Roman Empire or another empire to come later. Rome has its own beastly authority, the Caesar, who demands worship. "Caesar is Lord," they dare to claim. But John knows better. In every generation, powerful people and institutions arise—political predators that demand loyalty, sometimes even worship.

5And the beast was given a mouth that
bellowed arrogant boasts and uttered
great blasphemies, and it was permitted
to do what it willed for 42 months. 6Its
mouth opened with a stream of insults
against God, blaspheming His name,
cursing His dwelling and those who live
in heaven. 7Also it received permission to
declare war against the saints and con-
quer them. Not a single nation, people,
language, or ethnicity could escape its
dominion. 8The inhabitants of the earth
will worship it, *that is,* all those whose
names have not been recorded before the
foundation of the world in the book of life
of the Lamb who was slaughtered.
9Let the person who is able to hear,
listen *carefully*.

10If someone is destined for captivity,
a captive he will be.
If someone is destined [to die]* by the
sword,
by the sword he will die.

The endurance and faithfulness of the saints will be *tested* here.

11As I watched, I saw a second beast,
this one rising up from the earth. It had
two horns like a lamb, but it was speaking
with the voice of a dragon.

► The second beast, which later becomes "the false prophet," has horns like the lamb; but its true nature is revealed in its dragon-like voice.

Many pretenders and posers exist in the spiritual world. This new beast wants the world to believe it represents the True God, the only King worthy of worship. But it's a deceiver, a counterfeit of the true King; it steals devotion away from the one true God, producing signs to dazzle the inhabitants of the earth.

12This earth-beast exercises all of the
authority given to it by the first beast, and
it forces the earth and all its inhabitants
to *bow down and* worship the first beast,
whose mortal wound had been healed.
13And the earth-beast performs fantastic
miracles. *Like Elijah on Mount Carmel,*
it even causes fire to blaze down from
heaven to earth for all to see. 14Since it is
allowed to perform these miracles in the
presence of the first beast, the earth-beast
deceives the inhabitants of the earth, com-
manding them to make an image of the
first beast that had survived the mortal
wound inflicted by the sword. 15And the
earth-beast was granted permission to
breathe into the image *and to animate it*
so that it could even speak. It decreed that
those who refuse to worship the image
of the *first* beast must be killed, 16and the
earth-beast mandates that all humans
must carry a mark on their right hands or
foreheads: both great and small, both rich
and poor, both free and slave.

The beast demands worship and requires all to carry its mark. Those who don't face severe punishment.

17Those who do not carry this mark, that
is, *those who do not have* the name of the
first beast or the number representing its
name *inscribed on them*, are not allowed to
sell *their wares* or buy *in the market.*
18Here is *divine* wisdom: let anyone
who understands *these mysteries* figure out
the number of the beast because it is the
number of a person. Its number is 666.*

► The number "666" stands in contrast to the perfection of the Lamb and the Spirit. Because this number is "the number of a person," readers have

* 13:10 Other manuscripts read "to kill." * 13:18 Some manuscripts read 616.

tried to pin down the identity of this person throughout history. In John's day, the name and title "Nero Caesar" was a likely candidate for the beast because Nero persecuted and executed believers, demanding obedience and even worship. Every era seems to have its Neros, those beastly characters who occupy seats of power and yet use their power to oppress God's people. The speculation continues as to this person's identity, but what has not changed is the message of hope in the midst of extreme persecution; that is the beauty proclaimed in this vision given to John.

14 *The scene changed.* I looked and saw the Lamb standing on top of Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name inscribed on their foreheads. 2And I heard a voice from heaven roaring like a waterfall and clapping like thunder. The voice I heard was like a symphony of harpists playing their instruments. 3*As I watched,* they began to sing a new song before the throne, the four living creatures, and the *twenty-four* elders. The only ones with the ability to learn this song were the 144,000 who had been rescued from the earth, 4virgins who had not given themselves to sexual relations. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They have been purchased from among humanity as the firstfruits, *set apart* for God and the Lamb. 5In their mouths, no lie was found; no blemish marred them.

6I saw another messenger flying through midheaven. He carried an eternal gospel, bringing good news to all the citizens of the earth—every ethnicity, nation, language, and people.

Heavenly Messenger *(with a loud voice)*:
7Fear God. Give Him glory, for the time of judgment has arrived. Worship the One who fashioned heaven and earth and created the seas and the springs.

8Another messenger, a second, came along.

Second Messenger: Fallen, fallen is Babylon, the great city! She has intoxicated all the nations with the wine of the wrath of her sexual perversion.

9Another messenger, a third, followed.

Third Messenger *(with a loud voice)*:
Those who worship the beast and its image, and all who receive its mark on their foreheads or on their hands, 10will *be forced to* drink the wine of God's wrath, poured out undiluted into the cup of God's anger. And they will face the torment of fire and *the agony of* sulfurous flames before the holy messengers and the Lamb. 11The smoke of their torment will rise throughout the ages for eternity. Day and night will come and go without pause or cessation. There will be no end to the torture experienced by those who worship the beast and its image and by those who receive the mark of its name.

12Here is the patient endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and remain faithful to Jesus.

13Then I heard a voice call out from heaven.

A Voice: Record this: "Blessed are the dead who have died in the Lord from now until the end."

Spirit: Yes, they will rest from their labors because their deeds remain with them.

14Then I saw a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, a golden wreath atop His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15Another messenger proceeded from the temple and called with a loud voice to the One who sat on the cloud.

Heavenly Messenger: Take Your sickle and reap *the harvest*, because the harvest of the earth is full and ripe and because the time to harvest has come.

16Then the One seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth gave up its harvest.

17Just then another messenger proceeded out of the heavenly temple. He also had a sharp sickle. 18Then another messenger (the one with authority over fire) came out from the altar, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle.

Messenger of Fire: Take your sharp sickle and gather together the clusters *of grapes* from the vines of the earth, for the grapes are ripe *and ready for harvest.*

19So the heavenly messenger swung his
sickle over the earth, gathered the fruit
of the vine from the earth, and threw it
into the great winepress, which is the
wrath of God. 20And the winepress was
trampled outside of the city, and blood
flowed from the winepress. *The blood ran
deep.* It reached as high as the bridle on
a horse and ran for the distance of about
185 miles.

The New Testament God is not a God of fluffy love as some suppose. His judgment, while difficult to comprehend, is real; and fear of it should motivate repentance now.

15 Then I saw another sign in
heaven, great and amazing:
seven messengers with seven
plagues—plagues that marked the end.
With these the wrath of God reached its
end.

2And then I saw something like a
sea made of glass mixed with fire *flashing
through it*. Those who had been victorious
over the beast, its image, and the number
of its name were standing on the sea of
glass, holding the harps of God in their
hands. 3*As they stand and play their harps,*
they sing the song of Moses, the servant of
God, and the song of the Lamb.

Victors: Great and amazing are Your
works,
Lord God, the All Powerful.
Right and true are Your ways,
King of all nations.
4Who will not fear You, Lord?
Who will not glorify Your name?
Because You alone are holy,
all the nations will come
and worship before You,
For Your righteous judgments have
been revealed.

5After I had taken all this in, I looked
again; and the inner part of the tabernacle
of witness opened in heaven. 6Out of the
temple came seven messengers, clothed
in pure linen, bright *and shining*, their
chests clad in a golden sash, carrying
seven plagues. 7Then one of the four living
creatures *stepped over to* give to the seven
messengers seven golden bowls brimming
with the wrath of God who lives through-
out the ages. 8The temple was full of the
smoke *billowing* from the *magnificent* glory
of God and from His power, and no one
could enter the temple until the seven
plagues of the seven messengers accom-
plished their *God-ordained* end.

Just as God used the plagues to judge the Egyptians and deliver His people from bondage (Exodus 7–12), these plagues will help rescue God's faithful servants.

16 Then I heard a great voice com-
ing from the temple ordering
the seven heavenly messengers.

A Voice: Go and pour out the seven bowls
of the wrath of God upon the earth.

2So the first messenger poured out his
bowl onto the earth. *When he did,* a foul-
smelling, painful sore broke out on each
person who bore the mark of the beast
and who worshiped its image.

3The second messenger poured out
his bowl into the sea. *When he did,* the
waters became like the blood *that spills*
from a dead body, and every living crea-
ture in the sea died.

4The third messenger poured out his
bowl into the rivers and springs of *fresh*
water. *When he did,* they, too, became
blood. 5And I heard the messenger over
the waters speak.

Messenger over the Waters: You are
just, O holy One who is and who
was,
for You have judged these things
rightly.
6Because people shed the blood of the
saints and prophets,
You have given them blood to
quench their thirst.
They are deserving of these
punishments.

God's judgment is true and just. Violent people are thirsty for blood, so God gives it to them. Sometimes judgment means receiving what you desire.

7And I heard *a voice from* the altar agree.

A Voice: Yes, Lord God, the All Powerful,
true and right are Your judgments!

8The fourth messenger poured out his
bowl on the sun. *When he did,* the sun
was permitted to blister people with its
fire. 9The incredible heat *of the sun* burned
their skin; but instead of rethinking their

actions* and glorifying God, they cursed God's name because He had the power to carry out these plagues.

10The fifth messenger poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. *When he did,* its kingdom was blanketed in darkness. People chewed on their tongues out of *the depth of* their agony. 11Still they refused to change their wicked ways,* so they cursed the God of heaven because of their painful afflictions and *ulcerous* sores.

12The sixth messenger poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates. *When he did,* the river dried up and became a road so that the kings from the east *and their armies* could make their way. 13What I saw next *troubled me deeply*: three foul spirits like frogs appeared, belched from the mouth of the dragon, the mouth of the beast, and the mouth of the earth-beast. 14These frogs are demonic spirits. *As they go into the world,* they perform miracles persuading the kings of the world to gather for the *last* battle on the great day of God, the All Powerful.

► The dragon, beast, and earth-beast are an unholy trinity who send out demonic spirits. These spirits resemble frogs and remind the reader of the plague of frogs that invaded Egypt before the exodus. These foul spirits roam the world, persuading the kings of the earth to assemble together to do battle against God and His chosen.

A Voice: 15See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the person who watches and waits, dressed and ready to go, so as not to wander about naked, exposed to disgrace.

16And the kings gathered at the place called Har-Magedon in Hebrew.

► Har-Magedon means Mount Megiddo and is sometimes transliterated "Armageddon." This refers to the battleground where the armies of the earth, led by the forces of evil, will assemble to mount their final attack against God. This place is often associated with the plain of Megiddo in northern Israel because the fertile land there has often been turned into fields of blood during gruesome battles. In a place like this, for one last time, evil will raise its ugly head against good.

17*Finally,* the seventh messenger poured out his bowl into the air. *When he did,* a great voice came out of the temple, from the throne.

A Voice: It is accomplished!

18*At the sound of the voice,* there were flashes of lightning, sounds *of voices*, rumblings of thunder, and tremors of an earthquake. In all of human history, there had never been an earthquake of this magnitude. 19The great city was torn into three parts, and the cities of all the nations fell. God remembered the great city, Babylon, and made her drink the cup of His fury and wrath. 20Every island sank *into the ocean*, and no mountains were left to be discovered. 21And great hailstones, each weighing nearly 100 pounds, fell from the sky onto the people until they cursed God because the plague of hail was so severe.

17 And then one of the seven messengers entrusted with the seven bowls came over to me.

Guide: Come, and I will show you the *true nature and God's* judgment of the great whore who is sitting on the many waters. 2She has seduced all the kings of the earth into committing lewd, sexual acts; and *most* earth dwellers have become intoxicated with the wine of her harlotry.

3*Immediately* I was in the Spirit, and the guide picked me up and carried me off. In the middle of a *vast* desert, I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast covered with blasphemous names. The beast had seven heads and ten horns *like the beast I had seen earlier rising out of the sea.* 4The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet fabrics; she shimmered with gold and jewels and pearls. *I looked closer and saw that* her hand held a golden cup brimming with abominations, *bubbling over* with the

* 16:9 Literally, repenting * 16:11 Literally, repent

impurities of her sexual exploits. 5On her forehead was inscribed a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, the mother of whores and the abominations that defile the earth." 6I looked and saw that the woman was drunk because she had gorged herself on the blood of the saints and the blood of those people who refused to deny Jesus *even to save their own lives*. When I saw her, I was filled with wonder.

Guide: 7Why are you so amazed? I will reveal to you the mystery of this woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8The beast you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go away into *eternal* destruction. And the earth dwellers, whose names have not been inscribed in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be astonished when they see the beast because it was and is not and is to come.

9Here is the mind possessing wisdom: The seven heads signify the seven mountains where the woman is seated. They also stand for seven kings. 10Five have fallen, one is alive, and the last has not yet come *to reign*. But when he does come, he will be allowed to reign only a short time. 11Regarding the beast that was and is not, it is *actually* an eighth *ruler* that springs from the seven and goes away into *eternal* destruction. 12The ten horns you saw stand for ten kings who have not yet ascended to power, but they will be invested with royal authority for a single hour *and will reign* together with the beast. 13These come together for one purpose *and one purpose alone*: to yield their power and authority to the beast. 14Together they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will be victorious over them because He is the Lord over all lords and the King over all kings; and those who stand with Him are called, elect, and faithful.

15(continuing to speak to me) The waters you saw, where the whore is seated, represent the peoples and multitudes, ethnicities and languages. 16The beast and the ten horns you saw will despise the whore; they will make her a wasteland and strip her naked. They will gorge themselves on her flesh and incinerate her with fire. 17For God has placed in their hearts to do what He has purposed, *that is,* to become one in mind and to surrender their kingdoms over to the beast until the words of God accomplish their end. 18And the woman you saw—she is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

► Because Babylon is the city responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem's first temple in 586 B.C., John uses this ominous symbol to describe the Babylon of his day—Rome, the city on seven hills. In A.D. 70, the Roman armies march against Jerusalem, destroy the second temple, and scatter the Jewish people.

The whore, who is identified as Babylon, is a symbol to readers in John's day of Rome and its allure. Its beauty and power are legendary, but beneath the surface lies the truth of its nature. People who ally themselves with Rome and all that it represents are partners with ruin. In the years since John's Revelation was first written, the whore has been seen as many different world forces. What Rome represents in John's day has been replicated by many different world powers and their material attractions.

18 Next I saw another messenger descending from heaven. *I knew* he possessed great authority because his glory illuminated the earth.

Heavenly Messenger *(with a powerful voice)***:**

2Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great *city*!
It has become a habitat for demons,
A haunt for every kind of foul spirit,
a prison for every sort of unclean
and hateful bird.
3For all the nations have drunk *deeply*
from the wine of the wrath of her
immorality,
And the kings of the earth have
disgraced themselves by engaging
in *gross* sexual acts with her,
and the merchants of the earth
have grown fat and rich,
profiting off the power
purchased with her luxury.

4Then I heard another voice from heaven urge,

A Voice: My people, get away from her—
fast.
Make sure you do not get caught up
in her sins.
Put some distance between you so that
you do not share in her plagues,
5For her sins *are higher than the highest*
mountain. They reach far into
the heavens,
and God has not forgotten even one
of her missteps.
6Deal out to her what she has dealt out
to others,
and repay her double according to
her deeds.
In the cup where she mixed her
drink, mix her a double.
7Whatever glory she demanded and
whatever luxury she lived,
give back to her the same measure
in torment and sorrow.
Secretly she says in her heart:
"I rule as queen;
I am not like a widow;
I will never experience grief."
8Because of this *arrogance,* in a single
day, plagues will overwhelm her.
Her portion will be death and sorrow
and famine,
And she will be incinerated with fire,
for mighty is the Lord God who
exacts judgment on her.

9And the kings of the earth, who committed lewd, sexual acts and lived lavishly off of her, will weep and wail over their loss when they see the smoke from her burning *body rise into the sky*. 10They will stand at a distance, fearing they, too, might fall victim to her torment. They will moan,

Woe to you, our great city!
Babylon, the *most* powerful city *in*
the world.
In a single hour, your day of judgment
has come.

Since greed and seeking unjust gain are two of Babylon's greatest sins, economic collapse becomes the basis of God's judgment.

11And the merchants *and the magnates* of the earth weep and mourn over her *demise* because no one is buying their goods any longer: 12*warehouses remain full* of gold, silver, jewels, and pearls; fine fabrics, purple, silk, and scarlet *cloth*; fragrant woods, items made of ivory, and items finely crafted out of expensive wood; bronze, iron, and marble; 13cinnamon, spices, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; wine, olive oil, rich flour, and wheat; cattle, sheep, horses, chariots, and human cargo (the *trafficked* souls of humanity).

14Everything your heart desired
has gone away;
All the glitz and glitter
are lost to you forever;
you'll never have them again!

15The sellers of these goods, who made a fine profit from her, will stand at a distance. *Like the kings,* they will fear her punishment *might fall on them too*. They will weep and mourn *their loss.*

16Woe to you, our great city,
dressed in finest linens, in purple
and scarlet *fabrics*,
dazzling in gold and jewels and
pearls.
17In a single hour, all this wealth is gone.

And all the sea captains, all those who sail the seas, sailors, and those who make a living by the sea, stood at a distance. 18*Strong men* were reduced to tears as they gazed on the smoke that rose from her ruins. "Was there ever any city like her?" they asked. 19They threw dust in the air covering their heads. They wept *bitterly* and mourned *their loss.*

Woe to you, our great city;
all who had ships at sea
became rich off your wealth!
In a single hour, you have been utterly
ruined.

20Rejoice over her *torment*, O heaven.
Join in the celebration, you saints, emissaries,* and prophets because God has judged in your favor and against her.

21Then a mighty messenger picked up a huge stone—it looked like a great millstone—and he cast it into the sea.

Mighty Messenger: *Watch and see.* This is
how Babylon, the great city,
will be thrown down; violently *will*
she go down,
and they will search for her in vain.

* 18:20 Literally, apostles

22Never again will the sound of *music*
grace your streets.
The melodies and harmonies of the
harpists and musicians and
flutists and trumpeters
will never be heard again.
And never again will an artisan of any
craft
be found *in your markets*,
And never again will the grinding of the
millstone
provide rhythm to your city,
23And never again will the light of a lamp
bring warm light *to your houses*,
And never again will the voices of the
bridegroom and bride
bring joy *to your festivities*.
For the merchants were the magnates
of the earth,
and all the nations fell prey to your
sorceries.
24And in her *streets* the blood of the
prophets, saints,
and all who have been slaughtered
upon the earth, ran freely.

19 *The scene changed.* After this, I heard the great sound of a multitude *echoing* in heaven.

Multitude: Praise the Lord!
Salvation and glory and power *truly*
belong to our God,
2for true and just are His
judgments.
He has judged the great whore
who polluted the *entire* earth with
her sexual immorality,
And He has vindicated the blood of His
servants, which she shed.

3Again praise *spilled from heaven.*

Multitude: Praise the Lord!
The smoke rises up from her *ruins*
forever and ever.

4And the twenty-four elders and four living creatures fell on their faces and worshiped God who reigns on the throne.

Four Living Creatures and 24 Elders:
Amen, Praise the Lord!

A Voice from the Throne: 5Give praise to
our God,
all of you, God's servants,
All who reverence Him,
small and great.

6And I heard what seemed to be an immense crowd speaking with one voice—it was like the sound of a roaring waterfall, like the sound of clashing thunder.

Multitude *(in unison)*: Praise the Lord!
For the Lord our God,
the All Powerful, reigns *supreme.*
7Now is the time for joy and happiness.
He deserves all the glory we can give
Him.
For the wedding feast has begun; the
marriage of the Lamb to His
bride has commenced,
and His bride has prepared herself
for this glorious day.

► The church that suffered and remained pure is now prepared for a time of glorious celebration. As Israel has been the bride of God, now the church—the bride of the Anointed One—will be intimately united with the Lamb. God and His people are about to become one. The marriage feast has been arranged at great expense, and the festivities are about to begin. But before the wedding, some things need to be put in order.

8She had been given the finest linens to
wear,
linens bright and pure,
woven from the righteous deeds of
the saints.

Guide: 9Write this down: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb." What I am telling you are the true words of God.

10At that, I fell down at his feet to worship him, *but he refused my praise.*

Guide: Stop it. Don't you see? I am a servant like you and your brothers and sisters, all who hold fast to the testimony of Jesus. Address your worship to God, *not to me*! For the testimony about Jesus is *essentially* the prophetic spirit.

11I looked up and saw that heaven had opened. Suddenly, a white horse appeared. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and

with righteousness He exercises judgment
and wages war. 12His eyes burn like a flam-
ing fire, and on His head are many crowns.
His name was written *before the creation
of the world,* and no one knew it except He
Himself. 13He is dressed in a robe dipped
in blood, *and* the name He was known
by is The Word of God. 14And the armies
of heaven, outfitted in fine linen, white
and pure, were following behind Him on
white steeds. 15From His mouth darts a
sharp sword with which to strike down
the nations. He will rule over them with a
scepter made of iron. He will trample the
winepress of the fury of the wrath of God,
the All Powerful. 16And there on His robe
and on His thigh was written His name:
King of kings and Lord of lords.

17Then I *looked up and* saw a messen-
ger standing in the sun; and with a loud
voice, he called to all the birds that fly
through midheaven.

Heavenly Messenger: Come. Gather for
the great feast God is preparing *for you*
18where you will feast on the flesh of
kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of
the *rich and* powerful, the flesh of horses
and their riders—all flesh—both free and
slave, both small and great.

19*I looked down,* and I saw the beast *I had
seen earlier* and the kings of the earth with
their armies gathered together to wage war
against the One riding the white horse and
His *heavenly* army. 20The beast was soon
captured along with the false prophet,
the earth-beast I had seen earlier who per-
formed signs to deceive those who had
agreed to receive the mark of the beast and
those who worshiped its *detestable* image.
Both of them were thrown alive into the
lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21And all
who remained met death at the blade of
the sword that proceeded from the mouth
of the One riding on the *white* horse. All
the birds feasted fully on their flesh.

► In one of the final, decisive battles, the rider on the white horse leads the armies of heaven against the enemy armies of the beast and the false prophet. His enemies are easily defeated, and the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. When the battle is over, the rider known as "King of kings and Lord of lords" turns His attention to the dragon.

20 Then I saw a messenger coming from heaven. In his hand was a key to the abyss and a great chain *that had been forged in heaven.* 2He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for 1,000 years *with the great chain.* 3The messenger cast him into the abyss and locked it and sealed him in it so that he could not go about deceiving the nations until the 1,000 years had come to completion. Afterward he must be released for a short time.

4Then I saw some thrones, and those seated in judgment were given the right to judge. Standing there were the souls of those who were beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and the word of God. They had refused to worship the beast or its *detestable* image and had not received the mark upon their foreheads or upon their hands. They had come back to life and reigned with the Anointed One, *our Liberating King,* for 1,000 years. 5Now as for the rest of the dead, they were not given life until the 1,000 years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

6Blessed and holy are the ones who take part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power; they will serve as priests of God and His Anointed, and they will reign with Him for 1,000 years.

7When the 1,000 years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison. 8And he will crawl out *of the abyss* in order to deceive the nations located at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog* *as Ezekiel described them*, in order to rally them together for *one final* battle. They are in number as the grains of sand on the shore. 9They marched *in unholy array* over the expanse of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. *As they laid siege to the city,* fire rained down from heaven and incinerated them. 10And the devil who had deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had already been thrown; and the *unholy* trio will be tortured day and night throughout the ages.

* 20:8 Ezekiel 38–39

► Since the beginning, Satan, the dragon, has brought trouble on all the sons and daughters of Adam. Now John sees the truth of his destiny. Ultimately the one who brings such pain and sorrow upon the world will be bound and thrown into the lake of fire. But evil is not easily defeated; John watches as he mounts one last, futile attack against God's people and His beloved. Never again will he raise his ugly head against those who remain faithful to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

11 *The scene changed.* I saw a great white
throne, and One was seated upon it. The
earth and heaven receded from His pres-
ence; there was no place for them. 12 And
I saw the dead, great and small, standing
in front of the throne. Some books were
opened. Then another book was opened;
it was called the book of life. And the dead
were judged according to what had been
recorded in the *first* books; *these were
the records* of everything they had done.
13 And the sea surrendered its dead. Death
and Hades gave up their dead as well.
And all were judged according to their
works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast
into the lake of fire. This is the second
death, the lake of fire. 15 And everyone
whose name could not be found *among
the names* written in the book of life was
thrown into the lake of fire.

21 I looked again *and could hardly
believe my eyes.* Everything
above me was new. Everything
below me was new. *Everything around me
was new* because the heaven and earth
that had been passed away, and the sea
was gone, completely. 2 And I saw the holy
city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of
heaven from God, prepared like a bride *on
her wedding day*, adorned for her husband
and for His eyes only. 3 And I heard a great
voice, coming from the throne.

A Voice: See, the home of God is with *His*
people.
He will live among them;
They will be His people,
And God Himself will be with them.

4 *The prophecies are fulfilled:*
He will wipe away every tear from their
eyes.*
Death will be no more;
Mourning no more, crying no more,
pain no more,
For the first things have gone away.

5 And the One who sat on the throne
announced *to His creation,*

The One: See, I am making all things new.
(turning to me) Write *what you hear
and see*, for these words are faithful and
true. 6 It is done! I am the Alpha and the
Omega, the beginning and the end. I will
see to it that the thirsty drink freely from
the fountain of the water of life. 7 To the
victors will go this inheritance: I will be
their God, and they will be My children.
8 *It will not be so* for the cowards, the
faithless, the sacrilegious, the murder-
ers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers,
the idolaters, and all those who deal in
deception. They will inherit *an eternity in*
the lake that burns with fire and sulfur,
which is the second death.

► John sees an amazing sight. It is something no one had ever seen nor will ever see until that day arrives. Scene by blessed scene passes before the prophet. Finally he is transported to the end of history only to discover it is no end at all; it is a new beginning. The prophecies—every last one of them—are coming true. God's plan will be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven when the new Jerusalem comes down and He lives among His people. All things will become new.

9 And then one of the seven messengers in
charge of the seven bowls filled with the
seven last plagues came over to me.

Heavenly Messenger: Come *with me, and*
I will show you the bride, the wife of the
Lamb.

10 He took me away in the Spirit and set
me on top of a great, high mountain. *As
I waited for what I thought was a bride,*

* 21:4 Isaiah 25:8

he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem,
descending out of heaven from God. 11It
gleamed *and shined* with the glory of God;
its radiance was like the most precious of
jewels, like jasper, and it was as clear as
crystal. 12It was surrounded with a wall,
great and high. There were twelve gates.
Assigned to each gate was a messen-
ger, twelve in all. And on the gates were
inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of
Israel's sons. 13On the east *wall were* three
gates. On the north *wall were* three gates.
On the south *wall were* three gates. On
the west *wall were* three gates. 14And the
city wall sat *perfectly* on twelve founda-
tion stones, and on them were *inscribed*
the names of the twelve emissaries* of the
Lamb.

15My guide held a golden measur-
ing rod. With it he measured the city and
the gates and the walls. 16And the city
is laid out with four corners in a *perfect*
square, the length the same as its width.
He measured the city with his measuring
rod, and *the result was that* its length and
width and height are equal: 1,444 miles, *a*
perfect cube. 17And my guide measured the
wall; it was nearly 72 yards *high,* in human
measurements, which was the instrument
the guide was using. 18The wall was made
of jasper, while the city itself was made of
pure gold, yet it was as clear as glass. 19The
foundation stones of the wall of the city
were decorated with every kind of jewel:
the first was jasper, the second sapphire,
the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20the
fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh
chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth
topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh
jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21The twelve
gates were twelve pearls, each gate *expertly*
crafted from a single *beautiful* pearl. And
the city street was pure gold, yet it was as
transparent as glass.

22And in the city, I found no temple
because the Lord God, the All Powerful,
and the Lamb are the temple. 23And in the
city, there is no need for the sun to light *the*
day or moon *the night* because the resplen-
dent glory of the Lord provides the city
with *warm, beautiful* light and the Lamb
illumines every corner *of the new Jerusa-*
lem. 24And *all peoples of* all the nations will
walk by its *unfailing* light, and the rulers of
the earth will stream into the city bringing
with them the symbols of their grandeur
and power. 25During the day, its gates will
not be closed; the darkness of night will
never settle in. 26The glory and grandeur of
the nations will be *on display there,* carried
to the holy city by people *from every corner*
of the world. 27Nothing that defiles or is
defiled can enter into its *glorious gates.*
Those who practice sacrilege or decep-
tion will never walk its streets. Only those
whose names are written in the Lamb's
book of life *can enter.*

* 21:14 Literally, apostles

► John had never seen a city without a temple. In fact, every city John ever entered had many temples dedicated to many gods—all, of course, except Jerusalem, which only had one temple. But now in his vision, he sees a different kind of city, the holy city, the new Jerusalem. As he looks around its streets of gold and magnificent buildings, he sees no temple reaching into the sky. No temple is needed in this city because God and the Lamb live with them, constantly in view. Their throne sits prominently in the city. Their light forever illumines its streets and citizens.

22 My heavenly guide brought
me to the river of *pure* living
waters, *shimmering as* bril-
liantly as crystal. It flowed out from the
throne of God and of the Lamb, 2flowing
down the middle and dividing the street
of the holy city. On each bank of the river
stood the tree of life, *firmly planted,* bear-
ing twelve kinds of fruit and producing its
sweet crop every month *throughout the*
year. And the *soothing* leaves that grew on
the tree *of life* provided precious healing
for the nations.

► Fed by a crystal clear river is the tree of life. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were prevented from eating from the tree once they were expelled from the garden of Eden. Divine creatures and a flaming sword then stood guard at the entrance to the garden (Genesis 3:24). Now the tree of life returns to the story, a single tree situated on both sides of

the river. No one is denied access to its luscious fruit and healing leaves.

3No one or nothing will labor under any curse any longer. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will sit *prominently* in the city. God's servants will *continually* serve *and worship* Him. 4They will be able to look upon His face, and His name will be written on their foreheads. 5Darkness will never again fall *on this city*. They will not require the light of a lamp or of the sun because the Lord God will be their illumination. *By His light*, they will reign throughout the ages.

Guide *(speaking to me)*: 6These words are faithful and true.

And the Lord, the God who inspired the prophets, has sent His heavenly messenger to show to His servants what must soon take place.

The Anointed One: 7Look now, I am coming soon! The one who remains true to the prophetic words contained in this book will truly be blessed.

8I, John, am the one who heard and witnessed these visions. And when I heard and witnessed them, I fell prostrate at the feet of the heavenly guide who showed them to me. 9But he refused.

Guide: You must not do that! I am a servant with you, with your brothers and sisters the prophets, and with those who keep the words contained in this book. Worship God instead!

10(continuing) Do not seal up the prophetic words contained in this book *for another day*, for the finale is near. 11Let the one given to evil continue down evil's path and the one addicted to filth continue to be its servant. But let the one who is righteous journey along the righteous road, and let the holy continue in holy ways.

The Anointed One: 12See, I am coming soon, and I will bring My reward with Me. I will pay back every person according to the deeds he has done. 13I am the Alpha and Omega, the First One and the Last One, the beginning and the end.

14Blessed are those who wash their garments. *In the end,* they have rightful access to the tree of life and will enter the city through its gates. 15The dogs, the sorcerers, those who commit immoral acts, the murderers, the idolaters, and all who love and practice deception must remain outside *the gates for all eternity.*

Jesus: 16I, Jesus, have sent My messenger to *show you and guide* you so that you in turn would share this testimony with the churches. I am the Root and the Descendant of David, the Bright Morning Star.

The Spirit and the Bride: 17Come.

And let everyone who hears these words say, "Come."

And let those who thirst come.
All who desire *to drink,* let them take
and drink freely from the water
of life.

John closes his book with a warning to safeguard the integrity of his prophecy.

18Beware, everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book. *Know this for certain:* if anyone adds to these words, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. 19And if anyone subtracts from the prophetic words of this book, God will remove that person's access to the tree of life and to the holy city which are described in this book.

20The One who testifies to these realities makes this promise:

The Anointed One: Yes. I am coming soon.

To which we say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

21May the grace of the Lord Jesus [the Anointed One]* be with all [the saints].* Amen.

* 22:21 Some manuscripts omit this portion. * 22:21 The earliest manuscripts omit this portion.

Special Helps

for

Stepping into the Story of Scripture

Abbreviations for the Special Helps

Old Testament

Genesis	Ge	2 Chronicles	2 Ch	Daniel	Da
Exodus	Ex	Ezra	Ez	Hosea	Ho
Leviticus	Le	Nehemiah	Ne	Joel	Joel
Numbers	Nu	Esther	Es	Amos	Am
Deuteronomy	De	Job	Job	Obadiah	Ob
Joshua	Jos	Psalms	Ps	Jonah	Jon
Judges	Ju	Proverbs	Pr	Micah	Mi
Ruth	Ru	Ecclesiastes	Ec	Nahum	Na
1 Samuel	1 Sa	Song of Songs	Song	Habakkuk	Hab
2 Samuel	2 Sa	Isaiah	Is	Zephaniah	Zep
1 Kings	1 Ki	Jeremiah	Je	Haggai	Hag
2 Kings	2 Ki	Lamentations	La	Zechariah	Ze
1 Chronicles	1 Ch	Ezekiel	Eze	Malachi	Mal

New Testament

Matthew	Ma	Ephesians	Ep	Hebrews	He
Mark	Mk	Philippians	Ph	James	Jam
Luke	Lk	Colossians	Col	1 Peter	1 Pe
John	Jo	1 Thessalonians	1 Th	2 Peter	2 Pe
Acts	Ac	2 Thessalonians	2 Th	1 John	1 Jo
Romans	Ro	1 Timothy	1 Ti	2 John	2 Jo
1 Corinthians	1 Co	2 Timothy	2 Ti	3 John	3 Jo
2 Corinthians	2 Co	Titus	Tit	Jude	Jude
Galatians	Ga	Philemon	Phile	Revelation	Re

A 40-Day Retreat with Jesus

We spend much of our lives running from one event to another. Rarely do we step aside and listen for God to speak directly to us. Take this 40-day retreat, and dedicate yourself to hearing from Jesus. Ask Him to make dramatic changes in your life, and be diligent in spending time each day in a quiet place reserved for Him. Follow the seven suggested steps below each day as you move through these important New Testament passages.

1	Romans 12:1-2	21	Colossians 3:12-17
2	James 1:1-12	22	Luke 11:29-36
3	James 1:13-18	23	2 Peter 1:5-11
4	James 1:19-27	24	Acts 13:42-52
5	James 2:14-20	25	John 8:1-19
6	James 3:13-18	26	1 John 2:1-6
7	James 4:6-12	27	1 John 2:7-11
8	Luke 18:10-14	28	1 John 2:15-17
9	1 Corinthians 12:12-27	29	1 John 3:1-3
10	Ephesians 1:15-19	30	1 John 3:17-24
11	Ephesians 2:4-10	31	1 John 4:7-21
12	Ephesians 5:1-5	32	1 John 5:1-6
13	Ephesians 5:6-20	33	Matthew 14:25-33
14	Luke 15:11-32	34	Matthew 5:21-24
15	Revelation 3:2-5	35	Matthew 5:27-30
16	Philippians 3:12-16	36	Matthew 5:33-37
17	Philippians 4:4-9	37	Matthew 5:38-42
18	Revelation 3:8-11	38	Matthew 6:19-34
19	Colossians 2:16-23	39	Luke 14:25-35
20	Colossians 3:1-11	40	Revelation 21:1-4

1. Find a quiet place and an unhurried time to spend some quality time with God. Begin by asking the Lord to join you in this special time.
2. Step outside your immediate concerns for the day and focus your attention on knowing Jesus and seeking His guidance.
3. Read slowly the passage of the day and listen for God's special message for you.
4. Read the passage again, slowly. Look for a special word, phrase, or thought that seems to speak directly to you and your life.
5. Meditate on that message. Breathe each word in, each word out. Make it part of you.
6. Write down the impression you have from this passage. It would be helpful to keep a journal of each day's thoughts.
7. Thank the Lord for speaking with you and seek to make His message real in your life today.

365 Days Through the Whole Bible

Date	Reference
January 1	Genesis 1:1–3:24
January 2	Genesis 4:1–5:32
January 3	Genesis 6:1–8:22
January 4	Genesis 9:1–11:32
January 5	Genesis 12:1–14:24
January 6	Genesis 15:1–17:27
January 7	Genesis 18:1–20:18
January 8	Genesis 21:1–23:20
January 9	Genesis 24:1–28:9
January 10	Genesis 28:10–30:43
January 11	Genesis 31:1–36:43
January 12	Genesis 37:1–41:57
January 13	Genesis 42:1–45:28
January 14	Genesis 46:1–50:26
January 15	Exodus 1:1–4:31
January 16	Exodus 5:1–7:13
January 17	Exodus 7:14–12:30
January 18	Exodus 12:31–18:27
January 19	Exodus 19:1–24:18
January 20	Exodus 25:1–31:18
January 21	Exodus 32:1–34:35
January 22	Exodus 35:1–40:38
January 23	Leviticus 1:1–7:38
January 24	Leviticus 8:1–10:20
January 25	Leviticus 11:1–17:16
January 26	Leviticus 18:1–22:33
January 27	Leviticus 23:1–25:55
January 28	Leviticus 26:1–27:34
January 29	Numbers 1:1–4:49
January 30	Numbers 5:1–10:10
January 31	Numbers 10:11–14:45
February 1	Numbers 15:1–21:35
February 2	Numbers 22:1–25:18
February 3	Numbers 26:1–31:54
February 4	Numbers 32:1–34:29
February 5	Numbers 35:1–36:13
February 6	Deuteronomy 1:1–5:33
February 7	Deuteronomy 6:1–11:32
February 8	Deuteronomy 12:1–16:17
February 9	Deuteronomy 16:18–20:20
February 10	Deuteronomy 21:1–26:19
February 11	Deuteronomy 27:1–30:20
February 12	Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12
February 13	Joshua 1:1–5:12
February 14	Joshua 5:13–8:35
February 15	Joshua 9:1–12:24
February 16	Joshua 13:1–19:51
February 17	Joshua 20:1–24:33
February 18	Judges 1:1–3:6
February 19	Judges 3:7–8:35
February 20	Judges 9:1–12:15
February 21	Judges 13:1–16:31
February 22	Judges 17:1–21:25
February 23	Ruth 1:1–4:22
February 24	1 Samuel 1:1–3:21
February 25	1 Samuel 4:1–7:17
February 26	1 Samuel 8:1–12:25
February 27	1 Samuel 13:1–15:35
February 28	1 Samuel 16:1–17:58
March 1	1 Samuel 18:1–20:42
March 2	1 Samuel 21:1–26:25
March 3	1 Samuel 27:1–31:13
March 4	2 Samuel 1:1–4:12
March 5	2 Samuel 5:1–7:29
March 6	2 Samuel 8:1–10:19
March 7	2 Samuel 11:1–12:31
March 8	2 Samuel 13:1–14:33
March 9	2 Samuel 15:1–20:26
March 10	2 Samuel 21:1–24:25
March 11	1 Kings 1:1–4:34
March 12	1 Kings 5:1–8:66
March 13	1 Kings 9:1–11:43
March 14	1 Kings 12:1–16:34
March 15	1 Kings 17:1–19:21
March 16	1 Kings 20:1–22:53
March 17	2 Kings 1:1–8:15
March 18	2 Kings 8:16–10:36
March 19	2 Kings 11:1–13:25
March 20	2 Kings 14:1–17:41
March 21	2 Kings 18:1–21:26
March 22	2 Kings 22:1–25:30
March 23	1 Chronicles 1:1–9:44

Date	Reference
March 24	1 Chronicles 10:1–12:40
March 25	1 Chronicles 13:1–17:27
March 26	1 Chronicles 18:1–21:30
March 27	1 Chronicles 22:1–27:34
March 28	1 Chronicles 28:1–29:30
March 29	2 Chronicles 1:1–5:1
March 30	2 Chronicles 5:2–9:31
March 31	2 Chronicles 10:1–14:1
April 1	2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14
April 2	2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3
April 3	2 Chronicles 21:4–24:27
April 4	2 Chronicles 25:1–28:27
April 5	2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33
April 6	2 Chronicles 33:1–35:27
April 7	2 Chronicles 36:1-23
April 8	Ezra 1:1–2:70
April 9	Ezra 3:1–6:22
April 10	Ezra 7:1–8:36
April 11	Ezra 9:1–10:44
April 12	Nehemiah 1:1–2:10
April 13	Nehemiah 2:11–3:32
April 14	Nehemiah 4:1–7:73
April 15	Nehemiah 8:1–10:39
April 16	Nehemiah 11:1–13:31
April 17	Esther 1:1–2:23
April 18	Esther 3:1–4:17
April 19	Esther 5:1–10:3
April 20	Job 1:1–2:13
April 21	Job 3:1–14:22
April 22	Job 15:1–21:34
April 23	Job 22:1–31:40
April 24	Job 32:1–37:24
April 25	Job 38:1–41:34
April 26	Job 42:1-17
April 27	Psalms 1:1–4:8
April 28	Psalms 5:1–8:9
April 29	Psalms 9:1–12:8
April 30	Psalms 13:1–16:11
May 1	Psalms 17:1–20:9
May 2	Psalms 21:1–24:10
May 3	Psalms 25:1–28:9
May 4	Psalms 29:1–32:11
May 5	Psalms 33:1–36:12
May 6	Psalms 37:1–41:13
May 7	Psalms 42:1–45:17
May 8	Psalms 46:1–49:20
May 9	Psalms 50:1–53:6
May 10	Psalms 54:1–56:13
May 11	Psalms 57:1–59:17
May 12	Psalms 60:1–62:12
May 13	Psalms 63:1–65:13
May 14	Psalms 66:1–68:35
May 15	Psalms 69:1–72:20
May 16	Psalms 73:1–75:10
May 17	Psalms 76:1–78:32
May 18	Psalms 79:1–81:16
May 19	Psalms 82:1–84:12
May 20	Psalms 85:1–89:52
May 21	Psalms 90:1–92:15
May 22	Psalms 93:1–95:11
May 23	Psalms 96:1–98:9
May 24	Psalms 99:1–101:8
May 25	Psalms 102:1–104:35
May 26	Psalms 105:1–106:48
May 27	Psalms 107:1–109:31
May 28	Psalms 110:1–112:10
May 29	Psalms 113:1–115:18
May 30	Psalms 116:1–118:29
May 31	Psalms 119:1-176
June 1	Psalms 120:1–124:8
June 2	Psalms 125:1–129:8
June 3	Psalms 130:1–134:3
June 4	Psalms 135:1–137:9
June 5	Psalms 138:1–140:13
June 6	Psalms 141:1–144:15
June 7	Psalms 145:1–150:6
June 8	Proverbs 1:1-33
June 9	Proverbs 2:1-22
June 10	Proverbs 3:1-35
June 11	Proverbs 4:1-27
June 12	Proverbs 5:1-23
June 13	Proverbs 6:1-35
June 14	Proverbs 7:1-27
June 15	Proverbs 8:1-36
June 16	Proverbs 9:1-18
June 17	Proverbs 10:1-32
June 18	Proverbs 11:1-31
June 19	Proverbs 12:1-28
June 20	Proverbs 13:1-25
June 21	Proverbs 14:1-35
June 22	Proverbs 15:1-33
June 23	Proverbs 16:1-33
June 24	Proverbs 17:1-28
June 25	Proverbs 18:1-24

Date	Reference
June 26	Proverbs 19:1-29
June 27	Proverbs 20:1-30
June 28	Proverbs 21:1-31
June 29	Proverbs 22:1-29
June 30	Proverbs 23:1-35
July 1	Proverbs 24:1-34
July 2	Proverbs 25:1-28
July 3	Proverbs 26:1-28
July 4	Proverbs 27:1-27
July 5	Proverbs 28:1-28
July 6	Proverbs 29:1-27
July 7	Proverbs 30:1-33
July 8	Proverbs 31:1-31
July 9	Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26
July 10	Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:20
July 11	Ecclesiastes 6:1–8:17
July 12	Ecclesiastes 9:1–12:14
July 13	Song of Songs 1:1–8:14
July 14	Isaiah 1:1–6:13
July 15	Isaiah 7:1–12:6
July 16	Isaiah 13:1–18:7
July 17	Isaiah 19:1–23:18
July 18	Isaiah 24:1–27:13
July 19	Isaiah 28:1–31:9
July 20	Isaiah 32:1–35:10
July 21	Isaiah 36:1–39:8
July 22	Isaiah 40:1–48:22
July 23	Isaiah 49:1–52:12
July 24	Isaiah 52:13–55:13
July 25	Isaiah 56:1–59:21
July 26	Isaiah 60:1–66:24
July 27	Jeremiah 1:1–6:30
July 28	Jeremiah 7:1–10:25
July 29	Jeremiah 11:1–15:21
July 30	Jeremiah 16:1–20:18
July 31	Jeremiah 21:1–24:10
August 1	Jeremiah 25:1–29:32
August 2	Jeremiah 30:1–33:26
August 3	Jeremiah 34:1–38:28
August 4	Jeremiah 39:1–45:5
August 5	Jeremiah 46:1–52:34
August 6	Lamentations 1:1–5:22
August 7	Ezekiel 1:1–3:27
August 8	Ezekiel 4:1–11:25
August 9	Ezekiel 12:1–17:24
August 10	Ezekiel 18:1–24:27
August 11	Ezekiel 25:1–32:32
August 12	Ezekiel 33:1–39:29
August 13	Ezekiel 40:1–48:35
August 14	Daniel 1:1–3:30
August 15	Daniel 4:1–6:28
August 16	Daniel 7:1–12:13
August 17	Hosea 1:1–3:5
August 18	Hosea 4:1–5:15
August 19	Hosea 6:1–10:15
August 20	Hosea 11:1–14:9
August 21	Joel 1:1–2:27
August 22	Joel 28:1–3:21
August 23	Amos 1:1–2:16
August 24	Amos 3:1–6:14
August 25	Amos 7:1–9:15
August 26	Obadiah 1-21
August 27	Jonah 1:1–2:10
August 28	Jonah 3:1–4:11
August 29	Micah 1:1–2:13
August 30	Micah 3:1–5:15
August 31	Micah 6:1–7:20
September 1	Nahum 1:1–3:19
September 2	Habakkuk 1:1–3:19
September 3	Zephaniah 1:1–3:20
September 4	Haggai 1:1–2:23
September 5	Zechariah 1:1–8:23
September 6	Zechariah 9:1–14:21
September 7	Malachi 1:1–4:6
September 8	Matthew 1:1–4:25
September 9	Matthew 5:1-48
September 10	Matthew 6:1-34
September 11	Matthew 7:1-29
September 12	Matthew 8:1–10:42
September 13	Matthew 11:1–13:52
September 14	Matthew 13:53–15:39
September 15	Matthew 16:1–18:35
September 16	Matthew 19:1–20:34
September 17	Matthew 21:1–23:39
September 18	Matthew 24:1–25:56
September 19	Matthew 26:1–28:20
September 20	Mark 1:1–3:35
September 21	Mark 4:1–7:23
September 22	Mark 7:24–9:1
September 23	Mark 9:2–10:52
September 24	Mark 11:1–12:44
September 25	Mark 13:1-37
September 26	Mark 14:1–16:20
September 27	Luke 1:1–4:13
September 28	Luke 4:14–6:49
September 29	Luke 7:1–9:50

Date	Reference
September 30	Luke 9:51–10:42
October 1	Luke 11:1-54
October 2	Luke 12:1-59
October 3	Luke 13:1–14:35
October 4	Luke 15:1–16:31
October 5	Luke 17:1–19:27
October 6	Luke 19:28–21:38
October 7	Luke 22:1-71
October 8	Luke 23:1-56
October 9	Luke 24:1-53
October 10	John 1:1–2:12
October 11	John 2:13–3:36
October 12	John 4:1-45
October 13	John 4:46–6:71
October 14	John 7:1–10:42
October 15	John 11:1–12:50
October 16	John 13:1–14:31
October 17	John 15:1–17:26
October 18	John 18:1–19:42
October 19	John 20:1–21:25
October 20	Acts 1:1–4:37
October 21	Acts 5:1–7:60
October 22	Acts 8:1–12:24
October 23	Acts 12:25–15:35
October 24	Acts 15:36–18:23
October 25	Acts 18:24–21:16
October 26	Acts 21:17–28:31
October 27	Romans 1:1–3:20
October 28	Romans 3:21–5:21
October 29	Romans 6:1–8:39
October 30	Romans 9:1–11:36
October 31	Romans 12:1–16:27
November 1	1 Corinthians 1:1–4:21
November 2	1 Corinthians 5:1–6:20
November 3	1 Corinthians 7:1-40
November 4	1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1
November 5	1 Corinthians 11:2–14:40
November 6	1 Corinthians 15:1–16:24
November 7	2 Corinthians 1:1–2:11
November 8	2 Corinthians 2:12–7:16
November 9	2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15
November 10	2 Corinthians 10:1–13:14
November 11	Galatians 1:1–2:21
November 12	Galatians 3:1–4:31
November 13	Galatians 5:1–6:18
November 14	Ephesians 1:1–3:21
November 15	Ephesians 4:1–6:24
November 16	Philippians 1:1-30
November 17	Philippians 2:1-30
November 18	Philippians 3:1–4:1
November 19	Philippians 4:2-23
November 20	Colossians 1:1–2:23
November 21	Colossians 3:1–4:18
November 22	1 Thessalonians 1:1–3:13
November 23	1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:28
November 24	2 Thessalonians 1:1–2:17
November 25	2 Thessalonians 3:1-18
November 26	1 Timothy 1:1-20
November 27	1 Timothy 2:1–3:16
November 28	1 Timothy 4:1–6:21
November 29	2 Timothy 1:1–2:26
November 30	2 Timothy 3:1–4:22
December 1	Titus 1:1-16
December 2	Titus 2:1-15
December 3	Titus 3:1-15
December 4	Philemon 1-25
December 5	Hebrews 1:1–2:18
December 6	Hebrews 3:1–4:13
December 7	Hebrews 4:14–7:28
December 8	Hebrews 8:1–10:18
December 9	Hebrews 10:19–13:25
December 10	James 1:1-27
December 11	James 2:1–3:12
December 12	James 3:13–5:20
December 13	1 Peter 1:1–2:10
December 14	1 Peter 2:11–4:19
December 15	1 Peter 5:1-14
December 16	2 Peter 1:1-21
December 17	2 Peter 2:1-22
December 18	2 Peter 3:1-18
December 19	1 John 1:1–2:27
December 20	1 John 2:28–4:21
December 21	1 John 5:1-21
December 22	2 John 1–3 John 14
December 23	Jude 1-25
December 24	Revelation 1:1–3:22
December 25	Revelation 4:1–5:14
December 26	Revelation 6:1–8:5
December 27	Revelation 8:6–11:19
December 28	Revelation 12:1–14:20
December 29	Revelation 15:1–16:21
December 30	Revelation 17:1–20:15
December 31	Revelation 21:1–22:21

Topical Guide to the Notes

Key	Comment	Page	Location
abaddon	place or person of destruction and desolation	609	top
adultery	David tries to hide his sin	370	right upper
adultery	David takes Uriah's wife	370	right lower
adultery	affects society negatively	744	right upper
adultery	trusting something or someone over God	1060	top
adultery	against spouses and God	1140	top
adultery	David and Bathsheba	1154	right
anger	the disobedient want to silence Jeremiah's warnings	911	left
animals	pure and impure	9	left
animals	humans care for all creation	752	right
animals	God's creatures like humans	777	top
Anointed One	Jesus is the King who is and will be victorious	832	right
Anointed One	details about the Servant	846	right
Anointed One	will enter Jerusalem on a donkey	1132	right
Anointed One	Jesus is the One Jews have waited for	1154	top
Anointed One	Jesus teaches, preaches, and heals	1167	right upper
Anointed One	Jesus is not what is expected	1169	left lower
Anointed One	Pilate recognizes Jesus	1199	right
Anointed One	return date is a mystery	1229	right
Anointed One	John doubts if Jesus is He	1253	top
ascension	Elijah and Enoch	434	left
atonement	only for unknown sins	126	left
atonement	sacrifice of the scapegoat	143	left
authorship	narrator of Kings is reliable	410	left
authorship	narrator switches between North and South	433	left
authorship	chronicler writes to preserve lost history	497	left
authorship	Isaiah may not have written these chapters	842	top
authorship	Luke is educated	1237	left
authorship	Paul is sincere	1425	right
baptism	John washes Jesus	1244	left
battle	Amorites attack Israel	187	left
battle	Amorites attack Israel	202	left
battle	foreigners will attack Israel	244	left
battle	eleven tribes attack Benjamin	308	left
battle	David's army	483	left
battle	Israel and Judah are attacked by Shishak	512	right
battle	Judah defeats Assyria	833	right
battle	Ammon betrays Judah	952	right
battle	fight darkness with God's word and prayer	1442	right
battle	Jesus and the rebellious one	1463	left
battle	in Megiddo	1541	left lower
blessing	Jacob blesses Pharaoh	63	right
blessing	Jacob blesses Judah	67	left
blessing	proves God supports David	485	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
blessing	comes from living faith in community	1492	right
burial	generations are buried in same tomb	416	left
burial	priest Jehoiada is laid with kings	525	left
burial	Amon's is forgotten	537	left
calendar	lunar calendar and festivals	101	top
calendar	activities during second year wandering	171	left
cannibalism	resorted to during siege	979	left
capital punishment	Pharaoh kills chief baker	53	right
capital punishment	stoning is punishment for false worship	225	right
capital punishment	Joash stones Zechariah	525	right
capital punishment	Persian impaling	579	left
capital punishment	crucifixion	1283	top
capital punishment	crucifixion brought freedom	1397	left
census	tribal population increases and decreases	160	right
census	numbering the people in each tribe	161	top
census	of Levites	163	right
census	David offends God	490	right
census	necessary for taxation	1240	right
child sacrifice	Jephthah keeps his vow	298	right
child sacrifice	Mesha offers oldest son to Chemosh	436	left
childbirth	risks and rewards	6	left
childbirth	God is faithful to faithful women	1467	left
circumcision	of the heart	247	left
circumcision	distinguishes God's people	260	left
circumcision	of the heart in all nations	899	left
circumcision	of the heart	1339	right
communication	God speaks clearly to Moses	174	right
communication	God speaks to Balaam through donkey	187	right
compassion	medium gives Saul his last meal	354	right
compassion	David brings Mephibosheth to court	369	left
compassion	David mourns Absalom's death	382	right
confession	necessary with sacrifice	127	right
confidence	Peter is emboldened by the Spirit	1333	right
conflict	Israel's size threatens Egypt	71	left
conflict	political turmoil after Saul	359	left
conflict	not all Israel's descendants want to rebuild	545	right
conflict	Nehemiah's enemies	558	left
conflict	Benjamin and Agag are old enemies	576	left
conflict	Saul pursues David	670	right
conflict	Hezekiah faces Rabshakeh	837	top
conflict	affects the poor more than the rich	1098	left
conflict	Pharisees and Sadducees against Jesus	1205	right
conflict	Jesus and the Pharisees	1250	top
conflict	reveals the Kingdom	1277	top
conflict	Jesus doesn't advocate fighting Rome	1299	left
conflict	Christians and Jewish laws	1351	right
conflict	Pharisees, Sadducees, and Paul	1365	top
conflict	surrender rights for the love of another	1392	left
conflict	surrender rights for the love of another	1404	left
conflict	God's people are one	1406	top
conflict	be quick to love, not to argue	1417	left
conflict	God's people are one	1439	left
congregation tent	furnishings in the special room	103	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
congregation tent	His grace is among Israel	105	top
congregation tent	tent vs. dwelling	160	top
congregation tent	transportation of tent and furnishings	167	left
congregation tent	used until Solomon builds the temple	487	right
conquest	rise of Assyria's strongest kings	455	right
conquest	David's adversaries are Israel's relatives	489	left
conquest	Persians defeat Babylonia	1046	right
conquest	Jesus defeats sin and death	1380	right
consecration	God only talks to Moses and Joshua	113	right
consecration	of Aaron, priests, tent, and tent objects	131	right lower
consecration	sacred space	723	top
covenant	God's with Abram	17	left
covenant	Zipporah circumcises her son	76	right
covenant	God uses His chosen ones	121	left
covenant	permanent as salt is permanent	125	left
covenant	God makes a second with Israel	221	left
covenant	Israel will break it	245	left
covenant	Jews are ready to renew with God	567	left
covenant	animal is slaughtered to seal it	935	left upper
covenant	animal is slaughtered to seal it	1022	right
covenant	with Abraham continues in people of faith	1379	left
covenant	faith and the Spirit, not laws, are the foundation	1430	right
covenant	faith and the Spirit, not laws, are the foundation	1431	right
covenant	faith makes an outsider part of it	1447	left
covenant	Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant	1490	left
covenant chest	leads the Israelites in wilderness	172	right
covenant chest	brings God's terrible power to Philistia	325	left upper
covenant chest	moved to Jerusalem	365	right
covenant chest	presence makes Jerusalem the holy city	484	right
cult	Baal controls the rain	419	left
cult	Eternal as God of mountains	425	right
cult	Baal as creator of universe	448	left
cult	Tyre to blame for Israel's worship	1007	left lower
curse	Noah's on Canaan	11	left
curse	burial with family members is essential	413	right
daily life	mirrors expensive, made of bronze	119	left
daily life	fermentation process of wine	616	top
daily life	ovens	1065	top
Day of Atonement	high priest's duties	144	left
Day of Atonement	annual opportunity to ask for His healing	152	left
Day of Atonement	Jesus took sins into the real temple in heaven	1491	top
Day of the Lord	Israel vindicated; nations punished	1076	left
Day of the Lord	some of His people will be surprised to be punished	1084	left lower
Day of the Lord	Anointed is crowned king and world comes to Jerusalem	1137	left
death	all go to sheol	587	right
death	in God's timing	590	left
death	the fate of the wicked	602	left
death	comes to everyone	782	right
death	all go to sheol	1013	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
death	necessary before resurrection	1228	right
death	nullified by Jesus' resurrection	1459	right
death	authority is limited	1532	left
deceit	Abram hides marriage to Sarai	14	left
deceit	Abraham hides marriage to Sarah	24	right
deceit	Isaac hides marriage to Rebekah	32	right
deceit	Laban's and Jacob's flocks	40	left
defeat	the punishment for disobeying God	262	right
defeat	Josiah dies when Egypt and Assyria align	467	right
defeat	Babylonian deportation allows for rebuilding	468	right
defeat	Babylonia razes Jerusalem	535	right
defeat	Neco attacks Josiah	539	right
defeat	Jerusalem is razed	940	left
defeat	Babylonia deports the strong and powerful	1037	left
dependence	on God for life	7	right
dependence	Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac	27	left
depression	Jeremiah endures the consequences of his task	907	left
diplomacy	Ahab aligns with Aram	426	left
diplomacy	Judah and Edom help Israel against Moab	435	left
diplomacy	Israel tries to align with Egypt	457	right
diplomacy	Jerusalem is physically and politically neutral	481	right
diplomacy	Zedekiah abandons Babylonians for Egyptians	938	top
directives	God speaks to Israel directly	96	left
directives	10 easy-to-remember instructions	215	right
directives	love God and love others	1227	left
disciples	Jesus calls the first	1159	left
disciples	must be dedicated until death	1169	left upper
disciples	stay quiet until full understanding	1179	right
disciples	accept Him and get new life	1206	left
disciples	become emissaries for Jesus	1235	right
disciples	the new twelve	1252	left
disciples	become emissaries for Jesus	1257	left
disciples	Nicodemus the Pharisee	1293	left
disciples	actions after Jesus' death	1322	right
disobedience	Lot's wife turns back and is destroyed	22	right
disobedience	must be cut off from the community	130	right
disobedience	Israelites must wander 38 more years	176	right
disobedience	Balaam has become an enemy of God	198	right
disobedience	Moses won't enter Canaan	211	right lower
disobedience	Israel is in chaos	318	left upper
disobedience	Saul orders death of priests harboring David	347	left
disobedience	David's children	374	left
disobedience	of Northern Kingdom	412	left
disobedience	Ahab follows foreign wife	427	right
disobedience	Northern Kingdom separates from Southern	510	left
disobedience	of all Israel	510	right
disobedience	of Northern Kingdom ignores God's wishes	513	right
disobedience	Ahaz like the Northern kings	529	left
disobedience	of Josiah's successors	540	left
disobedience	why Job must have sinned	589	right
disobedience	the results	608	right
disobedience	grieves God	636	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
disobedience	God forgives and purifies those who change	665	top
disobedience	necessitates Israel's destruction	841	right
disobedience	separates people from God	879	left
disobedience	of Jehoiakim	936	right
disobedience	Jeremiah's last message in Egypt	945	right
disobedience	of Egypt	947	right
disobedience	of the Philistines	949	top
disobedience	of Aram	954	left
disobedience	of Judah	965	right
disobedience	the whole world is corrupted	1081	left
disobedience	of Jonah	1094	left
disobedience	of the Philistines	1118	left
disobedience	of some Jews	1305	right
disobedience	church quickly loses its way	1331	right
disobedience	is the problem and the punishment	1375	right
disobedience	new creations can't return to old behavior	1454	left upper
disobedience	daily confession brings us closer to Him	1514	left
divination	natural forces cannot prophesy	231	left
divination	Saul consults a medium	353	right
divination	natural forces cannot prophesy	998	right
divination	God tells Daniel the dream's meaning	1039	right
divination	disciples draw lots until Spirit enters	1329	top
emissaries	disciples whom Jesus sends into the field	1167	right lower
faithfulness	of God	207	left
faithfulness	plus work makes success	257	left
faithfulness	Caleb rewarded	270	right
faithfulness	of Hannah	318	left lower
faithfulness	of Eli	321	right
faithfulness	of David	339	left
faithfulness	of Hezekiah	459	right
faithfulness	remnant works for temple they won't see	493	left
faithfulness	God helps the remnant rebuild	499	left
faithfulness	of Hezekiah	534	left upper
faithfulness	the faithful flourish like a tended olive tree	666	right
faithfulness	God is faithful even when His people are not	708	left
faithfulness	of Jeremiah	914	top
faithfulness	of the Rechabites	935	left lower
faithfulness	of Daniel's friends	1042	left
faithfulness	activities of the faithful	1103	top
faithfulness	necessary in trying times	1308	right
faithfulness	of Paul	1362	top
faithfulness	makes anyone a member of God's family	1385	right
faithfulness	changes circumstances	1402	right
faithfulness	during suffering	1419	right
faithfulness	during opposition	1445	right
faithfulness	love of Jesus produces endurance	1458	right
faithfulness	during persecution	1474	left
faithfulness	the world can erode commitments	1484	left
faithfulness	when promises aren't fully realized	1494	left
faithfulness	produces works	1500	top
false prophet	Shemaiah shames Jeremiah	925	right
false prophet	looks like a lamb to steal devotion from God	1538	left
false prophet	thrown into lake of fire with beast	1545	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
fame	people hear of Jesus' words and deeds	1159	right
fame	Jesus is popular for His demeanor	1203	top
fame	Jesus' family dislikes His popularity	1208	left
family	all believers in Jesus are siblings	1165	left
family	Jesus' family forgets Him at the temple	1242	right upper
family	all believers in Jesus are siblings	1322	left
famine	Jacob looks for food in Egypt	56	left
farewell	Jacob and Laban part ways	42	left
fathers	responsible for raising the next generation	739	left
fathers	teach your children	743	right
favoritism	all are welcome in the Kingdom	1499	right
fear	of Joseph's brothers	57	right
fear	of Pharisees and Sadducees about Jesus	1177	left
fear	of Jesus just before death	1231	left
fear	remedied by depending on Jesus	1293	right
fear	unnecessary because God is among His people	1302	right
fear	of Peter	1314	left
fear	unnecessary because God is among His people	1316	right
fear	pulls the Thessalonians away from Jesus	1462	left
feasts	kings use them to display power	574	left
festivals	Passover honors exodus	87	top
festivals	of booths remembers 40 years of wandering	152	right
festivals	remember the covenant with God	228	top
festivals	Hezekiah reinstates	532	right
festivals	holiday songs to renew commitment	689	right
festivals	of booths foreshadows 40 years of exile	1070	left
focus	determines your choices	1162	right
focus	on Jesus' will, not those who preach it	1396	left
forgiveness	Adonijah grabs the altar horns	394	left
forgiveness	comes from confession and change	649	right
forgiveness	better than vengeance	1181	right
forgiveness	characterizes the kingdom of God	1248	top
format	Deuteronomy is episodic	208	top
format	mnemonic devices help Israel memorize laws	233	top
format	a glimpse into heavenly courtroom	585	left
format	a deposition	614	left
format	all emotions are reflected in the psalms	631	right
format	acrostic	634	left
format	all of the psalms' themes are reflected in Book Five	709	top
format	113–118 are sung together on Jewish holy days	714	right
format	poetic parallelism	749	right
format	libretto	787	top
format	dramatic dialog	874	top
format	chronological after deportation	975	left
format	prophecy calls for special attention	1102	right
format	poetry	1239	left
format	Book of Acts is Luke's second volume	1286	top
format	use of "voice"	1289	top
format	John's invitation	1326	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
format	Luke's second volume emphasizes work of the Spirit	1328	top
format	Luke's focus switches from Peter to Paul	1348	left
format	Luke ends as the good news is spreading freely	1372	top
fortifications	Solomon's infrastructure	406	left
fortifications	millo	534	left lower
fortifications	Jerusalem's wall	557	right
foundation	David is the "lamp of Israel"	409	right
foundation	Jesus is the cornerstone of the new temple	717	left
foundation	Jesus is cornerstone of the church	1178	left
friendship	David's commitment to Jonathan	342	right
friendship	David's enduring love of Jonathan	345	left
friendship	in adversity	360	left
genealogy	Noah to Jacob	48	top
genealogy	Jacob's descendants	66	top
genealogy	tells the remnant their ancestral responsibilities	479	top
genealogy	inspiration to remnant	479	right
genealogy	tells the remnant their ancestral responsibilities	544	left
genealogy	Jesus fulfills prophecies of the Anointed	1155	left
genealogy	Jesus is a new Adam	1244	right
generosity	Abram defers to Lot	14	right
generosity	rich and poor are responsible for the poor	146	right
generosity	gleanings are left for the poor	313	left
generosity	results in receiving	751	right
generosity	God gives to the undeserving	1184	right
generosity	God's people should all work together	1414	left
generosity	God's people should sacrifice for each other	1422	top
generosity	have less to give more	1423	right
God's glory	hidden by cloud and fire	103	left
God's glory	God is substantial, significant, and eternal	133	right
God's glory	appearance proves His connection with Moses	180	right
God's glory	seen in Babylonia	976	left
God's glory	seen at Jesus' resurrection	1311	right
God's glory	seen when encountering Jesus through the Spirit	1418	right
God's people	will impact all nations	212	right
God's people	from any nation	866	left
God's people	Paul goes to the Jews first	1350	left
God's people	not all Jews will be saved	1388	right
God's people	are one	1440	left
God's people	follow Jesus, a humble servant	1446	right
God's people	anyone may join	1532	right
God's will	success only happens when His and ours are the same	761	right
golden calf	Israel breaks Ten Directives	111	right
golden calf	Israel commits adultery against God	220	left
goodness	wise recognize it; fools don't	783	right
grace	God parts the sea	89	right
grace	Paul's testimony	1430	top
grace	beginning of change	1495	left
greatness	disciples wonder who is the best	1220	left
greatness	requires humility	1222	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
greed	those who have want more	756	left
greed	affects the rich and poor	770	right lower
greed	hastens Jerusalem's destruction	891	right
greed	absent in God's kingdom	1359	right
growth	Judah is selfless	60	right
growth	Spirit brings maturity	1459	left
growth	necessary to stay in the Kingdom	1487	right
guilt	Judah confesses theft	60	left
guilt	theft in daylight vs. dark	99	left
healing	natural remedies are effective	463	left
heavenly messenger	Gabriel and Michael	1053	right
heavenly messenger	serves God's will	1483	left
heritage	common history unites people	264	right
heritage	Joshua reminds people of common history	279	left
heritage	Joshua reminds people to remain faithful	280	left
heritage	David and Solomon inspire rebuilding efforts	480	right
heritage	Oded asks Ephraimites to release Judah	529	right
high places	heights and trees as places of worship	223	right
high places	Solomon allows worship at local shrines	397	left
high places	Solomon allows worship at local shrines	450	right
high places	lead Asa to lose his faith	517	left
history	Abraham is Aramean	35	right
history	Jerusalem falls in Babylonia in 586	923	top
history	God uses Persia to punish Babylonia	955	left
history	Jehoiachin is treated well in Babylonia	963	right
history	20 years to destroy Jerusalem	983	top
history	Zedekiah's actions during the siege	986	left
history	Tyre's destruction	1007	left upper
history	four generals after Alexander	1056	left
history	Romans are cruel governors	1242	right lower
history	Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner	1393	right
holiness	is transferable through touch	129	left
honesty	in business	751	left
hope	three friends misunderstand hope	595	right
hope	fulfilled when Jesus is resurrected	1323	right
human	to be is to have spirit	3	right
humility	generosity should have no ulterior motive	1334	right
humility	gives leaders great strength	1508	left
identity	Moses is well-rounded	73	left
identity	Who is Jesus?	1291	left
idols	representations of other gods destroyed	217	left
idols	Canaanites worship Astarte	325	left lower
idols	interfere with a relationship with God	850	right
idols	Judah commits adultery against God	886	top
idols	pull the people away from God	900	left
idols	Judah commits adultery against God	947	left
idols	worship is adultery	1066	left
idols	rejecting Jesus is like worshiping idols	1339	left
idols	anything loved more than God	1518	right
imagery	lotus and gazelle	789	top
imagery	Jeremiah hides an undergarment	903	right
imagery	the people are hard like potsherds	911	right
imagery	the people will be broken	912	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location	
imagery	Rachel mourns the exiles	928	right	
imagery	Jeremiah buys land in Babylonia	930	top	
imagery	Jeremiah performs a prophecy in Egypt	945	left	
imagery	Jeremiah's assistant portrays Babylonia's destruction	961	right	
imagery	Ezekiel acts out prophecies	977	right	
imagery	Ezekiel acts out the temple's destruction	980	left	
imagery	Nebuchadnezzar is an eagle, Jerusalem is a vine	992	right	
imagery	regional leaders and nations are lions	994	right	
imagery	Israel and Judah are two sisters	1000	left	
imagery	God kills Egypt, the sea monster	1009	right	
imagery	pagan nations are the beasts	1049	right	
imagery	cities are named for their history	1085	right	
imagery	Babylonia represents evil	1129	left	
imagery	Jesus is sheep, shepherd, and sacrifice	1308	left	
imagery	washing feet represents opportunities for service	1313	left	
imagery	the Kingdom is like a vineyard	1315	right	
imagery	disciples must fish in a new way	1324	right	
imagery	caught fish represent the new faith community	1325	left	
imagery	receiving grace is like being adopted	1383	left	lower
imagery	a cultivated olive tree is like God's family	1388	left	
imagery	lampstands are the churches, but Jesus is Light	1527	left	
imagery	beast is a political predator	1537	right	
imagery	Babylonia represents evil world power	1542	right	
immigrants	Israel temporarily settled in Egypt	69	right	
immigrants	proper treatment shows faith in God	147	right	
immorality	Lot trades daughter for guests	22	left	
immorality	Lot's daughters trick Lot	23	right	
immorality	incest and other sins cannot be ignored	1400	left	
immutable	God may or may not be reactionary	336	left	
immutable	God's mercy delays His judgment	1511	left	
impurity	leprosy vs. other skin diseases	137	top	
impurity	normal vs. abnormal bodily discharge	141	left	
impurity	necessity of bodily fluid in procreation	142	left	
impurity	no disabled priest may go before God	149	right	
impurity	impure animals may be sold, not offered	158	left	
impurity	Eleazar explains how to purify community	199	left	
impurity	no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the holy place	236	right	
impurity	impurity cannot be near holiness	237	top	
impurity	Miriam's skin disease	238	left	
impurity	skin diseases exclude one from the temple	440	left	
impurity	Uzziah shouldn't burn incense in the temple	528	left	
indwelling	followers of Jesus are His body	1452	left	
infanticide	Pharaoh kills Hebrew boys	72	left	
infanticide	Herod questions wise men	1156	left	lower
infanticide	Herod kills boys under 2 years old	1157	left	
inheritance	God and Jacob bless the younger	65	top	
inheritance	Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh	68	left	
inheritance	Reuben and Gad want land east of Jordan	200	left	

Key	Comment	Page	Location
inheritance	Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh get land east of Jordan	211	right upper
inheritance	division of Canaan	269	left
inheritance	God promises land to each tribe	269	right
inheritance	when there are no sons	273	left
inheritance	Levi receives no land	274	left
inheritance	Solomon's descendants rule Southern Kingdom	408	right
inheritance	how possessions are divided at a death	473	right
inheritance	God's will trumps convention	474	top
inheritance	effected by disobedience	474	right
intercession	Samuel prays for Saul	335	left
intercession	Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray for Jerusalem	914	left
intercession	Daniel prays for all Jews	1053	top
intercession	Paul prays for those he teaches	1438	left
interpretation	"time of the end"	1051	right
jealousy	Joseph's brothers return to Israel	62	left
jealousy	Saul feels threatened by David's popularity	340	right
jealousy	ill-gotten gains will not last	742	right
jubilee	all debts forgiven every 50 years	154	left
judgment	may render mercy or punishment	210	top
judgment	God is consistent	528	right
judgment	rituals have become habit not worship	895	left
judgment	not avoided by those not exiled	919	left
judgment	comes from God's mercy	970	left
judgment	protection for His followers, punishment for enemies	1091	top
judgment	of everyone	1163	left
judgment	Paul's trial in Rome	1367	left
judgment	of sin when Jesus was on the cross	1383	left upper
judgment	success is apparent in the result	1418	left
justice	Bildad reasons a just God only punishes the sinful	592	right
justice	David asks for punishment for his enemies	647	left
justice	the cross frees the world from sin	1377	left
kindness	can effect a positive change	766	left
king	Israel depends on a human instead of God	230	left
king	Saul's kingly qualities	328	right
king	Saul's memory and legacy	357	top
king	David abuses his power	371	right
king	is the father of a nation	418	left
king	Jehu leads rebellion against Joram	445	left
king	foreshadows Jesus' coming	681	top
king	Eternal is king	700	left
king	should not be distracted by women and wine	772	left
king	Anointed One is David's descendant	1021	left
king	rules alongside a priest until the Anointed	1129	right
king	Jesus' claim is treasonous	1320	top
kingdom	here now, established after the seventh trumpet	1536	left
knowledge	studying God's word leads to meaningful life	630	top
knowledge	God knows how devastation will become renewal	1113	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
kosher	importance of food in spiritual life	135	right
kosher	restrictions distinguish God's people from others	226	right
kosher	separates Jews from Babylonians	1037	right
kosher	healthy food not as important as healthy spirit	1215	right
language	dialects are discernable	299	left
laws	God gives more detailed instruction	97	right
laws	trial for an accused adulteress	165	right
laws	Israel's actions reflect on God	204	right
laws	interpersonal relationships	231	right
laws	property	234	right
laws	fornication	235	left
laws	who may enter the holy place	236	left
laws	Levirate marriage	239	left
laws	rediscovery intensifies reformation	563	top
laws	marriage and Sabbath requirements are unique	570	top
laws	praise for	717	top
laws	Levirate marriage	1189	left
laws	Pharisees demand strict observance	1249	left
laws	deeper purpose of Sabbath	1249	right
laws	are good, but better to serve others	1297	right
laws	expose sin but don't free from death	1382	left
laws	unnecessary when grace is accepted	1401	left
laws	prepared God's people to have faith in Jesus	1432	right
laws	unnecessary after the Spirit	1434	right
leadership	Joseph made vizier	55	right
leadership	Jethro suggests appointing judges	95	top
leadership	Moses and Aaron must be replaced	195	left
leadership	Moses prepares the people to enter Canaan	202	right
leadership	roles of judges, kings, Levites, prophets	229	left
leadership	Joshua in the shadow of Moses	256	left
leadership	of judges	283	top
leadership	monarchy against God's will	294	left
leadership	people affirm Samuel	330	right
leadership	Saul grabs too much power	335	right
leadership	David can't be both father and king	380	right
leadership	David rises from shepherd to king	388	right
leadership	Ezra revitalizes reforms	548	right
leadership	Ezra reorganizes government and religion	552	right
leadership	Nehemiah is cupbearer for Artaxerxes	555	right
leadership	Nehemiah is unselfish	560	top
leadership	Esther is queen for a purpose	578	left
leadership	Mordecai is king's scribe	581	left
leadership	pray for those in power	661	top
leadership	government makes an error	942	left
leadership	Johanan anticipates Babylonia's revenge	943	right
leadership	Babylonian government's structure	1041	left
leadership	regent rules Babylonia	1045	left upper
leadership	emissaries appoint seven food managers	1336	right
leadership	comes from God, not humans	1350	right
leadership	Christianity doesn't threaten Roman rule	1369	right
leadership	qualifications for overseers	1467	right
leadership	passionately follow God	1478	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
life	value of	10	right
life	better not to be born than not to find goodness	779	left
lion of Judah	is Lamb-king	1531	right
Lord's Supper	body is bread and blood is wine	1230	right
Lord's Supper	gives a glimpse of the Kingdom	1280	right
Lord's Supper	affirms Jesus' life and sacrifice	1301	top
lost tribes	result from Assyrian deportation	1063	top
love	God as creation's mother	857	right
love	how gifts work together	1409	right upper
love	more important than religious practices	1409	right lower
love	should permeate our witness to Jesus	1506	right
love	greater than doubt	1515	right
loyalty	few stay on God's path	1472	right
magic	cannot control natural forces of the world	224	right
marginalized	God uses Rahab	258	left
marginalized	God can use anyone	286	right
marginalized	God can use anyone	583	left
marginalized	all should help them	1181	left
marginalized	shepherds visit Jesus first	1241	left
marginalized	the good Samaritan	1261	right
marginalized	church is to support faithful widows and elders	1469	left
marriage	God's definition	4	right
marriage	Israel is God's bride	148	left
marriage	Canaanites could cause paganism in Israel	192	right
marriage	Midianite women cause paganism in Israel	198	left
marriage	Ruth informs Boaz she is available	314	right
marriage	Michal's ineffectual love of David	341	right
marriage	marriage with pagans is prohibited	551	left
marriage	only place for sexual intimacy	744	right lower
marriage	the virtuous wife	773	right
marriage	husband and wife become blood relatives	790	right
marriage	before the first sin	793	top
marriage	Jeremiah will always be alone	907	right
marriage	ended by adultery	1182	right
marriage	more may be accomplished by singles	1402	top
marriage	Spirit binds believers together but not nonbelievers	1421	left
marriage	the Anointed and the church are united	1544	right
measure	a long cubit	1024	left
memorial	physical reminders of God's actions	179	top
memorial	physical reminders of God's ways	222	right
memorial	focus of God and learn past lessons	259	left
memory	shapes societies	785	left
mercy	Abraham explores the limits	21	left
mercy	David has opportunity to kill Saul	348	right
mercy	God forgave Saul's persecution of Christians	1466	right
miracle	Aaron's staff bears fruit	182	left
miracle	God sends water out of rocks	216	right
miracle	Elijah returns boy to life	420	left
miracle	Elisha's bones revive a dead man	453	left
miracle	God heals Hezekiah	841	top
miracle	Mary was a virgin	1155	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
miracle	used to meet needs and reveal the Kingdom	1158	right
miracle	caused by faith	1186	right
miracle	at the Jordan River	1203	right
miracle	Jesus has power over nature	1210	left
miracle	caused by woman's faith	1211	right
miracle	Jesus raises the dead	1212	left
miracle	disciples help with loaves and fishes	1214	left
miracle	caused by faith	1214	right
miracle	Jesus heals the blind man in stages	1217	left
miracle	disciples can't heal the boy	1219	right
miracle	Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus	1223	left
miracle	Jesus curses the fig tree	1224	left
miracle	Jesus' signs and wonders announce the Kingdom	1246	top
miracle	healed man is questioned by Jewish leaders	1297	left
miracle	Jesus raises Lazarus	1310	left
miracle	Paul's first puts him and Silas in prison	1354	right
miracle	Paul raises the boy who fell from the window	1360	right
mother	Bilhah's child is Rachel's	38	right
mother	God birthed Israel	250	left
mother	Jerusalem is the mother of God's people	870	right
mother	Jerusalem is the mother, God the midwife	879	right
mother	Jerusalem will birth God's people	880	left
mother	dragon attacks the infant	1537	left
Mount Moriah	Abraham takes Isaac	26	left
mourning	use of dust and sackcloth	600	right
mourning	temple has been destroyed	682	right
mourning	God seems to be inactive	688	left
mourning	suffering requires dependence on God	1421	right
myth	Yam and Tannin	591	right
myth	Behemoth	625	right
myth	Leviathan	626	top
myth	Rahab	860	left
myth	Danel	988	top
name	defines the person	19	left
name	Jacob wrestles with stranger	43	top
name	God reveals His name to Moses	75	top
name	Meribah	184	right
name	Kadesh	185	left
name	Israel is known by God's name and reputation	252	left
name	God is associated with heights and strength	605	top
name	"God" reflects power, "Eternal" is His personal	659	top
name	calls the presence of God	667	right
name	Jesus is Immanuel	1156	left upper
name	what God's people do reflects on Him	1376	right
numbers	meanings of seven and twelve	1530	right
numbers	meaning of 666	1538	right
obedience	results in spiritual sensitivity	245	right
obedience	prophet reminds people to follow God	290	left
obedience	human weakness may become God's strength	300	right
obedience	Manasseh repents and is rewarded	536	right
obedience	Ezra answers to Artaxerxes	550	right
obedience	Jews obey God when Saul did not	582	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
obedience	necessary to approach God	637	right
obedience	no matter the circumstances	780	right
obedience	would make Judah's future bright	839	right
obedience	must be chosen	893	right
obedience	necessary with sacrifice	1122	right
obedience	seeks love and truth over worldly desires	1399	right
obedience	Paul was called by God and Jesus to his work	1429	left
obedience	honor Jesus' supremacy and God's grace	1505	right
obedience	yields pleasure	1514	right
offering	Abram to Melchizedek	16	left
offering	Aaron puts manna before the "covenant"	92	right lower
offering	three types of peace	130	left
offering	during Tishri	197	top
order	lifestyle should reflect order of creation	235	left upper
order	church is like family	1454	left lower
outsiders	punish and bless Israel	548	left
outsiders	those who accept God have all privileges of Jews	1034	top
outsiders	God cares for the Gentiles	1245	top
outsiders	welcome in the Kingdom	1267	right
outsiders	Jesus' message is for everyone	1345	left
outsiders	Spirit enters them	1346	left
outsiders	grace is for everyone	1364	top
passion	David's is sometimes good, sometimes bad	363	left
passion	peace is preferable	754	right
passion	Peter is driven by emotion	1217	right
patience	God waits for right time to act	817	left
patience	allows as many as possible to come to Him before judgment	1512	left
peace	comes from knowing God	856	right
peace	when the Anointed rules	1101	left
peace	Sabbath is the day to recognize God's provision	1170	right
peace	comes in the presence of God	1317	left
peace	comes from commitment to the Anointed	1448	right
peace	awaits God's people	1486	left
penitence	confession and trust in God's mercy	655	left
Pentecost	Spirit enters the disciples	1329	right
persecution	Manasseh orders Isaiah's arrest	464	right
persecution	refines faith	1056	right
persecution	in the first century and now	1336	left
persecution	spreads Jesus' message	1340	left
persecution	God sustains His followers	1357	left
persecution	struggles have stayed the same	1528	right
plagues	God displays power over Pharaoh	84	right
pollution	human practices affect the land	146	left
position	advancement is only remembered during life	778	right
position	expected by James and John's mother	1185	left
position	place on earth is reversed in the Kingdom	1268	right
power	inequality makes rich and poor	777	right
power	of God like a lion's	831	right
power	scares community of demon-possessed man	1211	left
power	leaders ask where His comes from	1225	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
power	good news reveals how God restores His people	1374	top
power	of God cannot be understood as a philosophy	1397	right
praise	God is always worthy	658	left
praise	command to praise Him	696	top
praise	natural response to God's work	706	top
praise	Jerusalem and the temple are grand	723	right
praise	God is rebuilding Jerusalem and giving her peace	735	left
praise	all creation must praise Him	737	right
praise	God redeemed the world through the Anointed	1437	right
prayer	maintaining integrity while asking for mercy	645	right
prayer	Jesus seeks solitude	1204	right
prayer	Jesus asks for God's will	1281	top
prayer	personal and corporate	1502	right
preparation	John the Baptist precedes Jesus	1157	right
preparation	John the Baptist precedes Jesus	1290	left
pride	rich man doesn't follow Jesus	1221	right
pride	Paul's pain keeps him humble	1426	top
priesthood	Aaron's descendants	78	right
priesthood	garments and stones represent tribes	107	left
priesthood	high priest's garments	107	right
priesthood	Levites instead of oldest of each family	162	right
priesthood	tent activities continue during war	170	left
priesthood	Levites eat a portion of offerings to God	182	right
priesthood	God provides for the Levites	230	right
priesthood	Levites eat a portion of offerings to God	451	right
priesthood	Levites perform daily rituals	476	right
priesthood	Levites' duties	477	right
priesthood	Levites service the temple, not all as priests	481	left
priesthood	more Levites serve the temple than the tent	494	left
priesthood	perform daily rituals in temple	1237	top
priesthood	corrupted under Roman rule	1319	right
priesthood	Jesus is the ultimate mediator between humans and God	1486	right
priesthood	Order of Melchizedek	1488	top
Prince of Tyre	creation like Adam	1008	left
promise	God's to Abram	13	right
promise	Esau founds nation of Edom	48	left
promise	remnant reassured David's descendant will rule	488	left
promise	remnant reassured David's descendant will rule	524	left
promise	David's descendants will always rule	694	right
promise	God's followers will win	864	top
promise	love is the only obligation	1390	right
promised land	Abraham buys property in Canaan	28	top
promised land	12 men spy out Canaan	175	left
promised land	an end to Israel's nomadic life	216	left
prophecy	Samuel's last words	330	left
prophecy	kings don't always heed	424	left
prophecy	Syria will conquer the Northern Kingdom	441	right
prophecy	given through a child's name	804	right
prophecy	surrounding nations will bow to God	813	right
prophecy	through Isaiah's actions	818	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
prophecy	God will punish Babylonia	819	top
prophecy	God will punish Tyre	821	right
prophecy	God will punish Edom	835	left
prophecy	Servant is Jesus	847	right
prophecy	God will guide exiles home	865	left
prophecy	proves God is not defeated	869	left
prophecy	God's new creation will be a place of peace	878	left
prophecy	God will punish Babylonia	920	left
prophecy	God will restore what Babylonia destroys	933	left
prophecy	God will punish those rejoicing over Judah's fall	1004	right
prophecy	Babylonia will destroy Egypt from north to south	1011	left
prophecy	can be fulfilled many times	1050	top
prophecy	cannot be silenced	1087	left
prophecy	kingdom of heaven	1193	right
prophecy	Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey	1223	right
prophecy	Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey	1276	right
prophecy	all are coming true	1546	right
prophets	Elijah in the Northern Kingdom	418	right
prophets	many working as Assyrians rise	454	left
prophets	Haggai and Zechariah motivate Jews	546	right
prophets	God's mouthpieces	796	left
prophets	John the Baptist is foreshadowed	842	right
prophets	use metaphors in messages	882	right lower
prophets	Jeremiah questions God's ways	902	right
prophets	Jeremiah's message is a burden	918	right
prophets	God's mouthpieces	962	left
prophets	vindicated when predictions come true	1015	right
prophets	John the Baptist is foreshadowed	1142	right
prophets	Moses wanted the Hebrews to listen to the next one	1179	left
prophets	not usually priests	1237	right
prophets	John abandons the priesthood of his family	1243	top
prophets	Paul explains Jesus' restoration	1374	left
provision	God gives food and water in the desert	92	right upper
provision	Elijah rests under the broom tree	422	right
punishment	Philistia returns golden mice and tumors	324	left
punishment	God uses David's children	372	right
punishment	consequences of disobedience	807	left
punishment	destruction comes because they refused God	896	right
punishment	Babylonia's siege results from God's judgment	971	right
punishment	God punishes Edom for pillaging Israel	1017	right
punishment	Nineveh is "trashed"	1108	left
purity	priests help people avoid impurity	134	right
purity	God sanctifies the camp	164	right
purity	God can't put His holy city among unholy people	805	top
reconcile	*kipper* as a sacrifice	234	left
reconcile	begins with God's gift of grace and salvation	1379	right
redemption	Perez is David's ancestor	51	right
redemption	Boaz reconstitutes Elimelech's family	315	left
redemption	Job needs God to acknowledge his innocence	603	left
redemption	new covenant with all humanity	929	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
redemption	new covenant with all humanity	1020	top
redemption	God's one goal	1131	top
redemption	Jesus is sanctifying everyone	1216	left
redemption	God's people must exemplify it	1315	left
redemption	resurrection begins God's work saving all	1412	right
redemption	freedom from death	1413	left
redemption	righteousness is God and only comes to those "in Him"	1420	right
redemption	accepting God's grace, then growing in it	1510	left
reformation	Josiah motivated by book of law	465	left
reformation	Asa restores proper worship	514	right
reformation	Asa makes an example of his mother	515	right
reformation	Jehoshaphat dispatches teachers	517	right
reformation	Hezekiah consolidates worship in Jerusalem	535	left
reformation	Josiah reinstates Passover	538	right
remnant	God will remember His people	800	left
remnant	will have a new exodus after exile	800	right
remnant	will have a new exodus after exile	849	left
remnant	shouldn't revolt against Babylonia	925	top
remnant	those who survived God's judgment	1084	left upper
remnant	those who survived God's judgment	1387	left
rescue	God is a shelter for His followers	635	right
rescue	God will judge and sentence enemies	646	left
rescue	David's prayer as he acted insane	651	left
rescue	God protects now, one day conflict will cease	661	right
rescue	God is a shelter for His followers	669	right
rescue	results from faith not works	1438	right
rescue	Jesus completed what Moses began	1485	left
respect	David kills Saul's assistant in suicide	359	right
respect	foreigners honor David	378	left
respect	respect elders even when they are wrong	618	left
respect	wise men bring Jesus gifts	1156	right
respect	woman douses Jesus in perfume	1229	right
respect	should be shown to governing authorities	1390	left
responsibility	Reuben must confess Joseph is gone	50	left
responsibility	everyone has a task in the community	495	right
restoration	remnant of South will re-found Israel	470	right
restoration	remnant will rebuild God's temple	540	right
restoration	follows punishment of His people	810	left
restoration	under the Anointed	843	left
restoration	God uses Cyrus	844	right
restoration	is completed in Jesus	872	top
restoration	can only come from above	875	right
restoration	Book of Consolation	926	left
restoration	happens when people receive new hearts	985	left
restoration	Jews are organized differently in New Israel	1031	left
restoration	will come after judgment	1089	right
restoration	believers are able to fulfill God's will	1325	right
restoration	comes from the justice brought through Jesus' actions	1378	left
restoration	happens when Jesus is resurrected	1386	left
revenge	attack on Shechem after Dinah's rape	46	left
revenge	cities of refuge	214	left

Key	Comment	Page	Location
revenge	cities of refuge	276	left
revenge	Solomon kills Shimei	396	right
revenge	nations who punished Judah will be destroyed	1117	right
revolution	peace with Jesus, violence with Barabbas	1233	left
revolution	must be spiritual	1317	right
rural life	God commands to scatter from cities	12	left
sacrifice	animals are center of Israel's life	108	right
sacrifice	some meat is for God and people	124	right
sacrifice	peace offering	125	right
sacrifice	animals must be properly slaughtered for food	145	left
sacrifice	burnt offerings	1029	left
sacrifice	giving results in receiving God's rewards	1178	right
sacrifice	Jesus is the innocent substitutionary sacrifice	1232	left
sacrifice	actions are offerings to God	1389	left
sacrifice	surrender rights for the love of another	1406	right
sacrifice	life to enter the Kingdom	1457	left
Samaritans	Assyrian deportation causes blended religion	459	left
Samaritans	tainted religion by marrying outsiders	1294	right
satan	dragon makes a final attack before being bound	1546	left
servitude	Israel and Judah are vassals of Shishak	415	left
servitude	Solomon is a fair master	503	right
servitude	our master must be chosen	1381	right
share	human role in creation	3	left
shepherd	David and Jesus are gentle shepherd-kings	643	top
shepherd	world rulers will be replaced by Anointed shepherd-king	917	top
shepherd	world rulers will be replaced by Anointed shepherd-king	1017	top
shepherd	Anointed One is a good shepherd	1134	left
Song of Deborah	God uses two women to bring victory	288	left
Song of Moses	witness to the covenant	249	left
speaks	God creates	2	top
Special Messenger	God sends to Hagar	18	left
Special Messenger	Moses sees burning bush	73	right
succession	Adonijah asks to marry Abishag	395	right
succession	Jehu kills all of Ahab's descendants	447	right
succession	Athaliah attempts to kill all Ahaziah's sons	449	right
succession	monarchs are subject to coups	522	top
suffering	foreshadows Jesus' experiences	677	right
suffering	of the Servant	859	left
suffering	has a place in God's plan	1507	left
suicide	Saul kills himself to avoid torture	356	right
supremacy	God controls nature	266	right
supremacy	God's will trumps convention	498	left
supremacy	God controls nature	621	top
supremacy	God is limitless	770	right upper
supremacy	God is in charge of history	852	left
supremacy	God shows His power and king's weakness	1045	left lower
supremacy	God controls nature	1106	left
supremacy	Jesus is Lord	1453	left
talent	God inspires Bezalel and Oholiab	117	left
talent	God inspires people to glorify Himself	116	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
teaching	follow parents not peers	739	right
teaching	Sermon on the Mount	1160	left
teaching	kingdom of heaven	1180	right
teaching	judgment	1191	right
teaching	parables apply truth to everyday life	1209	left
teaching	parables encourage reflection	1254	right
teaching	Jesus trains the disciples	1258	right
teaching	parable of the returning son is an invitation	1270	left
teaching	Kingdom is here now	1275	top
teaching	Paul uses culture to explain the good news	1356	left
teaching	emulate Paul's life, not just his words	1361	right
temple	construction is completion of exodus	400	left
temple	Israel is centered on God	403	left
temple	Ahaz builds a new altar	456	right
temple	Solomon uses wealth to honor God	502	right
temple	physical description	503	top
temple	Solomon is faithful so God's glory enters	506	top
temple	Cyrus returns temple treasures	543	left
temple	God builds on Jesus as cornerstone	827	top
temple	God wants humans' best, even though God is better	878	right
temple	existence won't save the city	894	top
temple	existence won't save the city	967	right
temple	Ezekiel measures the coming temple	1024	top
temple	Ezekiel can't enter holy place	1026	left
temple	comparison to 'Ain Dara'	1027	left
temple	made up of believers	1180	left
temple	Jesus expels the merchants	1185	top
temple	Jesus expels the merchants	1224	right
temple	veil to most holy place tears when Jesus dies	1234	left
temple	veil to most holy place tears when Jesus dies	1284	right
temple	unnecessary when God and Lamb are among the people	1547	right upper
temptation	Israel lives among pagans	285	right
temptation	Sennacherib questions Hezekiah's choices	534	right
temptation	even heavenly messengers sin	599	left
temptation	excess use of alcohol wastes life	763	right
temptation	sin has always been attractive	781	top
thanksgiving	God created all and chose His people	702	top
thanksgiving	Colossian hymn	1451	right
transfiguration	confirms Peter's identification of the Anointed	1218	right
treaty	actions have consequences	223	left
treaty	a copy stays in the covenant chest	240	right
treaty	consequences	241	left
treaty	keeping the covenant will bless Israel	242	left
treaty	breaking the covenant will curse Israel	242	right
treaty	sky and land witness the covenant	247	right
treaty	do not make one with Canaanites	265	left
treaty	foreign alliances honor other gods	516	top
treaty	Nehemiah could threaten Sanballat's alliance	556	left
treaty	Israel should avoid alliances and depend on God	815	right

Key	Comment	Page	Location
treaty	Israel should avoid alliances and depend on God	884	top
treaty	Edom resists Babylonia	953	left
treaty	with foreigners is adultery against God	990	right
treaty	Israel and Judah commit adultery against God	1002	right
treaty	Judah should avoid alliances and depend on God	1067	top
tree	of knowledge of good and evil	5	left
tree	of life	1547	right lower
trinity	the Spirit chooses where to give gifts	1408	right
trinity	dragon, beast, earth-beast are unholy	1541	left upper
trust	God can do what humans cannot	669	left
trust	God and His messengers protect	697	right
trust	Jerusalem should rely on God, not weapons	821	top
trust	Jeremiah knows God will protect him	901	right
trust	leaders must choose to believe in Jesus or not	1188	left
trust	Peter knows God is in control	1347	left
trust	suffering requires dependence on God	1416	left
trust	weakness leads to dependence on God	1427	left
trust	should lead to action	1498	right
truth	Pharisees are hypocritical	1190	left
truth	Pharisees are blind to it	1307	left
truth	is never complete	1358	left
truth	Paul's message is from God and Jerusalem	1431	left
truth	only one	1477	left
truth	Jesus is fully God and fully human	1517	top
understanding	David and Saul acknowledge each other's fate	349	top
Urim and Thummim	use	131	right upper
Urim and Thummim	form and function are a mystery	563	left
victory	complete after destruction of city and people	262	left
victory	Israel conquers many Canaanite cities	268	left
victory	David wins the battle in the forest	381	left
victory	God gives Jehoshaphat more territory	521	left
victory	Jesus is the King	713	top
victory	Anointed suffers and dies to win Kingdom	1285	top
victory	comes from God's love	1384	left
violence	work to stop it	764	left
vision	Jacob's dream	36	right
vision	God reigning in peace from New Jerusalem	798	left
vision	Isaiah sees a message	810	right
vision	Jeremiah sees first two	882	right upper
vision	Jeremiah sees devastation	888	left
vision	God's anger covers the scroll	976	right
vision	Zechariah has eight	1125	left
vision	Zechariah sees a heavenly courtroom	1127	left
vision	scroll is bittersweet like God's judgment	1535	left
vision	witnesses speak God's message under temporary protection	1535	right
vows	voluntary but must be fulfilled	157	right
vows	women's vows must be approved by men	197	right
vows	futility curse	239	right
vows	David refuses to fight Amalekites	356	right upper

Key	Comment	Page	Location
vows	David fulfills promise to Jonathan	368	left
wandering	Moses outlines additional 38 years	201	left
wandering	temple court is reminiscent of Hebrews' camp	533	left
wandering	members of the Kingdom are resident aliens on earth	1496	left
wealth	poverty requires dependence on God	219	left
wealth	best used to care for the poor	1271	right
wealth	early church had greedy and generous members	1334	left
weather	personifies personal struggle	621	right
winged guardians	appearance and function	401	left
winged guardians	appearance and function	983	right
wisdom	foreign monarchs honor Solomon with gifts	509	left
wisdom	hard to find without God's direction	611	left
wisdom	psalms instruct the singer and listener	663	right
wisdom	brings tangible and intangible benefits to life	741	right
wisdom	should be remembered and exercised	746	right
wisdom	for the wise, fools, and naïve	749	top
wisdom	choose words carefully	750	right
wisdom	is following God's way	1441	right
wisdom	dependence on God	1498	left
women	some are good, some are evil	304	left
women	Abigail is politically cunning	351	right
women	concubines won't have deep marriage relationships	793	left
women	first to hear Jesus is resurrected	1235	left
work	as God works, humans are made to work	745	right
work	desire and ability to work are gifts from God	779	left
work	Paul earns a wage and donates his teaching time	1404	right
world	impermanent	777	left
worship	David dances as chest enters Jerusalem	366	left
worship	David sings of God's strength	386	right
worship	songs part of regular temple worship	682	top
worship	should be energetic	736	right
worship	meaningless from the disobedient	893	left
worship	rituals have become habit not worship	1084	right
worship	treatment of others reflects love of God	1518	left

Topical Guide to the Scripture

Topic	Reference
First Advent	
Prophesied	
woman's child	Ge 3:15
a prophet like Moses	De 18:15, 18-19
birth of Immanuel	Is 7:14
Glorious Birth	
angels' announcement	Lk 2:10-14
Jesus' Mission	
divine sacrifice	Mk 10:45
save the lost	Lk 19:10
a new vessel, servant/man	Ph 2:5-7
grace revealed	2 Ti 1:8-10
Second Advent	
Important Aspects of His Mission	
judgment	Ma 25:32-36
primary teaching on second advent	1 Th 5:1-11
Jesus Predicted	
throne will be wondrous	Ma 25:31
Jesus making arrangements	Jo 14:1-3
Jesus will return the same way He left	Ac 1:9-11
Unknown and Sudden Time	
be ready; no one knows when	Ma 24:36, 44
be alert; no one knows when	Mk 13:32-37
alertness	Lk 12:40
will appear from heaven	2 Th 1:7-10
will come unexpectedly	2 Pe 3:10-13
Heavenly Descension	
will descend from heaven	1 Th 4:16
rescue those waiting His return	He 9:28
His appearing	2 Ti 4:8
Abiding in Christ	
Christ's Teaching	
makes disciples	Jo 8:31
His love	Jo 15:4, 9-10
if you live with Him, walk His path	1 Jo 2:6
Abortion	
miscarriage penalty	Ex 21:22-25
stillbirth	Job 3:16
miscarriage as judgment	Ho 9:14

Topic	Reference
Alcohol	
Abstinence	
Nazirite vow—none	Nu 6:3
wine or spirits	Ju 13:4, 7, 14
not for king and princes	Pr 31:4, 6
not strong drink	Lk 1:15
Abuse	
drunken sleep	Ge 9:20-21
strong drink—noisy fights	Pr 20:1
early morning to late evening	Is 5:11
drunken priests and prophets	Is 28:7
will get our fill of intoxicating drink	Is 56:12
preach to you about abuse	Mi 2:11
become intoxicated	Re 17:2
Rules Concerning	
if before worship—death	Le 10:9
strong wine	Nu 28:7
law of tithe	De 14:26
feast of aged wine	Is 25:6
not new in old wine skins	Lk 5:37-39
good for the stomach	1 Ti 5:23
Jesus and	
Jesus' blood	Ma 26:27-29
water into wine	Jo 2:1-11
Anger	
Characteristic of Fools	
quickly evident	Pr 12:16
quick tempter magnifies foolishness	Pr 14:29
heavy the burden of anger	Pr 27:3
Characteristics of Sin	
disputes, dissensions	Ga 5:20
Refrain from	
hot head stirs trouble	Pr 15:18
better to control temper than conquer a city	Pr 16:32
discretion not easily anger	Pr 19:11
not quick to anger	Tit 1:7
don't get worked into a rage	Jam 1:19
Warning with Children	
don't drive children away	Ep 6:4
don't infuriate your children	Col 3:21
Warning with Prayer	
pray without rage	1 Ti 2:8
Anger of God as Slow	
slow to anger	Ex 34:6
He does not anger easily	Joel 2:13
Anger of God as Quick	
furiously angry	De 29:23-28
Achan kept spoil	Jos 7:1, 11-12
Anger of Jesus	
at Pharisees	Mk 3:5
in the temple	Ma 21:12

Topic	Reference
Anger *(continued)*	
Anger of Man	
Jacob with Rachel	Ge 30:1-2
anger about God's grace to Nineveh	Jon 4:1-9
at Jesus	Lk 4:28
will never produce God's justice	Jam 1:20
Christian Attitude Toward	
don't let anger carry into sin	Ep 4:26, 31
Antichrist	
there are many antichrists	1 Jo 2:18, 22
to not affirm Jesus is the spirit of the antichrist	1 Jo 4:3
Apostles' Teaching	
early church committed to	Ac 2:42
proclaimed Jesus in public, temple, and homes	Ac 5:42
central message—gospel	1 Co 15:1-8
have followed my instruction	2 Ti 3:10
Asherah	
cut down poles	Ex 34:13
400 prophets of Asherah	1 Ki 18:19
Asa's mother worshiped	2 Ch 15:16
Assyrian Invasion	
Invasion of Israel	
carried off Israel into exile	2 Ki 17:6
Invasion of Judah	
Sennacherib attacked	2 Ki 18:13-16
Authority	
Divine	
given to Jesus	Ma 28:18-20
all created by Him—power and authority	Col 1:16
all authority	Col 2:9-10, 15
authorities and powers submit to Him	1 Pe 3:22
Human	
in God's image	Ge 1:26-31
submit to authority	Ro 13:1-6
the power the Lord has given	2 Co 10:8
Baal	
people bound themselves to Baal of Poer	Nu 25:3, 5
Jehu eliminated Baal worship	2 Ki 10:28
Babylonian Captivity	
wept, thinking of Zion	Ps 137:1
deported by Nebuzaradan	Je 39:9-10
survivors—servants of Babylon	2 Ch 36:5-21
Israel's idolatry	Ac 7:43
Boldness	
right living will stand their ground	Pr 28:1
Apollos in Ephesus	Ac 18:26
Paul in Rome	Ac 28:31

Topic	Reference
Boldness *(continued)*	
possible for us to have courage	Ep 3:12
courage	Ph 1:14, 20
step boldly to the throne	He 4:16
Bond of Peace	
unity of Spirit with the bond of peace	Ep 4:3
Bosses	
Jesus' Sermon on the Mount	Ma 5–7
can't serve two	Ma 6:24
be kind	Ep 6:9
treat slaves fairly	Col 4:1
submit to the master	1 Pe 2:18
Calling	
sheep know shepherd's voice	Jo 10:3
if not sent by God	Ro 10:13-14
He issues a calling	Ro 11:29
live a life worthy of the calling	Ep 4:1
to His holy calling	2 Ti 1:9
a heavenly calling	He 3:1
God called and claimed you	2 Pe 1:10
Charity	
welcome weak in faith without disputes	Ro 14:1-21
shoulder each other's burdens	Ga 6:1-6
Chemosh	
your people are destroyed	Nu 21:29
Amorite god	Ju 11:24
turn away from God to Chemosh	1 Ki 11:7, 33
will go into exile	Je 48:7, 13, 46
Childcare	
teach: sitting; walking; before bed, rising	De 6:7
children are a gift from God	Ps 127:3-5
teach a child, will stay on course	Pr 22:6
don't withhold discipline	Pr 23:13
Jesus welcomes, blesses children	Lk 18:16
nurture, discipline, and teach	Ep 6:4
obey your parents	Col 3:20
Christ and the Law	
came to fulfill	Ma 5:17
Jesus names greatest commandment	Ma 22:37-40
Jesus offered grace and truth	Jo 1:17
climax when the Anointed One arrives	Ro 10:4
law of the Anointed	Ga 6:2
Christlikeness	
initiated into Jesus the Anointed	Ro 6:3
living in Jesus	Ro 8:1
imitate me—I imitate Jesus	1 Co 11:1

Topic	Reference
Christlikeness *(continued)*	
experience suffering and comfort	2 Co 1:5
we are the sweet smell of the Anointed	2 Co 2:15
reflect the glory of the Lord	2 Co 3:18
that we might live for Him	2 Co 5:14-17
Church Discipline	
one who won't repent	Ma 18:17
Ananias and Sapphira punished	Ac 5:11
man with a rebellious nature	1 Co 5:4-5
live under correction of the Father	He 12:5-11
Church Government	
caring for members	Ac 6:3-6
leaders: emissaries, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers	Ep 4:11-12
elders and deacons	Ph 1:1
overseer qualifications	1 Ti 3:1-7
elders	1 Pe 5:1-4
Church Activities	
apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer	Ac 2:42
proclaiming Jesus as Anointed One, the Liberating King	Ac 5:42
Paul taught publicly and privately	Ac 20:20
Communion	
With God and Christ	
pray in secret	Ma 6:6-15
intimate relationship	1 Co 1:9
joined with the Lord	1 Co 6:14-17
united with the Anointed	2 Co 5:17
fellowship of the Holy Spirit	2 Co 13:14
new life enmeshed with the Anointed	Col 3:1-3
become one	He 2:10-13
share in Anointed's suffering	1 Pe 4:12-16
intimate connection with the Father	1 Jo 1:6-7
we are officially His children	1 Jo 3:1-3
washed robes in the blood of the lamb	Re 7:13-17
With Other Believers and Saints	
like a gentle rain	Ps 133:1-3
early church, giving	Ac 2:42-45
partnered with me	Ph 1:5
Lord's Supper or Table	
Jesus inaugurates	Ma 26:26-29
early church unity, joy	Ac 2:42, 46
primary teaching on communion	1 Co 11:23-34
Concubines	
Abram and Hagar	Ge 16:1-4
Sarai jealous of Hagar	Ge 21:10-14
Abraham and Keturah	Ge 25:1
Levite's mistress	Ju 19:1
300 mistresses	1 Ki 11:3

Topic	Reference
Congregation Tent	
collection for building	Ex 25:1-9
God's glory blanketed	Ex 40:34
covenant chest in the middle of congregation tent	1 Ch 16:1
Stephen's sermon to the council in Jerusalem	Ac 7:44
was set up for worship	He 9:2-5
Conscience	
Good Conscience	
Paul's conscience clear before God	Ac 24:16
with a clear conscience	2 Co 1:12
appeal to God for a good conscience	1 Pe 3:21
Evil Conscience	
hypocrisy of liars	1 Ti 4:2
polluted conscience	Tit 1:15
Courtship	
finding a wife for Jacob	Ge 24:1-67
Jacob and Rachel	Ge 29:9-30
of Samson	Ju 14:1-7
Ruth and Boaz	Ru 3:4-13
Joseph and Mary	Ma 1:18-20
Covenant Chest	
jar with manna within	Ex 16:33-34
construction of	Ex 37:1-5
sacrifice for mercy seat	Le 16:2, 14-17
covenant chest leads the procession in destroying Jericho	Jos 6:6-20
Philistines send covenant chest back	1 Sa 6:7-15
covenant chest brought into the temple	1 Ki 8:1-11
Criminals	
Barabbas	Ma 27:16-26
crucified with Jesus	Lk 23:33-43
Day of the Lord	
the day is nearly here	Is 13:6-13
God's judgment	Eze 30:3
great and dreadful day	Joel 2:1, 11, 31
do you look forward to the day	Am 5:18-20
the day is near and will be bitter	Zep 1:7, 14
can anyone live through the day of the Lord	Mal 3:2
Peter quotes the prophet Joel	Ac 2:20
as a thief in the night	2 Pe 3:10
Demons	
Jesus sends demons into pigs	Ma 8:28-34
recognize Jesus; Jesus sends away	Mk 1:23-26
know Jesus and Paul	Ac 19:13-16
idol sacrifices made by demons	1 Co 10:20
doctrine of demons	1 Ti 4:1
demons believe also	Jam 2:19
demonic spirits	Re 16:14

Topic	Reference
Disciples of Jesus	
empowered by Jesus	Ma 10:1, 24-25, 32-39
cost	Ma 16:24-28
emissaries	Lk 6:13
the cost; family	Lk 14:26-27, 33
wedding feast in Cana	Jo 2:2
abide in Him	Jo 8:31
Distinguishing Spirits	
difference between sacred and profane	Le 10:10
distinguish prophetic spirits	1 Co 12:10
to distinguish—good from evil	He 5:14
Divine Guidance	
discern what God's will is	Ro 12:1-3
choose obedience	2 Co 10:2-6
learn to do what pleases God	Ep 5:8-10
Divisions in the Church	
guard against anyone causing conflict	Ro 16:17
don't allow divisions	1 Co 1:10, 13
no division in the body of Christ	1 Co 12:25
divide friends	Jude 19
Divorce	
Rules Concerning	
if not a virgin	De 22:13-19, 28-29
can't take back after intercourse	De 24:1-4
In Israel	
legal document for divorce	Is 50:1
Israel because of adultery	Je 3:8
Foreign Wives	
put aside	Ez 10:1-16
Israel abandoned the Eternal	Ho 2:1-22
God hates divorce	Mal 2:14-16
Jesus' Teaching	
Jesus' perspective on divorce	Ma 5:27-32
Jesus' perspective on divorce	Ma 19:3-9
Jesus' perspective on divorce	Mk 10:2-9
and adultery	Lk 16:18
Paul's Teaching	
divorce and adultery	Ro 7:1-3
primary teaching on divorce	1 Co 7:10-17
Duty	
Toward God	
obey God	De 11:1
God expects reverence and obedience	Ec 12:13
and God's family	Ma 12:50
God's followers worship in truth, spiritually	Jo 4:23
serve the one, true, living God	1 Th 1:9
Toward People	
Apostles commission men to oversee food distribution	Ac 6:3
submit to authority	Ro 13:1-7

Topic	Reference
Duty *(continued)*	
Toward People *(continued)*	
your liberty shouldn't harm a weaker Christian	1 Co 8:1-13
wives submit, husbands love	Ep 5:22-33
children obey, honor parents	Ep 6:1-4
with humility and kindness do right, exalt Him	1 Pe 3:8-16
Early Church Leaders	
Peter	Ac 2:14
Paul	Ac 13:16
James	Ac 15:13
Apollos	Ac 18:24
Phoebe, Prisca, Aquila, Andronicus, Junias	Ro 16:1, 3, 7
Edom	
Esau, brother of Jacob	Ge 25:30
would not let Israel pass through	Nu 20:18-21
marked for destruction	Is 34:5-6
object of horror	Je 49:16-19
Education	
reminders	De 6:7
pass down His instruction	Ps 78:1-8
first step toward knowledge is worship	Pr 1:7-8
twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple	Lk 2:46
nurture, discipline, and teach	Ep 6:4
all Scripture—useful	2 Ti 3:15-16
Egyptian Dominance	
provided for neighbors	Ge 41:57
Israel lived under 430 years	Ex 12:40
Eldercare	
for widows	De 10:18
defender of widows	Ps 68:5
take care of the widow	Ps 146:9
providing for widows	1 Ti 5:3, 8
widows	Jam 1:27
Enemies of God's People	
provisions in the midst of enemies	Ps 23:5
live peacefully near enemies	Pr 16:7
Ahab and Jezebel	1 Ki 19:1-2
Haman	Es 3:10
love and pray for enemies	Ma 5:44
if enemies are hungry, feed them	Ro 12:20
put all enemies under His feet	1 Co 15:25-26
put enemies under your feet	He 1:13
world order	Jam 4:4
Enmity	
woman's child and snake	Ge 3:15
characteristic of sin	Ga 5:20

Topic	Reference
Environment	
humanity, trustees of creation	Ge 1:26-31
everything is the Eternal's	Ps 24:1
making a new heaven and a new earth	Is 66:22
Envy	
the wicked look happy to me	Ps 73:3
don't envy evil people	Pr 24:1
endless desire for more	Ro 1:29
love doesn't envy	1 Co 13:4
leads to envy	1 Ti 6:4
get rid of envy	1 Pe 2:1-2
Ethiopia	
descendants of Ham—Cush	Ge 10:6
Moses married a Cushite	Nu 12:1
ally of Egypt against Assyria	Is 20:1-6
Philip and the Ethiopian treasurer	Ac 8:26-40
Evangelism	
to all nations	Ma 28:18-20
Jesus as Liberator	Ac 5:42
Philip in Caesarea	Ac 21:8
some evangelists	Ep 4:11
be ready to give a defense	1 Pe 3:15
Evil	
knowledge of	Ge 3:5
heart of humanity is set on	Ge 8:21
throng of evil	Ps 22:16
walk away from evil	Ps 34:14
evil will not escape punishment	Pr 11:21
confuse some with evil	Is 5:20
deliverance from evil	Ma 6:13
don't retaliate with evil	Ro 12:17
Creator free from evil	Jam 1:13
Faith	
As Gift	
asking for more	Lk 17:5
available to all	Ac 15:8-9
sins are atoned through faith	Ro 3:24-25
made right through faith	Ro 5:1
assigned to each a measure of faith	Ro 12:3
grace received through faith	Ep 2:8-9
precious	2 Pe 1:1
As Behavior	
God is faithful	De 7:9
Aaron disobeyed at Meribah-kadesh	De 32:51
righteous one lives by faith	Hab 2:4
rewarded	Ma 25:21
faith, love, and hope remain	1 Co 13:13
remains faithful	2 Ti 2:13
One who promised to be faithful	He 10:23
show faith by works	Jam 2:18

Topic	Reference
Faith *(continued)*	
As Behavior *(continued)*	
if we confess He is faithful	1 Jo 1:9
that you may be tested	Re 2:10
As Belief	
examine yourselves	2 Co 13:5
one living faith	Ep 4:5
worthless faith	2 Ti 3:8
kept believing	2 Ti 4:7
assurance of things hoped for	He 11:1
False Teachers	
blindness	Ma 23:26
many will come	Mk 13:21-23
false emissaries	2 Co 11:13
a distorted version—false gospel	Ga 1:6-8
Hymenaeus and Alexander	1 Ti 1:20
exploit desires	2 Pe 2:10-22
teaching of Balaam, Nicolaitans	Re 2:14-15
Family	
created to multiply	Ge 1:27-28
Abram's descendants to bless families of earth	Ge 12:3
train children	De 6:6-7
we will serve God	Jos 24:15
like a healthy vine—blessing from Zion	Ps 128:3-6
of Jesus	Mk 3:31-35
honoring parents	Mk 7:10
Philippian jailer's whole family believes	Ac 16:33
husband—head of the family	1 Co 11:3-7
all family in heaven and below receive names	Ep 3:15
wives submit, husbands love, children obey	Ep 5:22–6:9
family standards for leadership	1 Ti 3:1-13
Family Planning	
God made Leah fertile	Ge 29:31
God remembered Rachel	Ge 30:22
firstborn	Ex 13:2
Eternal had not given Hannah children	1 Sa 1:5-6
children are a blessing	Lk 1:41-44
Fellowship	
intimate relationship	1 Co 1:9
of the Holy Spirit	2 Co 13:14
a cloud of witnesses	He 12:1
connected to each other	1 Jo 1:6-7
visit and be with you	Re 3:20
Finding Rest	
From Labor	
for three men sent to Abraham	Ge 18:4
Sabbath set aside for	Ex 31:15
in Jesus	Ma 11:28-29
told to rest for a little while	Re 6:11

Topic	Reference
Finding Rest *(continued)*	
For Eternity	
they will never enter My rest	Ps 95:11
entering into salvation's rest	He 4:3, 8-13
no end to the torture	Re 14:11-13
Food in Israel	
all creatures given all plants to eat	Ge 1:29-30
garden filled with nourishing food	Ge 2:9
all animals and plants to eat	Ge 9:3-4
Joseph provides for Jacob's sons	Ge 43:2-4
Food in the Desert	
quail and manna in wilderness	Ex 16:13, 31
no animal torn to pieces	Ex 22:31
pour blood on the ground	De 12:16
clean animals to eat	De 14:4-20
Food in the Time of Jesus	
God's provision	Ma 6:25
Jesus proclaims all food pure	Mk 7:19
Peter's vision—God commands him to eat "unclean" food	Ac 10:11-15
avoiding certain meats	Ac 21:25
don't sacrifice God's work for the sake of certain food	Ro 14:20
if any food is an issue, don't eat it	1 Co 8:8, 13
Friendship	
With God	
as friend to friend	Ex 33:11
with God	Job 29:4
have intimacy with Him	Ps 25:14
Jesus, friend of sinners	Ma 11:19
being Jesus' friend	Jo 15:13-15
Abraham, God's friend	Jam 2:23
With People	
true friend loves regardless	Pr 17:17
true friend closer than a brother	Pr 18:24
don't befriend one given to anger	Pr 22:24
a friend proves he is faithful	Pr 27:6
Jonathan loved David as himself	1 Sa 18:1-4
giving your life for	Jo 15:13-15
not with corrupt world	Jam 4:4
Gifts	
To God	
in triumph receiving gifts of men	Ps 68:18
repentance more important	Ma 5:24
From God	
hard work is a gift from God	Ec 3:13
living water	Jo 4:10
gifts of the Holy Spirit	Ac 2:38
free gift—eternal life	Ro 6:23
indescribable gift	2 Co 9:15
gifts of the Holy Spirit	He 2:4
gift of new life	He 6:4
every good gift is from above	Jam 1:17

Topic	Reference
Gifts *(continued)*	
Spiritual Gifts	
gifts poured out on each of us	Ro 12:6
spiritual gifts	1 Co 12:1
passionately seek gifts	1 Co 14:1
gave gifts to the people	Ep 4:8
gifts you received	1 Pe 4:10
God the Father	
Nature	
good and honorable	Ps 25:8
thoughts and ways beyond you	Is 55:9
of all living things	Je 32:27
all wisdom and power	Da 2:20
makes the impossible possible	Lk 1:37
Abba, Father	Ro 8:15
wisdom and knowledge	Ro 11:33
can't deny Himself	2 Ti 2:13
Father of lights—all good gifts	Jam 1:17
One who called is holy	1 Pe 1:15-16
intimate relationship	1 Jo 3:24
the All-Powerful	Re 1:8
Activity	
God throws Pharaoh's army into sea	Ex 15:3-4
offers the same gifts to everyone	Ac 11:17
kindness of God	Ro 2:4
God's own restorative justice	Ro 3:25-26
show My greater power	Ro 9:17
God has confounded them	Ro 11:8
who causes growth	1 Co 3:6
Supreme Judge and Lawgiver	Jam 4:12
God is love	1 Jo 4:16
God the Son	
Nature	
Immanuel	Ma 1:23
Son of David	Mk 10:47
The Voice	Jo 1:1
I AM	Jo 8:58
in the form of God	Ph 2:5-11
image of the invisible God, created all	Col 1:15-20
all God's fullness in Jesus	Col 2:9
the Anointed—great God and Savior	Tit 2:13
has dominion over all, sustains all, above all	He 1:2-4
Emissary of God, High Priest	He 3:1
I am coming soon	Re 22:12-16
Activity	
birth prophesied	Ma 1:21
brings God's kingdom	Ma 12:28
walks on water	Ma 14:25
Son of David	Mk 12:35
calls out to the Father	Mk 15:34
heals a lame man	Jo 5:6-9

Topic	Reference
God the Son *(continued)*	
Activity *(continued)*	
brother to disciples	Jo 20:17
appears to Saul of Tarsus	Ac 9:5
guarantee of a better covenant	He 7:22
God His Father	Re 1:5-7
God the Holy Spirit	
Nature	
and baptism	Ma 28:19
fellowship of the Holy Spirit	2 Co 13:14
the eternal Spirit	He 9:14
Activity	
descends on Jesus	Lk 4:18
brings life	Jo 6:63
teaches and helps	Jo 14:16-17, 26
judges; reveals truth	Jo 16:8-11, 13-14
empowerment; spiritual gifts	Ac 2:4
even for outsiders	Ac 10:45
commissions Paul and Barnabas	Ac 13:4
Spirit of holiness	Ro 1:4
Spirit pleads for us	Ro 8:26-27
One Spirit works all	1 Co 12:11
the Holy Spirit who was promised	Ep 1:13
God's Holy Spirit	Ep 4:30
an anointing	1 Jo 2:20
Government	
Israel	
Moses sat as judge	Ex 18:13
Samuel and sons administered justice	1 Sa 8:5
Ish-bosheth as king; David ruled from Hebron	2 Sa 2:2-10
Appointed	
Cyrus, the Eternal's chosen agent	Is 45:1
Teaching On	
taxation, coinage	Ma 22:18-21
apostles obey God rather than men	Ac 5:29
submit to authority	Ro 13:1-7
kings	1 Ti 2:1-3
Roman Government	
taxation, coinage	Ma 22:17, 21
census	Lk 2:1-2
Tiberius Caesar	Lk 3:1
Festus sends Paul to Caesar	Ac 25:12
Grace	
Noah pleases God	Ge 6:8
grant it Your grace	Ze 4:7
Jesus offers	Jo 1:14, 17
all are liberated through the grace of the Lord Jesus	Ac 15:11
place of radical grace	Ro 5:2, 20
under grace, not law	Ro 6:14
grace has nothing to do with deeds	Ro 11:6
I am who I am because of grace	1 Co 15:10

Topic	Reference
Grace *(continued)*	
grace is enough	2 Co 12:9
I can't dismiss	Ga 2:21
throne of grace	He 4:16
God gives more grace	Jam 4:6
stewards of God's grace	1 Pe 4:10
grace of the Lord Jesus	Re 22:21
Gratitude	
People for Gideon	Ju 8:22-23
Saul blesses David for his kindness	1 Sa 26:21-25
Ahasuerus for Mordecai	Es 6:1-6
Nebuchadnezzar worshiped Daniel	Da 2:46-48
Tertullus to Felix	Ac 24:3
all be thankful	He 12:28
Greed	
Samuel's sons took bribes	1 Sa 8:1-3
illegal gains injure their families	Pr 15:27
of the Pharisees	Ma 23:25
giving	Lk 21:1-6
given to sensual, greedy, and reckless living	Ep 4:19
not a single cent	1 Th 2:5
false teachers follow greed	2 Pe 2:3, 14-15
Hate	
don't hate relatives	Le 19:17
hate evil	Ps 97:10
six things God hates	Pr 6:16
served hatefully	Pr 15:17
hate what is evil	Am 5:15
do good to those who hate you	Lk 6:27
world hate Jesus, God	Jo 15:18, 23
hate what is evil	He 1:9
hate other Christians—you are a murderer	1 Jo 3:15
can't love God and hate your brother	1 Jo 4:20
Healing	
binds wounds, heals sorrows	Ps 147:3
wise speech—healing balm	Pr 12:18
sun of righteousness has healing rays	Mal 4:2
Jesus' ministry	Ma 4:23
Jesus empowers disciples	Ma 10:1-8
Peter heals Aeneas, a paralyzed man	Ac 9:34
gifts of healing	1 Co 12:9
elders anoint with oil	Jam 5:14-15
leaves provide precious healing	Re 22:2
Heaven	
Sky	
called the expanse	Ge 1:8
highest heaven is not big enough for God	1 Ki 8:27
gaze to the skies	Ps 8:3
skies testify	Ps 19:1

Topic	Reference
Heaven *(continued)*	
Sky *(continued)*	
out of your reach	Is 55:9
heaven is His throne	Is 66:1
open	Ma 3:16
abundance	Ma 16:9
and God's word	Ma 24:29, 35
Jesus returning	Ma 28:18
choir of angels	Lk 2:13
celebration in heaven	Lk 15:7
breaking through from heaven	Ro 1:18
third heaven	2 Co 12:2
every spiritual blessing in heaven	Ep 1:3
for above all the heavens	Ep 4:10
Eternal Existence	
treasure in heaven	Lk 18:22
citizens of heaven	Ph 3:20
hope for those awaiting	Col 1:5
heavenly kingdom	2 Ti 4:18
held in reserve in heaven	1 Pe 1:4
a new heaven	2 Pe 3:13
a heavenly country	He 11:16
heaven and earth had passed away	Re 21:1
Heavenly Messengers	
Representative of God	
to Abraham for Isaac	Ge 22:11, 15
adversary to Balaam	Nu 22:22
traveled from Gilgal to Bochim	Ju 2:1-4
to Joseph	Ma 1:20
Rebellious Messengers	
a warrior race	Ge 6:1-5
the Eternal's sword	1 Ch 21:12
Satan poses as a heavenly messenger	2 Co 11:14
rebellious	Jude 6
Special Messenger	
appear as men	Ge 18:2-8
sat under tree in Ophrah	Ju 6:11-12
Guidance	
His messenger guides Abraham's servant	Ge 24:40
release apostles from prison	Ac 5:19
Protector	
found Hagar alone	Ge 16:7
heavenly messenger surrounds	Ps 34:7
messenger of His presence	Is 63:9
shut lions' mouths	Da 6:22
Preparing the Way	
I am sending My messenger	Mal 3:1
John the Baptist	Ma 11:10
Hell (Hades)	
danger of hell	Ma 5:22, 29, 30
danger of hell	Ma 10:10, 28

Topic	Reference
Hell (Hades) *(continued)*	
punishment for religious hypocrisy	Ma 23:14, 33
for the unrighteous	Ma 25:41, 46
eternal destruction	2 Th 1:9
tongue's fuel comes from hell	Jam 3:6
dark pits of hell	2 Pe 2:4
no end to the torture	Re 14:11
an eternity in the lake that burns	Re 21:8
High Places	
punishment for worshiping at high places	Le 26:29-34
destroy the high places	De 12:1-14
people offer at high places	1 Ki 3:2
built for Solomon's wives	1 Ki 11:7-11
burned, destroyed	2 Ki 23:5, 8, 13
shrines at Topheth	Je 7:31
High Priest	
Aaron's observation of the Day of Atonement	Le 16:1-34
Aaron's blessing for the people	Nu 6:22-27
Aaron and the Levite offering for service	Nu 8:11-21
Caiaphas	Ma 26:57
job of high priest is reconciliation	He 5:1, 4-5
once a year, enter most high place	He 9:7, 12, 24
Holiness	
made Sabbath special	Ge 2:3
barefoot before God	Ex 3:5
God is great in holiness	Ex 15:11
a holy nation	Ex 19:6
be holy as God is holy	Le 19:2
sacred splendor	Ps 29:2
seek holiness and purity	1 Th 4:7
holiness with self-restraint	1 Ti 2:15
pursue peace and holiness	He 12:14
godly lives	2 Pe 3:11
holy, holy, holy	Re 4:8
holy city	Re 21:2
Honesty	
integrity, right	Ps 15:1-2
straight answers are precious	Pr 24:26
Jesus' perspective	Ma 5:33-37
makes heart fertile	Lk 8:15
do what is right, act honorably	2 Co 13:7
work honestly with your hands	Ep 4:28
live honorably	1 Pe 2:12
Honor	
father and mother	Ex 20:12
those who honor God—He will honor	1 Sa 2:30
humility precedes	Pr 15:33
and the heart	Ma 15:8
prophet in hometown	Jo 4:44
love, honor, and appreciation	Ro 1:21

Topic	Reference
Honor *(continued)*	
all members celebrate	1 Co 12:26
dishonor, shame	Ph 1:20
meditate on what is honorable	Ph 4:8
hold marriage in high esteem	He 13:4
honor your ruler	1 Pe 2:17
Humility	
wisdom accompanies humility	Pr 11:2
the greatest are humble	Ma 18:4
tax collector's prayer	Lk 18:13-14
Paul's note to Ephesus	Ac 20:19
be humble	Ep 4:1-2
embrace true humility	Ph 2:3
clothed with humility	Col 3:12
Idols	
not to make any idols	Ex 20:4-5
don't follow useless idols	Le 19:4
made by human hands	Is 40:19
contributes nothing of value	Is 44:9
hodge-podge of idols	Is 57:13
his maker's creation	Hab 2:18
in Athens	Ac 17:16
idols are nothing—there is only One God	1 Co 8:1, 4
idol food has no power	1 Co 10:14, 19
leaving your idols to crumble	1 Th 1:9
keep away from idols	1 Jo 5:21
Illness	
God will take away all	Ex 23:25
He comforts and restores	Ps 41:3
healing illness is ministering to Jesus	Ma 25:43
Simon's mother-in-law	Mk 1:30
Jesus heals official's son	Jo 4:46
Lazarus	Jo 11:4
Immorality	
divorce and adultery	Ma 5:32
makes one unclean	Mk 7:21
patterns of dark life	Ro 13:13
body—not meant for immorality	1 Co 6:13-20
no immorality among you	Ep 5:3
polluted earth	Re 19:2
Immortality	
what must I do	Lk 10:25
immortal God	Ro 1:23
seeking immortality	Ro 2:7
when our adoption is complete	Ro 8:22-23, 38-39
immortal bodies	1 Co 15:53
King immortal	1 Ti 1:17
He possesses immortality	1 Ti 6:16
lasting eternal glory	2 Ti 2:10
when He appears, we will be like Him	1 Jo 3:2

Topic	Reference
Incarnation	
took on flesh	Jo 1:14
Jesus and the Father	Jo 14:8-11
bearing the likeness of sinful flesh	Ro 8:3
we are now representatives of the Anointed	2 Co 5:18-21
at the right time God sent His Son	Ga 4:4
he was revealed in the flesh	1 Ti 3:16
He died in the flesh	1 Pe 3:18
One who was from the beginning	1 Jo 1:1-3
Jesus has come in the flesh	1 Jo 4:1-6
Jealousy	
Joseph's brothers	Ge 37:3-11
He is a jealous God	Ex 20:5
Phinehas	Nu 25:11
God burns with jealousy	De 4:24
wickedness aroused His jealousy	1 Ki 14:22
they aroused His jealousy	Ps 78:58
of His reputation and name	Eze 39:25
Eternal has become possessive	Joel 2:18
jealous with a people	Ro 10:19
not a good idea to make Jesus jealous	1 Co 10:22
I am extremely jealous for you	2 Co 11:2
characteristic of sin	Ga 5:20
where it is, also chaos	Jam 3:16
Jerusalem (Jebus) through History	
Melchizedek priest-king	Ge 14:18
promise to Abram	Ge 15:18-21
king fought Joshua	Jos 10:5-23
Jebusite city	Jos 18:28
didn't drive Jebusites out	Ju 1:21
Levite (mistress) spent night	Ju 19:1, 11
David captured Zion from the Jebusites	2 Sa 5:6-9
David brought the covenant chest into the city of David	2 Sa 6:12-17
Zadok and Abiathar returned covenant chest	2 Sa 15:29
build a temple in Jerusalem	1 Ki 5:5-8
Solomon built whatever he desired in Jerusalem	1 Ki 9:19
Jehoash demolished part of the wall	2 Ki 14:13-14
remnant will depart	2 Ki 19:31-36
My name will dwell in Jerusalem	2 Ki 21:4
Nebuchadnezzar gathered all Jerusalem	2 Ki 24:14
Jebusites threatened—David captured Jerusalem	1 Ch 11:4-5
Cyrus's proclamation to return	Ez 1:1-4
Nehemiah's return	Ne 2:11
His home	Ps 76:2
Jerusalem fell to Babylon	Je 39:1-8
the Eternal will choose Jerusalem as His city	Ze 2:12
Jesus' ministry	Ma 20:18
Jesus' perspective	Ma 23:37
destruction of Jerusalem	Lk 21:20
forgiveness of sins preached there first	Lk 24:47
only place for worship	Jo 4:20

Topic	Reference
Jerusalem (Jebus) through History *(continued)*	
where the church began	Ac 2:1-47
council on non-Jews keeping the law of Moses	Ac 15:2
Paul seized and beaten	Ac 21:30-36
Hagar and Sarah—Mount Sinai and Jerusalem	Ga 4:25-30
you have come to Mount Zion	He 12:22
the great city	Re 11:8
holy city, Jerusalem	Re 21:10
Jewish Calendar	
Passover	Ex 12:18
Abib or Nisan (Mar–Apr)	Ex 13:4
Day of Atonement	Le 16:29-34
Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits	Le 23:5-6, 10-11
Pentecost (Weeks or Harvest)	Le 23:15-21
Booths (Succoth) and Trumpets	Le 23:23-24, 36
Later Passover	Nu 9:10-11
Ab (July–Aug)	Nu 33:38
Zif or Iyyar (Apr–May)	1 Ki 6:1, 37
Bul or Heshvan (Oct–Nov)	1 Ki 6:38
Ethanim or Tishri (Sept–Oct)	1 Ki 8:2
Chislev or Kislev (Nov–Dec)	Ne 1:1
Elul (Aug–Sept)	Ne 6:15
Tebeth (Dec–Jan)	Es 2:16
Adar (Feb–Mar)	Es 3:7
Sivan (May–June)	Es 8:9
Tammuz (June–July)	Je 39:2
Shebat (Jan–Feb)	Ze 1:7
Dedication	Jo 10:22
Judges	
tribal judges	De 16:18
Othniel	Ju 3:9-11
Ehud	Ju 3:15-30
Shamgar	Ju 3:31
Deborah and Barak	Ju 4:4-9
Gideon	Ju 6:11-40
Tola	Ju 10:1-2
Jair	Ju 10:3-5
Jephthah	Ju 12:1-7
Ibzan	Ju 12:8-10
Elon	Ju 12:11-12
Abdon	Ju 12:13-15
Samson	Ju 15:20
Justice	
don't bend rules	De 16:19
He cherishes	Ps 37:28
sing of justice	Ps 101:1
His accomplishments are truth and justice	Ps 111:7
the right celebrate	Pr 21:15
justice brings stability	Pr 29:4
commit to seeking justice	Is 1:17
His Servant will bring justice	Is 42:1

Topic	Reference
Justice *(continued)*	
He does what is true and just	Da 4:37
let justice thunder down like a waterfall	Am 5:24
live justly	Mi 6:8
He defines judgment	Zep 3:5
God's job	Ma 5:45
God will bring justice	Lk 18:7
God's restorative justice	Ro 3:26
verdict is already declared	Ro 8:33
sin and disobedience receive justice	He 2:2
the One who is just	1 Pe 2:23
right and true are Your ways	Re 15:3
Kindness	
faithful to Your promise—marked with grace	Ps 145:13
kindness is its own reward	Pr 11:17
pursue justice—treat others with kindness	Pr 21:21
I lifted the yoke	Ho 11:4
kindness of God	Ro 2:4
balance kindness and severity of God	Ro 11:22
love is kind	1 Co 13:4
kindness in the Holy Spirit	2 Co 6:6
richness of His grace and kindness	Ep 2:7
be kind and compassionate	Ep 4:32
be gentle	2 Ti 2:24
for humanity	Tit 3:4
Kings of Israel	
Jeroboam ruled 22 years	1 Ki 12:25–14:20
Nadab ruled 2 years	1 Ki 15:25-31
Baasha ruled 24 years	1 Ki 15:32–16:7
Elah ruled 2 years	1 Ki 16:8-14
Zimri ruled 7 days	1 Ki 16:15-20
Omri ruled 12 years	1 Ki 16:21-28
Ahab ruled 22 years	1 Ki 16:29–22:40
Ahaziah ruled 2 years	1 Ki 22:51–2 Ki 1:18
Jehoram/Joram ruled 12 years	2 Ki 2:1–8:15
Jehu ruled 28 years	2 Ki 9:30–10:36
Jehoahaz ruled 17 years	2 Ki 13:1-9
Joash/Jehoash ruled 16 years	2 Ki 13:10-25
Jeroboam II ruled 41 years	2 Ki 14:23-29
Zechariah/Zachariah ruled 6 months	2 Ki 15:8-12
Shallum ruled 1 month	2 Ki 15:13-15
Menahem ruled 10 years	2 Ki 15:16-22
Pekahiah ruled 2 years	2 Ki 15:23-26
Pekah ruled 20 years	2 Ki 15:27-31
Hoshea ruled 9 years	2 Ki 17:1-41
Kings of Judah	
Rehoboam ruled 17 years	1 Ki 14:21-31
Abijam ruled 3 years	1 Ki 15:1-8
Asa ruled 41 years	1 Ki 15:9-24
Jehoshaphat ruled 25 years	1 Ki 22:41-50
Jehoram ruled 8 years	2 Ki 8:16-24

Topic	Reference
Kings of Judah *(continued)*	
Ahaziah/Jehoahaz ruled 1 year	2 Ki 8:25–9:29
Athaliah ruled 6 years	2 Ki 11:1-16
Joash/Jehoash ruled 40 years	2 Ki 11:17–12:21
Amaziah ruled 29 years	2 Ki 14:1-22
Azariah/Uzziah ruled 52 years	2 Ki 15:1-7
Jotham ruled 16 years	2 Ki 15:32-38
Ahaz/Jehoahaz ruled 20 years	2 Ki 16:1-20
Hezekiah ruled 29 years	2 Ki 18:1–20:21
Manasseh ruled 55 years	2 Ki 21:1-18
Amon ruled 2 years	2 Ki 21:19-26
Josiah ruled 31 years	2 Ki 22:1–23:30
Jehoahaz/Shallum ruled 3 months	2 Ki 23:31-34
Jehoiakim/Eliakim ruled 11 years	2 Ki 23:35–24:7
Jehoiachin ruled 3 months	2 Ki 24:8-16
Zedekiah/Mattaniah ruled 11 years	2 Ki 24:17–25:21
Knowledge	
tree of the knowledge of good and evil	Ge 2:9
more sayings, more to learn	Ps 19:2
how deeply You know me	Ps 139:6
as a safeguard	Pr 10:14
love discipline, love knowledge	Pr 12:1
entire world filled with the knowledge of the Eternal	Is 11:9
lack of knowledge	Ho 4:6
of freedom	Lk 1:77
teacher's responsibility	Lk 11:52
full of knowledge	Ro 15:14
knowledge promotes arrogance	1 Co 8:1
power to understand	Ep 3:19
treasures of wisdom and knowledge	Col 2:3
add to virtue	2 Pe 1:5
true knowledge	2 Pe 3:18
Land of Canaan	
for Abram's future generations	Ge 12:1-7
Abram settled here	Ge 13:12
promises to Abram	Ge 15:18-21
flowing with milk and honey	Ex 3:8
spies go into land	Nu 13:2
entering the land	De 1:34-40
you will be torn from the land	De 28:49-68
God showed Moses the whole land	De 34:1
Eternal has bound Israel in the land	Is 62:4
born among the Canaanites	Eze 16:3, 29
famine	Ac 7:11
location of Jesus' ministry	Ac 10:39
land of the promise	He 11:9
Law	
you will become corrupt	De 31:29
is perfect	Ps 19:7
I love Your law	Ps 119:97
Jesus fulfills	Ma 5:17-20

Topic	Reference
Law *(continued)*	
do to others as you would have them do to you	Ma 7:12
loving God and others	Ma 22:40
Moses gave rules; Jesus offered grace and truth	Jo 1:17
does following the law make me right	Ro 2:13
faith—nothing to do with deeds of law	Ro 3:28
law brings God's wrath	Ro 4:15
law came—sin grew	Ro 5:20
the law is not sin	Ro 7:7-25
law reaches its climax	Ro 10:4
law achieves what the law required	Ro 13:10
obey to win those who follow it	1 Co 9:20
sin gained power over those who follow the law	1 Co 15:56
law like a tutor pointing	Ga 3:24-25
not a subject of the law	Ga 5:18
not for law abiding, but law breakers	1 Ti 1:9
anything perfected by	He 7:19
perfect truth—law of liberty	Jam 1:25
Laziness	
lounge your life away	Pr 6:6-11
a door swings on its hinge, but goes nowhere	Pr 26:13-16
make the most of every moment	Ep 5:16
not willing to work	2 Th 3:10-12
lazy gluttons	Tit 1:12
Leadership	
his unintentional sin	Le 4:22-24
Moses leads Israel in wilderness	Nu 33:1
leaders of Gilead ask Jephthah to lead	Ju 11:6-11
grant leadership over My people	1 Ki 14:7
Judah would lead	1 Ch 28:4
commander of army nations	Is 55:4
must serve	Lk 22:26
Jesus is Prince, Liberator, at God's right hand	Ac 5:31
Lebanon Mountains	
Amorite highlands	De 1:7
unconquered land	Jos 13:5-7
Hivites live here	Ju 3:1-3
cut stone and timber for temple construction	1 Ki 5:5-6, 14, 18
story of thornbush and wild animal	2 Ki 14:9
cedar shipment	Ez 3:7
chariot takes Sennacherib	Is 37:24
like the wine of Lebanon	Ho 14:6-7
the flowers of Lebanon shrivel	Na 1:4
Legalism	
of the Pharisees	Ma 23:1-3
Peter says not to burden outsiders	Ac 15:19-21
do all to the glory of God	1 Co 10:31
meeting demands of the law	Ga 2:16
rules are human commands	Col 2:21

Topic	Reference
Lending	
no interest to the poor	Ex 22:25
generous lender	De 15:8
you will lend to the nations but not borrow	De 28:12, 44
Hannah lent Samuel back to God	1 Sa 1:28
share freely	Ps 112:5-6
with abandon	Lk 6:34-35
a parable	Lk 11:5
Leprosy	
Moses' hand drawn from shirt	Ex 4:6
law of skin diseases	Le 13:1-46
how to determine	Le 14:1-57
Miriam from God's anger	Nu 12:10
Naaman is healed	2 Ki 5:1, 27
Uzziah's forehead erupted with leprosy	2 Ch 26:19
Jesus heals	Ma 8:2
Simon the leper	Ma 26:6
Naaman, an outsider, healed	Lk 4:27
Jesus heals 10 lepers	Lk 17:12
Literacy	
Ezra read, Levites interpreted	Ne 8:8
read from scroll	Je 36:8
read the scroll	Je 51:63
Philip teaches the Ethiopian treasurer	Ac 8:28-32
Paul in synagogue in Antioch	Ac 13:15
Paul and Felix	Ac 23:34
public reading of Scripture	1 Ti 4:13
Love	
Loving God	
love Me, then keep My directives	Ex 20:6
love God with all your heart	De 6:5
those forgiven much, love much	Lk 7:47
Peter do you love Me	Jo 21:16
Love of God	
abundant in love	Ex 34:6
Your love towers	Ps 36:5
He proves love with discipline	Pr 3:12
everlasting love	Je 31:3
God gave His only Son	Jo 3:16
through Him who loved us	Ro 8:37
God loves a cheerful giver	2 Co 9:7
who loves me and gave His life for me	Ga 2:20
richness of His love	Ep 2:4
who has loved us	2 Th 2:16
those He loves He corrects	He 12:6
love comes straight from God	1 Jo 4:2
love of God	Jude 21
Directives to Love	
love your neighbor as yourself	Le 19:18
calms all rebellions	Pr 10:12

Topic	Reference
Love *(continued)*	
Directives to Love *(continued)*	
can't love anyone more than Jesus	Ma 10:37
greatest command	Ma 22:36-40
new command	Jo 13:34-35
only owe love	Ro 13:8
primary teaching on love	1 Co 13:4-7
faith energized by love	Ga 5:6
love your wife as yourself	Ep 5:28
Misplaced Love	
of money	Ec 5:10
don't fall in love with the corrupt world	1 Jo 2:15
Lust	
Amnon loved Tamar, his half sister	2 Sa 13:1-18
stare with desire	Job 31:1
temptation to lust	Pr 5:3-5
shallow desires	Pr 11:6
and adultery	Ma 5:27-28
their own vile pursuits	Ro 1:26-27
sinful imagination	Ro 13:14
everything of the flesh	Ga 5:17
swells of lustful passion	1 Th 4:5
becomes desire and takes control	Jam 1:14-15
sexually immoral	Re 21:8
Marriage	
Directives About	
leave mother and father	Ge 2:24
don't intermarry	De 7:3-4
Jesus' Teaching	
sanctity	Ma 19:10
in heaven	Ma 22:30
wedding feast in Cana	Jo 2:1-11
obligated until death	Ro 7:2
Paul's Teaching	
it is not an easy thing	1 Co 7:9-39
no partnership with those who are not followers	2 Co 6:14
wives submit, husbands love	Ep 5:22-32
false leading to not marry	1 Ti 4:3
remarriage of widows	1 Ti 5:14
Other Truths	
pleasures of your wife	Pr 5:15-19
dealt deceitfully with wife	Mal 2:14
keep the marriage bed pure	He 13:4
marriage of the Lamb	Re 19:7
Mediator (Jesus)	
we stand now reconciled and at peace with God	Ro 5:6-19
Jesus	1 Ti 2:5
Mediator of a better covenant	He 8:6
Mediator of a better covenant	He 9:15
Mediator of a new covenant	He 12:24

Topic	Reference
Meditation	
focus from dusk to dawn	Ps 1:1-2
meditation in bed	Ps 63:6-7
fix my mind	Ps 119:97, 148
meditation on what is honorable	Ph 4:8
cultivate these practices	1 Ti 4:15
Melchizedek	
priest-king of Jerusalem	Ge 14:18-20
Melchizedek, a priest forever	Ps 110:4
order of Melchizedek	He 5:10
a priest forever	He 7:1-4
Men	
apostles obey God rather than men	Ac 5:29
through one man, Adam	Ro 5:12
stand tall—be strong	1 Co 16:13
trustworthy people	2 Ti 2:2
are moved to speak on behalf of God	2 Pe 1:21
Mercy	
Mercy of God	
seat of mercy on covenant chest	Ex 25:17
a compassionate God	De 4:31
heart of mercy	Ps 51:1
compassionate	Ps 103:8
inexhaustible compassion	La 3:22
he is gracious and compassionate	Joel 2:13
it upset Jonah greatly	Jon 4:2
and blessings	Ma 5:7
blind man asks Jesus	Lk 18:38
mercy to whom I choose	Ro 9:15
Father of compassion	2 Co 1:3
come to save us	Tit 3:5
I will be merciful when they fail	He 8:12
Job a grand display of mercy	Jam 5:11
raise Jesus through great mercy	1 Pe 1:3
have received mercy	1 Pe 2:10
Mercy Shown by People	
the kind are happy	Pr 14:21
more important than sacrifice	Ma 12:7
can't expect it if you don't show it	Jam 2:13
Metaphors	
God and Christ	
rock	De 32:4
sun and shield	Ps 84:11
bread that gives life	Jo 6:35
light that gives life	Jo 8:12
the good shepherd	Jo 10:9, 14
the path, truth, life	Jo 14:6
vine	Jo 15:1
He is like a fierce fire	He 12:29
lion, root of David	Re 5:5

Topic	Reference
Metaphors *(continued)*	
Church	
salt and light	Ma 5:13-14
human body for body of Christ	1 Co 12:16-17
living letters	2 Co 3:3
living stones	1 Pe 2:5
7 bowls	Re 21:9
Miracles	
Authentication from God	
Moses' staff to snake—a sign	Ex 4:1-5
evidence of Jesus' authenticity	Ma 11:4-6
disciples confirm words with miracles	Mk 16:20
won't convince unbelievers	Lk 16:31
demonstrate authenticity	Jo 5:36
too many to record	Jo 20:30-31
Apostolic	
Simon (the sorcerer) believes	Ac 8:13
through Paul	Ac 19:11
performing signs	2 Th 2:9
Not from God	
miracles from false gods are a test	De 13:1-3
perform signs to deceive	Re 19:20
Miraculous Gifts	
healing, miracles, miracle workers	1 Co 12:10, 28-29
miracle after miracle has occurred	Ga 3:5
signs, wonders, and miracles	He 2:4
Missions	
Make you a light to the nations	Is 49:6
light of the world	Ma 5:14
to all nations	Ma 28:18-20
all of creation	Mk 16:15
Greek pilgrims looking for Jesus	Jo 12:20-21
witnesses to the whole earth	Ac 1:8
Peter and John cannot refrain	Ac 4:19-20
preaching good news has been laid upon Paul	1 Co 9:16
Moloch	
don't sacrifice your children	Le 18:21
Solomon built high place east of Jerusalem	1 Ki 11:7
destroy Topheth	2 Ki 23:10
worshiped by Israelites	Ac 7:43
Money	
Teaching About	
no cost	Is 55:1
can't serve two masters	Ma 6:24
and responsibility	Ma 25:18
disciples not to accept	Lk 9:3
clever manager	Lk 16:9
free from money lust	1 Ti 3:3
free from the love of money	He 13:5

Topic	Reference
Money *(continued)*	
Shortcomings Of	
to love	Ec 5:10
Simon (the sorcerer) tries to buy miraculous power	Ac 8:20
chase riches—fall into temptation	1 Ti 6:9-10
Most Holy Place	
top of covenant chest	Ex 26:34
priest enters to cover sins	Le 16:33
paneled with cedar	1 Ki 6:16
gold door hinges	1 Ki 7:50
the holiest work	1 Ch 6:49
gilded, sculpted winged creatures	2 Ch 3:10
carried covenant chest to its new home	2 Ch 5:7
measurement of inner sanctuary	Eze 41:4
within the sanctuary	Eze 45:3
behind a second dividing curtain	He 9:3
Music	
Asaph head over music	1 Ch 16:4-6
priest trumpets, Levites cymbals	2 Ch 29:25
Levites performed at dedication	Ne 12:27
sing songs of joy	Ps 100:2
joyful songs	Is 44:23
Paul and Silas singing in prison	Ac 16:25
pious songs, hymns, spiritual songs	Ep 5:19
sing psalms, hymns, songs	Col 3:16
began to sing a new song	Re 14:3
Musical Instruments	
Miriam's tambourine	Ex 15:20
ram's horn	Jos 6:4
musicians leading prophets	1 Sa 10:5
David and others played wooden instruments and cymbals	2 Sa 6:5
Levite relatives—Heman and kinsmen played	1 Ch 15:16, 19, 28
stringed instruments	Ps 33:2
harp and lyre	Ps 57:7-8
trumpets, harps, lyres, tambourines, flutes	Ps 150:4
sound of all instruments	Da 3:5, 7, 10, 15
brass, cymbals	1 Co 13:1
pipe, harp, bugle	1 Co 14:7
harps	Re 5:8
Names and Titles of Jesus	
Immanuel	Ma 1:23
Son of David	Ma 9:27
Consolation of Israel	Lk 2:25
Liberating King (Christ)	Lk 23:2
Anointed One (Messiah)	Jo 4:25-26
Rabbi	Jo 6:25
King of Israel	Jo 12:13
Son of Man	Ac 7:56
Son of God	Ro 1:4
Second Adam	1 Co 15:45-47

Topic	Reference
Names and Titles of Jesus *(continued)*	
Image of God	2 Co 4:4
Savior God	Tit 1:3
Chief Shepherd	1 Pe 5:4
Holy One	1 Jo 2:20
Alpha and Omega	Re 21:6
Names of God	
God	Ge 1:1
Eternal God	Ge 2:4
Eternal One (YHWH)	Ge 6:5
Most High God	Ge 14:18-22
God of the Mountain (All-Powerful God)	Ge 28:3
I AM WHO I AM	Ex 3:14
Jealous	Ex 34:14
Commander of heavenly armies	Ps 80:7
Holy One of Israel	Is 43:3, 14-15
Heavenly Father	Ma 6:26
King Eternal	1 Ti 1:17
Nonbiblical Writings	
Old Testament Sources	
book of Eternal One	Nu 21:14
scroll of Jasher	Jos 10:13
New Testament Sources	
Paul quotes Athenian poets	Ac 17:28
Jewish mysteries	Tit 1:12
Old Age	
Time or Former Life	
past generations	De 32:7
days gone by	Is 43:9, 18
new creation, old life is gone	2 Co 5:17
old skin	Col 3:9
death will be no more	Re 21:4
Age	
ripe old age	Ge 15:15
Sarah's advanced years	Ge 21:2, 7
old man, Jacob	Ge 44:20
Naomi's old age	Ru 4:15
wicked and long life	Job 21:7
when I am worn out	Ps 71:9
when old, early training is the guide	Pr 22:6
I will be there to carry you	Is 46:4
and childbearing	Lk 1:36
Omnipotence	
is anything too difficult	Je 32:17, 27
God makes the impossible possible	Lk 1:37
the All-Powerful	Re 1:8
Omnipresence	
take care what you say	Ps 33:13-14
anywhere I go, You are there	Ps 139:7-12
My hand will find them	Am 9:2-5

Topic	Reference
Omniscience	
He knows what lies veiled	Da 2:20-22
wisdom and knowledge	Ro 11:33
He knows all things	1 Jo 3:20
Oral Tradition	
Jesus' perspective	Ma 15:2, 6
Jesus and His disciples	Mk 7:4
I have passed on	1 Co 11:2
I passed down to you	1 Co 15:1-3
ways of ancestors	Ga 1:14
we passed on to you	2 Th 2:15
we passed on to you	2 Th 3:6
we told you about	2 Pe 1:16, 19
entrusted to saints	Jude 3
Gods (other)	
gods of Egypt	Ex 12:12
Terah served	Jos 24:2
of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistine	Ju 10:6
Dagon kept falling before the covenant chest	1 Sa 5:2-7
judgment on	Ps 82:1
Paul and Barnabas mistaken for Zeus and Hermes	Ac 14:11
Parables	
story of poor man's lamb	2 Sa 12:1-6
ancient mysteries	Ps 78:2
vineyard	Is 5:1-6
said that Ezekiel spoke in them	Eze 20:49
told you parables through the prophets	Ho 12:10
fulfillment of Scripture	Ma 13:10-16, 34-35
the sower	Mk 4:13
listening, not comprehending	Lk 8:10
Samaritan	Lk 10:25-37
fig tree	Lk 21:29-36
Patriarchs	
Abram	Ge 12:1-3
Ishmael is born	Ge 16:4
Isaac is born	Ge 17:10-14
Jacob and Esau	Ge 27:27-40
were mortal	Ac 2:29
Abraham gave a tenth	He 7:4
Philistine	
Coastal Land West of Israel	
five capital cities	Jos 13:3
five capital cities	Ju 3:3
generals are worried to have David fight with them	1 Sa 29:3-4, 9
Gaza	Ju 16:1
crimes of Gaza	Am 1:6-7
Ashkelon	
eventually fall—Eternal ordered	Je 47:5, 7
will be deserted	Zep 2:4, 7

Topic	Reference
Philistine *(continued)*	
Ashdod	
a capital city	1 Sa 5:1-7
men from Judah marrying wives from other nations	Ne 13:23-24
Ekron	
Ahaziah sought counsel	2 Ki 1:2-6
the Philistine city will fall	Ze 9:5-7
Gath	
Goliath of Gath	1 Sa 17:4
Gath	Mi 1:10
Poverty	
judge the poor justly	Le 19:15
God makes the rich and the poor	1 Sa 2:7
in need, the poor never die	Ps 9:18
talking too much—scarcity	Pr 14:23
work hard—you'll have enough food	Pr 20:13
to bring good news to the poor	Is 61:1
and blessings	Ma 5:3
treasure in heaven	Ma 19:21
and giving	Mk 12:44
riches through His humble poverty	2 Co 8:9
God picked poor for riches in faith	Jam 2:5
Power	
Powerful Ability	
Pharaoh's power to show God's power	Ex 9:16
His voice explodes in great power	Ps 29:4
overwhelming power	Ps 147:5
God strengthens	Is 40:29
your strength and prowess will not be enough	Ze 4:6
healing	Lk 5:17
Jesus feels power go out	Lk 8:46
to come upon disciples	Lk 24:49
comes from the Holy Spirit	Ac 1:8
God's power	1 Co 1:18
His dynamic power	1 Co 6:14
power of God	Col 2:12
salvation and glory and power	Re 19:1
Powerful Agents	
dislodged and shaken	Ma 24:29
spiritual powers	Ro 8:38
supernatural powers	Ep 6:12
those who overpowered us	Col 2:15
powers of coming age	He 6:5
authorities and powers submit to Him	1 Pe 3:22
Prayers	
Nature of Effective Prayer	
hear my prayer	Ps 54:2
prayed diligently—begging for mercy	Da 9:3-4
of the self-righteous vs. the humble	Lk 18:11
the Spirit articulates prayers for us	Ro 8:26
prayer language	1 Co 14:14

Topic	Reference
Prayers *(continued)*	
Nature of Effective Prayer *(continued)*	
have not stopped praying	Col 1:9
pray constantly	1 Th 5:17
without rage or conflict	1 Ti 2:8
powerful if rooted in righteous living	Jam 5:16
prayers of God's holy people	Re 5:8
Prayer Meetings	
early church devoted to constant prayer in unity	Ac 1:13-14
Peter's imprisonment	Ac 12:5-17
Paul and others in Philippi	Ac 16:13
on the beach at Tyre	Ac 21:5
Jesus teaches disciples to pray	Ma 6:9-15
Of Jesus	
praises God	Ma 11:25-27
in Gethsemane	Ma 26:36-42
at His baptism	Lk 3:21-22
before calling the apostles	Lk 6:12-16
goes away to pray	Lk 9:28-29
for Himself, His disciples, and all believers	Jo 17:1-26
Preaching	
Proclaiming the Gospel	
Jesus	Ma 4:17
and those who preach	Ma 23:3
Jesus	Mk 2:2
John the Baptist	Lk 3:18
Jesus as Liberator	Ac 5:42
Peter to Cornelius	Ac 10:42
Paul and Barnabas team with others	Ac 15:35
to teach the good news	Ro 1:15
if no one proclaims Him	Ro 10:14-15
the message we preach	1 Co 1:21
preaching good news has been laid upon Paul	1 Co 9:16
taking the good news to people and lands	2 Co 10:16
preaching a different gospel	Ga 1:9, 16, 23
the Great Preacher	Ep 2:17
preacher to all nations	Ep 3:8
preaching because of jealousies and rivalries	Ph 1:15
teaching the word and preaching	1 Ti 5:17
prefer myths	2 Ti 4:1-4
from those who told you the good news	1 Pe 1:12
Sermons	
Jesus rebukes teachers of the law and Pharisees	Ma 23:1-39
Jesus regarding the temple	Mk 13:1-37
Peter at Pentecost in Jerusalem	Ac 2:14-39
Peter at the temple	Ac 3:12-26
Stephen to the Jewish council in Jerusalem	Ac 7:2-53
Paul in synagogue in Antioch	Ac 13:16-40
Peter to the Jerusalem church council	Ac 15:13-29
Paul to the Athenians	Ac 17:22-31
Paul in Jerusalem	Ac 22:6-21
Paul to King Agrippa	Ac 26:1-29

Topic	Reference
Prejudice	
Toward Jesus	
in his hometown	Mk 6:3
Nazareth	Jo 1:46
Jews and Samaritans	Jo 4:9
Pharisees	Jo 9:16-41
Toward Others	
Joseph's brothers	Ge 37:3-11
against Samaritans	Ma 10:5
against non-Jews	Mk 7:26
against women	Jo 4:9
against Jews in Ephesus	Ac 19:34
hypocritical behavior	Ga 2:14
choosing affluent over bums	Jam 2:1-4
Pride	
arrogance of the wicked	Ps 10:4
ways of pride and arrogance	Pr 8:13
precedes destruction	Pr 16:18
against arrogant and proud	Is 2:12
you thought you could be a god	Is 14:13-15
Nebuchadnezzar lived as animal—acknowledged God	Da 5:20-23
shame will be payback for pride	Zep 2:10-11
leads to corruption	Mk 7:22
God punishes	Lk 1:51
knowledge promotes arrogance	1 Co 8:1-2
pompous sense of superiority	1 Jo 2:16
Priesthood	
Melchizedek	Ge 14:18
kingdom of priests	Ex 19:6
ordination	Ex 29:9
can't have physical defect	Le 21:17-23
God will raise up a faithful priest	1 Sa 2:35
order of Melchizedek	Ps 110:4
priest is messenger from God	Mal 2:7
priests obey Jesus	Ac 6:7
High Priest—has been tested	He 4:15
priests of the order of Melchizedek	He 7:11-28
a perfect High Priest	He 8:1-6
holy order of priests	1 Pe 2:5, 9
appointed them priests	Re 5:10
will serve as priests of God	Re 20:6
Priests	
Aaron—and his sons' garments	Ex 31:10
Eleazar	Nu 16:39
Eli—sat by the doorpost	1 Sa 1:9
Ahimelech—David's priest, son of Ahitub	1 Sa 22:11
Abiathar—served David, brought priestly robe	1 Sa 23:9
Zadok—served David, brought priestly robe	2 Sa 15:27
Ezra—Artaxerxes' letter given to	Ez 7:11-12
Ezekiel	Eze 1:3
Joshua—the high priest	Ze 3:1

Topic	Reference
Priests *(continued)*	
Zacharias—division of Abijah	Lk 1:5
Caiaphas—plots to arrest Jesus	Ma 26:3
Jesus—High Priest	He 3:1
Melchizedek—priest of Most High God	He 7:1
Prophecy	
Sent by God	
God will send another prophet	De 18:18
chosen before birth	Je 1:5
prophecy about Jesus not understood	Ac 13:27-29
prophetic voices passed down in Scripture	Ro 16:26
Messages from God	
predictions will not wait any longer	Eze 12:25-28
70 weeks to put an end to sin	Da 9:24-27
wife sells herself, children are killed	Am 7:14-15
word from the Eternal a second time	Jon 3:1-10
regarding John the Baptist and Jesus	Ma 17:10-12
Jesus fulfills	Lk 24:25-44
prophetic gifts will not last	1 Co 13:8
don't downplay prophecy	1 Th 5:20
once spoken over you	1 Ti 1:18
light in darkness	2 Pe 1:19-21
prophetic words recorded here	Re 1:3
prophetic words recorded here	Re 22:7, 10, 18-19
False Prophets	
don't listen to prophet or dreamer	De 13:1-5
can idols tell the future	Is 41:22-23
false prophets	Je 23:17-34
conflicting voices—Hananiah versus Jeremiah	Je 28:1-17
Prophet(s/esses)	
Abraham—one of God's	Ge 20:1, 7
Miriam—praises God	Ex 15:20-21
Moses—God will send another like him	De 18:18
Deborah—leads Israel	Ju 4:4-5
Samuel—a priest of God, could be trusted	1 Sa 3:20
Jeremiah—message, Israel to be quiet for 70 years	2 Ch 36:12
Isaiah—Hezekiah sent for the prophet	2 Ki 19:2
Huldah—Shallum's wife	2 Ki 22:12-20
Isaiah's Wife—bears Isaiah's child	Is 8:1-3
Ezekiel—in captivity	Eze 1:3
Hosea—depicts Israel's unfaithfulness	Ho 1:1
Malachi—Book of Malachi	Mal 1:1
Daniel—Jesus quotes Daniel	Ma 24:15
Anna—identifies Jesus as Redeemer	Lk 2:36
John the Baptist—Malachi	Lk 7:26-28
Jesus—people identify Him as "the Prophet"	Jo 6:14
David—about Judas	Ac 1:16
Moses—thought the people would understand	Ac 7:25, 30
Philip's Daughters—Paul stays with Philip in Caesarea	Ac 21:8-9
Peter—about the false prophets	2 Pe 2:1-2
John—the apocalypse	Re 1:1

Topic	Reference
Prostitution	
Tamar's disguise	Ge 38:21-22
neither women nor men	De 23:17
Rahab	Jos 2:1
two prostitutes ask Solomon for judgment	1 Ki 3:16
temple prostitution	1 Ki 14:24
prostitution is like falling into a well	Pr 23:27
you will lose everything	Pr 29:3
Israel to other gods	Je 13:27
your daughters	Ho 4:14
repentance	Ma 21:32
united to a prostitute	1 Co 6:15
Rahab made right by God	Jam 2:25
Punishment	
of Cain	Ge 4:13
day of reckoning	Is 10:3
those who act wickedly	Is 13:11
punishment for wicked deeds	Je 21:14
sheep and goats	Ma 25:46
you have punished him enough	2 Co 2:6
punish every act of disobedience	2 Co 10:6
eternal destruction	2 Th 1:9
much more severe punishment	He 10:29
punish those who do wrong	1 Pe 2:14
fear of punishment	1 Jo 4:18
punishment by fire	Jude 7
Redemption	
rescue from Egyptian load	Ex 6:6
He will liberate	Ps 34:22
help us, restore us	Ps 44:26
liberate from persecution	Ps 72:14
deliver you from death	Ps 103:4
rescue from trouble	Ps 107:2
He will plead their case	Pr 23:11
your rescuing hero	Is 44:24
power not limited to redemption	Is 50:2
will set you right again	Is 54:5
God rescues His people	Lk 1:68
of Jerusalem	Lk 2:38
the end	Lk 21:28
now saved and set right	Ro 3:24
redemption of our bodies	Ro 8:23
He is our righteousness and holiness and redemption	1 Co 1:30
has redeemed us from the curse	Ga 3:13
adopted sons and daughters	Ga 4:5
setting us free	Ep 1:7
we are redeemed and forgiven	Col 1:14
break us free from wickedness	Tit 2:14
His own blood—obtaining redemption for us	He 9:12

Topic	Reference
Reconciliation	
before sacrifice	Ma 5:24
we stand now reconciled and at peace with God	Ro 5:6-11
resolves the hostility	Ro 11:15
reconciled with her husband	1 Co 7:11
a restored and healthy relationship	2 Co 5:18-20
reconciled opposing group to God	Ep 2:14-16
cross—means of reconciliation	Col 1:20-21
Religion	
Nature Of	
fabricated religion	Col 2:23
real, true religion	Jam 1:27
Greek and Roman Religion	
and Caesar	Jo 19:12-15
Paul in Athens	Ac 17:16-31
on the prowl for wisdom	1 Co 1:22
weak and worthless powers	Ga 4:8-10
philosophy and empty deception	Col 2:8
Persian Religion	
God compelled Cyrus to send proclamation	2 Ch 36:22-23
decree of Persians and Medes	Es 1:19
law can't be rescinded	Da 6:8, 12, 15
spirit prince of Persia	Da 10:1, 10, 20
Egyptian Religion	
Pharaoh's magicians	Ex 7:9-13
idols	Is 19:3, 18-25
Repentance	
repented in dust and ash	Job 42:6
create in me a clean heart	Ps 51:10-13
John's message	Ma 3:2, 8, 11
John the Baptist's preaching	Mk 1:4
why Jesus was sent	Lk 5:32
or face judgment	Lk 13:3
preached to all nations	Lk 24:47
change in direction; leads to forgiveness and gifts	Ac 2:38
forgiveness, renewal	Ac 3:19
God intends to forgive Israel	Ac 5:31
Simon (the sorcerer)	Ac 8:22
and non-Jews	Ac 15:3
turn away to walk a new path	Ro 2:4
repenting from what you loved	He 6:1
a change of mind and behavior	2 Co 7:9-10
turn toward God's path	2 Pe 3:9
rethink and change your way	Re 2:5
instead of rethinking their way	Re 16:9
Responsibility	
Adam pointed to Eve	Ge 3:12
Moses toward Aaron	Ex 32:21-24
repentance	Ma 3:9-10
hearing and hospitality	Ma 10:11-15

Topic	Reference
Responsibility *(continued)*	
for sin	Ma 23:31-35
Pilate refuses	Ma 27:24
the light has pierced the darkness	Jo 3:18-20
self-reliance	Jo 9:39-41
after hearing Jesus	Jo 15:22, 24
world to be judged by Jesus	Ac 17:30-31
Rest	
Abraham's offer to three men	Ge 18:4
Sabbath rest—Jew and outsider	Ex 20:10-11
be still	Ps 37:7
I would find rest	Ps 55:6
my shelter	Ps 62:7
reverence—fulfilled life—sleeps well	Pr 19:23
in returning and rest you will be saved	Is 30:15
in Jesus	Ma 11:28-29
disciples sleep in Gethsemane	Ma 26:45
Jesus in the wilderness	Mk 6:31
my spirit was restless	2 Co 2:13
kept believing	2 Ti 4:7
entering into salvation's rest	He 4:3, 8-11
Spirit of God rest on you	1 Pe 4:14
told to rest for a little while	Re 6:11
Righteousness	
will right what is wrong	Ps 24:5
He listens to the righteous	Pr 15:29
righteous flee to His protection	Pr 18:10
Eternal clothed Himself with righteousness	Is 11:4-5
I will make things right	Is 46:13
will justify countless	Is 53:11
robe of righteousness	Is 61:10
the Eternal is our righteousness	Je 33:16
Jesus' obedience	Ma 3:15
shines like the sun	Ma 13:43
rewarded	Ma 25:37, 46
of God	Jo 17:25
through faithfulness of Jesus	Ro 3:21-26
likeness of God—truthful, righteous and holy	Ep 4:24
joined in suffering, shaped by His death	Ph 3:4-11
righteous deeds	Tit 3:5
you have loved what is right	He 1:9
can't know what it means to be righteous	He 5:13
people alive with faith	He 11:33
live faithfully and act justly	1 Jo 2:1, 29
Sacrifices	
Individual's Offering	
God accepted Abel's	Ge 4:4
Noah on dry land	Ge 8:20
Jacob in fear of Laban	Ge 31:54

Topic	Reference
Sacrifices *(continued)*	
Regulations On	
Passover	Ex 12:27
earthen altar	Ex 20:24
unblemished	Le 22:19
when you have something to offer	De 12:6
God chose Aaron to serve	1 Sa 2:28-29
delights not in offerings but obedience	1 Sa 15:22
Wrong Offerings	
to another god—beware	Ex 22:20
deceiver offers imperfect sacrifices	Mal 1:14
Spiritual Aspects	
they don't please	Ps 40:6
I can accept your thankfulness	Ps 50:14
I offer my broken spirit	Ps 51:16-17
God desires mercy	Ma 9:13
love more important	Mk 12:33
Passover lamb; Day of Unleavened Bread	Lk 22:7
Jesus is our Passover lamb	1 Co 5:7
everyone who hangs on a tree	Ga 3:13
gave Himself as a fragrant sacrifice	Ep 5:2
a holy sacrifice	Ph 4:18
offering sacrificed to repair damage of our sin	He 5:1, 3
put away sin—Himself as a sacrifice	He 9:26
these sacrifices also please God	He 13:16
spiritual sacrifices	1 Pe 2:5
Salvation	
Source Of	
from the Eternal	Ps 3:8
my deliverance	Ps 18:46
He is my rescue	Ps 27:1
He alone is my rock	Ps 62:2
never ceases to be loving and kind	Ps 118:14
come to rescue me	Is 12:2
the Eternal will save	Is 45:21-22
the world will see His power	Is 52:10
God—Israel's only hope	Je 3:23
Eternal to make things right	La 3:26
only the Eternal delivers	Jon 2:9
I will look to the Eternal	Mi 7:7
comes to Zaccheus	Lk 19:9
God's power to save	Ro 1:16
that day you were delivered	2 Co 6:2
gift of salvation	Tit 2:11
Lord as your salvation	2 Pe 3:15
salvation comes only from our God	Re 7:10
salvation and glory and power	Re 19:1
Message Of	
broadcast good news of salvation	Ps 96:2
Jesus saves Peter	Ma 14:30
losing life to be saved	Ma 16:25
through King David's descendants	Lk 1:69

Topic	Reference
Salvation *(continued)*	
Message Of *(continued)*	
revealed to Simeon	Lk 2:30
coming through the Jews	Jo 4:22
Jesus comes to liberate the world	Jo 12:47
Jesus, the only name that saves	Ac 4:11-12
confess Jesus—you will be saved	Ro 10:9
rescuing people of faith	1 Co 1:21
work out your salvation	Ph 2:12
how will we escape destruction if we ignore this salvation	He 2:3
inquire about this great salvation	1 Pe 1:10
Sanctification	
God's glory sanctifies	Ex 29:43
Sabbath reveals	Ex 31:13
the Eternal sanctifies you	Le 20:8
set the priest apart as special	Le 21:8
of Jesus and disciples	Jo 17:17, 19
for God's holy purposes	Ac 20:32
through faith in Jesus	Ac 26:18
a growing holiness	Ro 6:19, 22
conformed to His image	Ro 8:29-30
made holy by work of the Holy Spirit	Ro 15:16
set apart for service	1 Co 1:2, 30
set apart, restored	1 Co 6:11
He washed the church of impurity	Ep 5:26
set apart and live holy lives	1 Th 4:3
set you apart from the rest	1 Th 5:23
Spirit's sanctifying work	2 Th 2:13
made holy	He 10:10
to sanctify the people	He 13:12
selected and destined	1 Pe 1:2
Saving Israel	
rescue from Egypt's heavy load	Ex 6:6
you saw in your own eyes	De 4:34
delivered with overwhelming power	De 26:8
the battle is the Lord's	1 Sa 17:47
prayer for relief from Sennacherib	2 Ki 19:19
help will come	Ps 20:6
liberate me	Ps 54:1
protects the lives of the needy	Ps 72:13
come to my rescue	Ps 109:26
outstretched arm	Ps 136:12
not so short He can't save you	Is 59:1
God protects, rescues	Je 15:20
rescue out of Egypt	Je 32:17, 21
Jesus, "the Lord saves"	Ma 1:21
Science and the Bible	
who knows the rules of the stars	Job 38:31-33
sky arches overhead	Ps 19:6

Topic	Reference
Science and the Bible *(continued)*	
He designed every detail	Col 1:16-17
treasures of wisdom and knowledge	Col 2:3
Sermons See Preaching	
Serving	
complete wedding week with Leah	Ge 29:27
Egyptians lost Israel's service	Ex 14:5
serving other gods	Ju 2:19
Eli's sons failed to perform	1 Sa 2:22
people serve other gods	1 Sa 8:8
Jeroboam appointed his own priest	2 Ch 11:14
walking with integrity—enter My service	Ps 101:6
can't serve two masters	Ma 6:24
Zacharias in the temple	Lk 1:8
Martha	Lk 10:40
following Jesus' path	Jo 12:26
you have to obey your master	Ro 6:16-18
serve in a new Spirit-empowered life	Ro 7:6
service gift	Ro 12:7, 11
Paul	Ac 20:19
serve each other through love	Ga 5:13
serve the Lord	Col 3:24
while doing His work	He 6:10
serve not themselves but you	1 Pe 1:12
Shepherding	
Animals	
Laban's shepherds	Ge 29:2-10
Jacob's service to Laban	Ge 31:38-40
Jethro's shepherds	Ex 2:17, 19
his father's shepherd	1 Sa 17:34-36
clans sought pastures	1 Ch 4:39-41
God's Flock	
David was to shepherd God's people	2 Sa 5:2
David commanded to shepherd Israel	1 Ch 17:6
the Eternal is my shepherd	Ps 23:1
guided like sheep, led like a flock	Ps 78:52-53
feed His fold like a shepherd	Is 40:11
Cyrus is My shepherd	Is 44:28
shepherd with no understanding	Is 56:11, 12
teachers—shepherds	Je 3:15
woe to shepherds who scatter God's sheep	Je 23:1
promise to return to land as shepherds	Je 33:12-13
what shepherd can stand against the Eternal	Je 49:19
Israel's leaders—shepherds	Eze 34:1-10
Jesus sees people as lost sheep	Ma 9:36
sheep and goats	Ma 25:31-46
guarding at night	Lk 2:8
lost sheep	Lk 15:3-6
Jesus, the good shepherd	Jo 10:3-5, 11-16
some pastor-teachers	Ep 4:11

Topic	Reference
Shepherding *(continued)*	
God's Flock *(continued)*	
the great Shepherd	He 13:20
shepherd the flock God has given you	1 Pe 5:2, 4
Sin	
Confession	
David confesses to Nathan	2 Sa 12:13
Job asked for forgiveness	Job 1:5
owned up to own sin	Ps 32:5
sin against you	Ps 51:4
I will never sin against You	Ps 119:11
wicked in our rebellion	Da 9:5
prostitute anoints Jesus' feet	Lk 7:39
tax collector's prayer	Lk 18:13
His blood purifies	1 Jo 1:7, 9-10
Teaching On	
You hurled me aside	Ps 102:10
one wrongdoer undoes much	Ec 9:18
persistent wrongdoings	Is 59:2
you will die for your sins	Eze 18:4
lust and adultery	Ma 5:27-28
punishment	Jo 9:2, 16
sin and die apart from the law	Ro 2:12
all have sinned	Ro 3:23
not tempted beyond what you are able	1 Co 10:13
stop sinning	1 Co 15:34
sinned and turned away	2 Co 12:21
has forgiven our sinful ways	Ep 1:7
buried in transgressions	Ep 2:1
willfully persist in sin	He 10:26
desire gives birth to sin	Jam 1:14-15
what will happen to ungodly?	1 Pe 4:18
do not persist in sin	1 Jo 3:6-8
God's Solution	
wipes the slate clean	Is 43:25
cast into the sea	Mi 7:19
Jesus forgives	Ma 9:2
reconciling with others	Ma 18:15
forgiveness; new covenant	Ma 26:28
rejoicing over repentance	Lk 15:10, 18
power to forgive	Jo 20:23
Slavery	
work beyond exhaustion	Ex 1:13
life in Egypt	Ex 13:3
laws protecting	Ex 21:2-6, 12, 26-27
celebrate with your slaves	De 12:12, 18
those who surrender are slaves	De 20:11-14
don't take advantage of slaves	De 23:15-16
obedience to Jesus	Ma 20:27
to sin	Jo 8:34
you have to obey your master	Ro 6:16-18

Topic	Reference
Slavery *(continued)*	
not a spirit of slavery	Ro 8:15
oppressed or free	1 Co 12:13
slave or freeman	Ga 3:28
no longer lives as a slave	Ga 4:7
not one more day under slavery	Ga 5:1
respect and fear masters	Ep 6:5-9
slave or free	Col 3:11
death has held captive	He 2:15
Social Consciousness	
created in God's image	Ge 1:27
father to the fatherless	Ps 68:5
we are like orphans and widows	La 5:3
widow from Zarephath	Lk 4:25
Greek-speaking widows discriminated against in church	Ac 6:1
care of widows	1 Ti 5:3
caring for orphans and widows	Jam 1:27
Speech	
Moses stuttered	Ex 4:10
directly, without riddles	Nu 12:8
let words fall like rain drops	De 32:1-2
Spirit speaks through David	2 Sa 23:2
sayings	Ps 19:2
pure heart, speak with grace	Pr 22:11
too inexperienced to speak	Je 1:6
speak right at her heart	Ho 2:14
the Anointed speaks	Jo 4:26
through metaphor/openly	Jo 16:25
not with eloquent speech	1 Co 2:1
rich in speech	2 Co 8:7
speak the truth	Ep 4:25
speak the word, speak it gracefully	Col 4:6
the truth	Tit 2:8
by faith—he still speaks	He 11:4
Spirit Filled	
Bezalel filled with God's Spirit	Ex 31:3
Caleb had a different spirit	Nu 14:24
Joshua had the breath of God's Spirit	Nu 27:18
moved in Samson	Ju 13:25
His Spirit is upon us	Is 42:1
My Spirit to all humanity	Joel 2:28
filled with power, with the Spirit	Mi 3:8
John, Elizabeth, Zacharias	Lk 1:15, 41, 67
Jesus to Nicodemus; water and Spirit	Jo 3:5
early church; speaking in tongues	Ac 2:4
Peter, John, and early church	Ac 4:8, 31
Saul receives Holy Spirit	Ac 9:17
overcomes intimidation	Ac 13:9, 52
instead of drunkenness be filled with the Spirit	Ep 5:18

Topic	Reference
Spiritual Warfare	
weapons powered by God	2 Co 10:4
demon princes—darkness	Ep 6:12
fight the devil	Jam 4:7
your enemy is prowling around	1 Pe 5:8
Success	
live by the law so you may have success	Jos 1:7-9
David was successful in everything	1 Sa 18:14
trust God—you will succeed	2 Ch 20:20
bring us success	Ps 118:25
right guidance brings success	Pr 15:22
do it well—after death there is nothing	Ec 10:10
living faithfully	Ma 6:32-34
great gain	Ph 1:20-21
Suffering	
Human	
profound agony	Job 2:13
Jesus'	
He predicts His own	Ma 16:21
He predicts His own	Ma 17:12, 15
eats Passover with disciples before suffering	Lk 22:15
God at work in suffering	Ac 3:18
using suffering to perfect Jesus—tested by suffering	He 2:10, 18
learned obedience through suffering	He 5:8
Jesus suffered and bled	He 13:12
suffering of the Anointed	1 Pe 1:11
He suffered for us	1 Pe 2:19, 21
Christian	
apostles filled with joy	Ac 5:41
celebrate in seasons of suffering	Ro 5:3
share in His suffering	Ro 8:17-18
all members suffer	1 Co 12:26
endure the same suffering we share	2 Co 1:5-6
chosen to suffer	Ph 1:29
join in suffering	Ph 3:10
I've suffered on your behalf	Col 1:24
willing to suffer	1 Th 2:14
warned of suffering	1 Th 3:4
join us in suffering	2 Ti 1:8
within your community	Jam 5:13
suffer for doing what is right	1 Pe 3:17-18
suffer for being a Christian	1 Pe 4:1, 16
in the face of suffering	Re 2:10
Syria and Aram	
Rebekah of Padan-aram	Ge 25:20
Laban of	Ge 31:20, 24
Balaam's home	Nu 23:7
Moses from an Aramean nomad	De 26:5
David set outposts and charged tribute	2 Sa 8:6
Absalom made a promise in Geshur of Aram	2 Sa 15:8
Ben-hadad laid siege to Samaria	1 Ki 20:1-23

Topic	Reference
Syria and Aram *(continued)*	
King Hazael	2 Ki 13:3-24
allies with Israel against Judah	Is 7:1-8
fields of Aram	Ho 12:12
smash the gates of Damascus	Am 1:5
hear about Jesus	Ma 4:24
Quirinius, governor	Lk 2:2
letter about the Jerusalem council	Ac 15:23
Paul journeys to Syria	Ga 1:21
Taxes	
Israel	
for congregation tent	Ex 30:11-16
other nations burdened Israel with taxes	1 Sa 10:8-18
Solomon enlisted 150,000 men	1 Ki 5:13-17
gather stonecutters—purchase location	1 Ch 22:2
none for Levites or priests	Ez 7:24
borrow to pay	Ne 5:1-13
Wrongful	
Rehoboam increased load of taxes	1 Ki 12:1-19
Menahem took from rich to pay off Assyria	2 Ki 15:17-22
wealth from taxes	Am 5:11
Jesus' Teaching	
tax collectors	Ma 5:46
temple tax	Ma 17:24
Jesus' perspective	Ma 22:17-19
Jesus, friend of tax collectors	Lk 7:34
attitudes toward tax collectors	Lk 18:11
pay your taxes	Ro 13:6-7
Teaching	
In Israel	
repeat to your children	De 6:7
show me Your way	Ps 27:11
pay attention; don't ignore	Pr 1:8
teaching of kindness	Pr 31:26
Jesus	
new teaching, with authority	Mk 1:27
Jesus' teaching comes from God	Jo 7:17
From the Spirit	
will teach all things and remind	Jo 14:26
don't need any other teacher	1 Jo 2:27
The Spiritual Gift	
teaching spiritual gift	Ro 12:7
Are all teachers?	1 Co 12:29
some pastor-teachers	Ep 4:11
Paul's Wisdom	
human teaching	Col 2:22
with all wisdom, teach	Col 3:16
allow women to teach	1 Ti 2:12
bringing unhealthy conversation into the church	1 Ti 6:3
who have the ability to teach	2 Ti 2:2
solid teaching, be a good example	Tit 2:1, 7

Topic	Reference
Teaching *(continued)*	
False Teachers	
some will not tolerate sound teaching	2 Ti 4:3
diverse and strange teachings	He 13:9
false teachers	2 Pe 2:1
Temple	
Physical Building	
Nathan tells David to plan the temple	2 Sa 7:1-3
a cloud filled the temple	1 Ki 8:1-11
remove vessels that honor other gods	2 Ki 23:4-12
Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple	2 Ki 25:9-17
Solomon honored the Eternal's reputation	2 Ch 2:1
proclamation to rebuild temple	Ez 1:1-11
dedication of temple	Ez 6:13-18
He remains in the temple	Ps 11:4
shadow of His temple	Ps 27:4
He is in His holy land	Hab 2:20
the devil tempts Jesus	Ma 4:5
Jesus greater than temple	Ma 12:6
Jesus teaching in temple	Ma 21:23-46
Jesus' prediction	Ma 24:1-2
Jesus taught openly there	Ma 26:55
Jesus' family visits	Lk 2:46
early church worshiping at temple	Ac 2:46
Peter and John visit at customary prayer time	Ac 3:1
Paul	Ac 21:20-30
take a seat in temple	2 Th 2:4
God's temple in heaven	Re 11:19
Spiritual Body	
Jesus in temple	Jo 2:15-20
Stephen's sermon to the council in Jerusalem	Ac 7:46-50
God cannot be contained in a man-made structure	Ac 17:24
together in the temple of the living God	1 Co 3:16
your body—temple of the Holy Spirit	1 Co 6:19
we house the temple of the living God	2 Co 6:16
become a holy temple in the Lord	Ep 2:21
not temple—God and Lamb are the temple	Re 21:22
Temptation	
in garden	Ge 3:1-5
David incited to conduct a census	1 Ch 21:1
destroy possession—hell curse you	Job 1:6-12
protection from	Ma 6:13
of Jesus	Ma 16:1, 23
resisting	Ma 26:41
the devil tempts Jesus	Lk 4:1-13
being source of temptation	Lk 17:1
don't withhold sex—short on self-control	1 Co 7:5
not tempted beyond what you are able	1 Co 10:13
fallen into a trap and is snared	Ga 6:1
the tempted tested you	1 Th 3:5

Topic	Reference
Temptation *(continued)*	
we are tested	He 2:18
tested as we are tested	He 4:15
process of temptation ends in sin	Jam 1:13-15
Thankfulness	
testify to Your goodness	1 Ch 29:13
grateful music	Ps 30:4
tune of thanksgiving	Ps 69:30
erupt with praise—give thanks	Ps 107:8
open your mouth with thanks	Ps 147:7
Jesus is thankful	Ma 11:25
for healing	Lk 17:12-19
for eternal gifts	Lk 18:30
for food	Jo 6:11
appreciation due	Ro 1:21
eating with gratitude	1 Co 10:30
your generosity—indescribable gift	2 Co 9:11, 15
haven't stopped thanking Him	Ep 1:16
offer thanks in praise	Ep 5:4, 20
I thank God for you	Ph 1:3
be thankful	Ph 4:6
thanking God	Col 1:3
spill over into thanksgiving	Col 2:7
hearts spilling over with thankfulness	Col 3:16
jubilant celebration	1 Th 3:9
give thanks no matter what	1 Th 5:18
to be received with gratitude	1 Ti 4:3-5
honor and thanksgiving	Re 4:9
thanksgiving and honor	Re 7:12
Tithes	
Abram to Melchizedek	Ge 14:20
1/10 of everything	Le 27:30-33
Levites receive	Nu 18:21-26
don't neglect the Levites	De 12:12-19
don't neglect the needy	De 14:22-29
affects prayer life	De 26:13-15
gave more than was required	2 Ch 31:5
storerooms for	Ne 13:5, 12
you are stealing from Me	Mal 3:3-10
of the Pharisees	Ma 23:23
Pharisee's prayer	Lk 18:9-14
Abraham gave a tenth	He 7:1-6
Trinity	
Jesus baptized; God speaks; Holy Spirit descends	Ma 3:16-17
and baptism	Ma 28:19
Son reveals Father, sends Spirit	Jo 14:16-26
Son prays to Father	Jo 17:1-26
same Spirit, same Lord, same God	1 Co 12:4-6
the Father, the Anointed, the Holy Spirit	Ep 1:1-14

Topic	Reference
Unity	
live together in peace	Ps 133:1
early church worshiping together	Ac 2:42-47
early Christians shared everything	Ac 4:32
united with Him	Ro 6:5
work toward unity	Ro 12:16
join us	Ro 14:19
don't eat something that causes offense	Ro 15:5
come together in agreement	1 Co 1:10, 26-29
mutually dependent	1 Co 12:25-26
unity of Spirit with peace binding	Ep 4:3-6
together as one mind	Ph 2:2
following the example we set	Ph 3:16-17
be like minded	1 Pe 3:1-8
Wealth	
Jacob's	Ge 34:29
God provides the wealth	De 8:17-19
asked not for selfish gain	2 Ch 1:11
exulted in wealth	Job 31:25
all die beggars	Ps 49:6-7, 10
honor Him with your best	Pr 3:9
hard earned—continues to grow	Pr 13:11
they think wealth is a fortress	Pr 18:11
wealth is brought to you	Is 60:11
an impediment to the Kingdom	Mk 10:23
receive wealth	Re 5:12
Will of God	
obedience; Jesus' true family	Mk 3:35
align life with will of God	Ro 8:27
discern will of God	Ro 12:2
to be an emissary	1 Co 1:1
by the will of God	2 Co 1:1
answer the call of God	2 Co 8:5
by the will of God	Ep 1:1
do will of God from your heart	Ep 6:6
at God's pleasure	Col 1:1
confidence from knowing will of God	Col 4:12
will of God for you	1 Th 4:3
this is will of God for you	1 Th 5:18
according to promise of life	2 Ti 1:1
done as God requires of you	He 10:36
it is will of God	1 Pe 2:15
live by the will of God	1 Pe 4:2
doing the will of God	1 Jo 2:17
Wisdom	
wisdom and discernment as expansive as beach sand	1 Ki 4:29
who put wisdom or granted understanding	Job 38:36
may we achieve wisdom	Ps 90:12
wisdom You create	Ps 104:24
He shares wisdom	Pr 2:6

Topic	Reference
Wisdom *(continued)*	
wisdom is required to build a house	Pr 24:3
converse with wisdom	Pr 31:26
better than weapons	Ec 9:18
He alone is wise—holds world together	Je 10:12
Jesus' growth	Lk 2:52
wisdom of this rebellious, broken world	1 Co 1:20
wisdom of this rebellious and broken world	1 Co 3:19
ready to receive wisdom and revelation	Ep 1:17
infinite and boundless wisdom	Ep 3:10
ask God for wisdom	Jam 1:5
wisdom centered on good fruits	Jam 3:17
honor and glory and praise	Re 5:12
glory and wisdom	Re 7:12
Women	
Adam's companion	Ge 2:18-23
His justice for powerless widows	De 10:18
dignified wife brings honor	Pr 12:4
Greek-speaking widows discriminated against in church	Ac 6:1
adultery	Ro 7:3
wife is glory of the husband	1 Co 11:3-12
wives submit	Ep 5:22-33
honoring widows	1 Ti 5:3-16
teach older women to teach younger women	Tit 2:3
accept authority of your husband	1 Pe 3:1-2, 5
Women in Leadership	
Miriam	Ex 15:20
Deborah	Ju 4:4-14
Huldah the prophetess	2 Ki 22:12-20
truly excellent woman	Pr 31:10-31
Lydia	Ac 16:14, 40
Phoebe, Prisca, Junias	Ro 16:1, 3, 7
Prisca	1 Co 16:19
Women in Life of Jesus	
Mary	Mk 6:3
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses, Salome	Mk 16:1
Elizabeth, Mary	Lk 1:5-7, 42
Mary Magdalene	Lk 8:2
Martha and Mary	Lk 10:38-42
Word of God	
Spoken Word	
spoke God's message	1 Sa 9:27
Ahithophel's counsel to David	2 Sa 16:23
message to John	Lk 3:2
hearing and doing	Lk 8:11, 21
and prayer; early church speaking with confidence	Ac 4:31
effectiveness; apostles focus on teaching	Ac 6:2, 7
also for outsiders	Ac 11:1
is for everyone	Ac 13:5, 7, 46

Topic	Reference
Word of God *(continued)*	
Spoken Word *(continued)*	
not that God's word has failed	Ro 9:6
is the word of God by you or only to you?	1 Co 14:36
sword—word of God	Ep 6:17
to preach the word of God	Col 1:25
taken into yourselves the word of God	1 Th 2:13
by God's word made holy	1 Ti 4:5
not in chains	2 Ti 2:9
is alive and moving—sharp	He 4:12
created by the word of God	He 11:3
who have spoken God's word to you	He 13:7
the word of God lives and abides forever	1 Pe 1:23
God spoke the word	2 Pe 3:5
I have written to you	1 Jo 2:14
witness to the word of God	Re 1:2, 9
holding fast to the word of God	Re 6:9
His name—the Word of God	Re 19:13
Jesus and the word of God	Re 20:4
Written Scripture	
and tradition	Ma 15:6
Jesus fulfills	Mk 12:10
Jesus fulfills	Lk 4:21
must come true	Lk 22:37
Jesus fulfills	Jo 2:22
cannot be set aside	Jo 10:35
about Judas	Jo 17:12
leads to good news of Jesus	Ac 8:32, 35
the Scriptures say	Ro 4:3
what Isaiah said was true	Ro 10:11
has subjected the whole world	Ga 3:8, 22
public reading of Scripture	1 Ti 4:13
use in teaching	2 Ti 3:16
royal law of Scripture	Jam 2:8, 23
where prophecy is found	2 Pe 1:20
Work	
Physical Labor	
industrious hand—riches	Pr 10:4
hard work satisfies	Pr 13:4, 11
do it as a service to Him	Pr 16:3
serve in good faith	Ep 6:5-8
work hard	Col 3:23
not working/willing to work	2 Th 3:10-12
a worker unashamed	2 Ti 2:15
Work Schedules	
God paused	Ge 2:2
God's curse of painful toil	Ge 5:29
ox and donkey rest	Ex 23:12
defile Sabbath—executed	Ex 31:14
stoned for working on Sabbath	Nu 15:32-36
the Sabbath	Lk 6:1-10

Topic	Reference
Work *(continued)*	
Good Works	
let the world see	Ma 5:16
Father and Son at work	Jo 5:17
Jesus' beautiful work	Jo 10:32
Tabitha (Dorcas) doing good for the poor	Ac 9:36
to accomplish work	Ep 2:10
works decorate your true beauty	1 Ti 2:10
widow's works	1 Ti 5:10, 25
rich in works	1 Ti 6:18
good example	Tit 2:7, 14
doing the right things	Tit 3:8, 14
inspire to righteous deeds	He 10:24
Worship	
don't worship any god but Me	Ex 34:14
David danced before the Lord	2 Sa 6:14-16
glory worthy of His name	1 Ch 16:29
David bowed low	1 Ch 29:20
fell to the ground to worship	Job 1:20
turn my face, fall on my knees	Ps 5:7
all nations will worship	Ps 22:27
a new song	Ps 33:3
my heart is ready	Ps 57:7-8
everyone bow down	Ps 95:6
lay awestruck before Him	Ps 96:9
praise, dance, sing	Ps 149:3
flaming creatures—holy, holy, holy	Is 6:1-7
sing a new song	Is 42:10
Nebuchadnezzar praises God	Da 3:28
wise men worship Jesus	Ma 2:11
meaningless worship	Ma 15:9
after Jesus' resurrection	Ma 28:9
only the Eternal One	Lk 4:8
where to worship	Jo 4:19-26
Paul in Athens	Ac 17:23
your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice	Ro 12:1
fall on his face	1 Co 14:25
offer worship that pleases Him	He 12:28
fell prostrate—worship	Re 4:10
sang a new song	Re 5:9
began to sing a new song	Re 14:3
worship God instead	Re 22:9
Youth	
minister before the Lord	1 Sa 2:11
David, youngest son of Jesse	1 Sa 17:14
sins of youth	Ps 25:7
restoring your youth	Ps 103:5
how can a young person remain pure	Ps 119:9
teach naïve, instruct young	Pr 1:4
wife of your youth	Pr 5:18
naïve young man	Pr 7:7

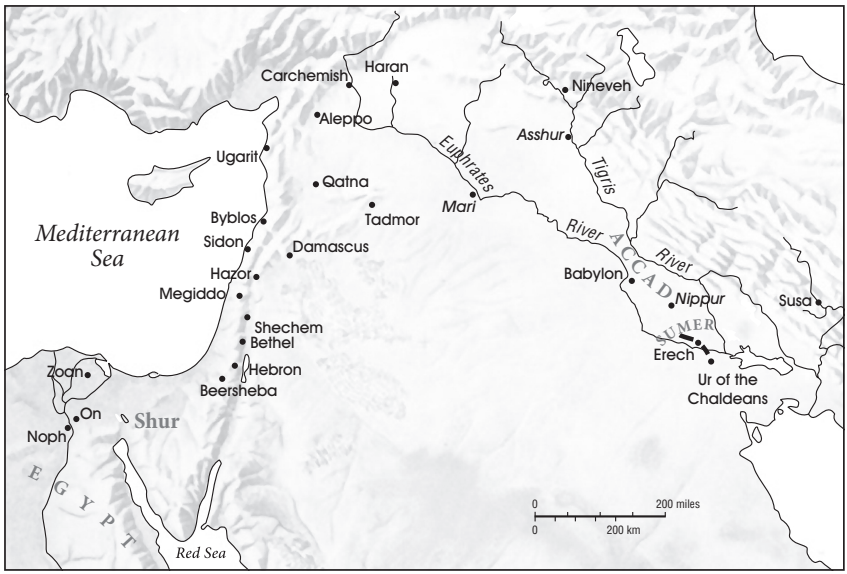
Topic	Reference
Youth *(continued)*	
young strong body where age has gray hair	Pr 20:29
remember God before life gets hard	Ec 12:1
terrorize the elderly	Is 3:5
young will stumble and fall	Is 40:30
inexperienced youth	Je 1:6
wife of your youth	Mal 2:15
wayward son	Lk 15:13
greatest must become like youngest	Lk 22:26
don't let anyone belittle you	1 Ti 4:2, 12
younger women	1 Ti 5:2
young women be a good example	Tit 2:4, 6
do as your elders ask	1 Pe 5:5

Maps

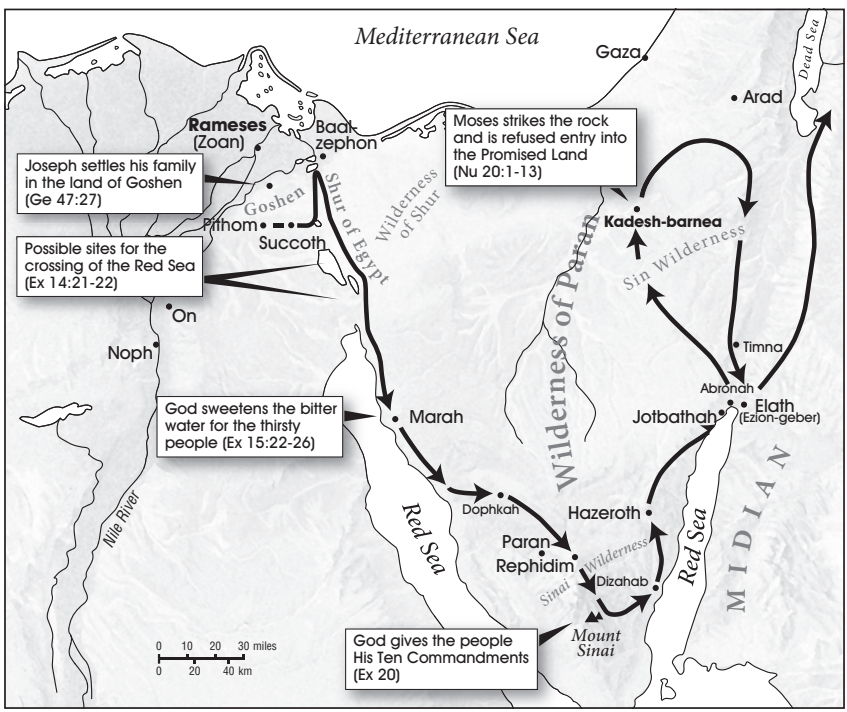
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The World of the Patriarchs



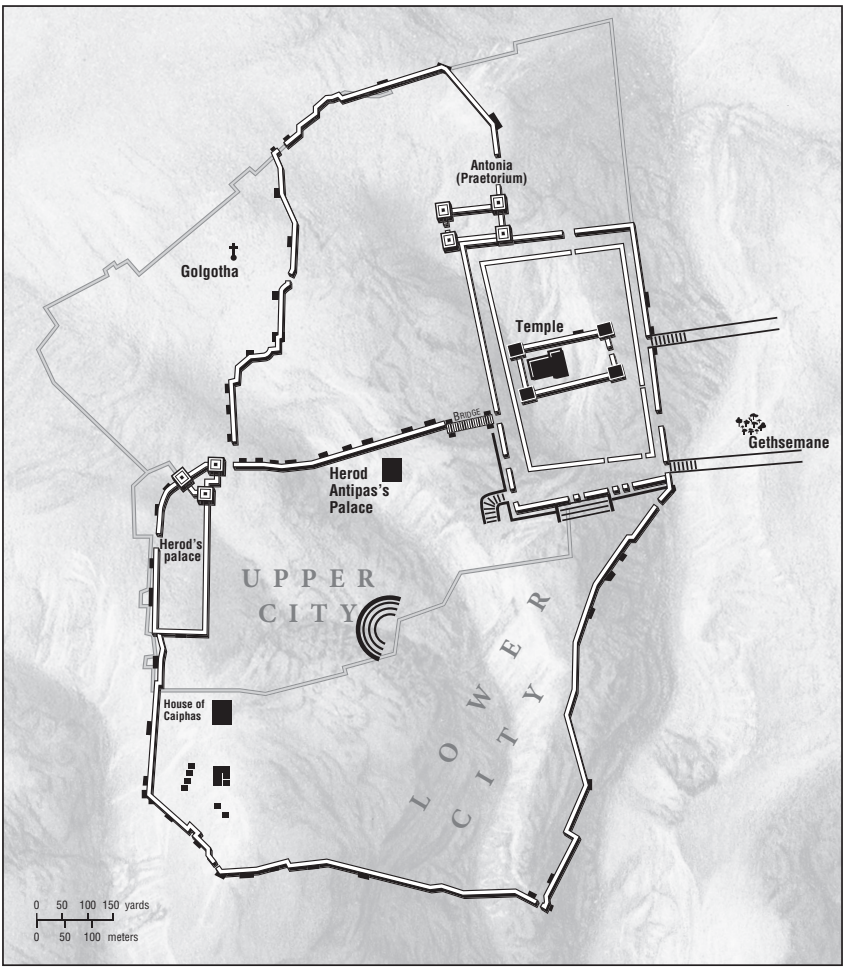
The Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings



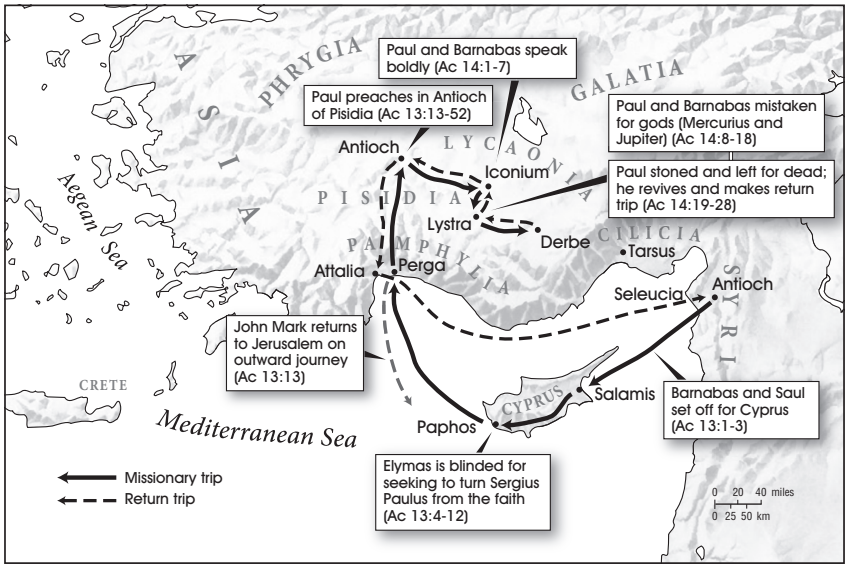
The Twelve Tribes



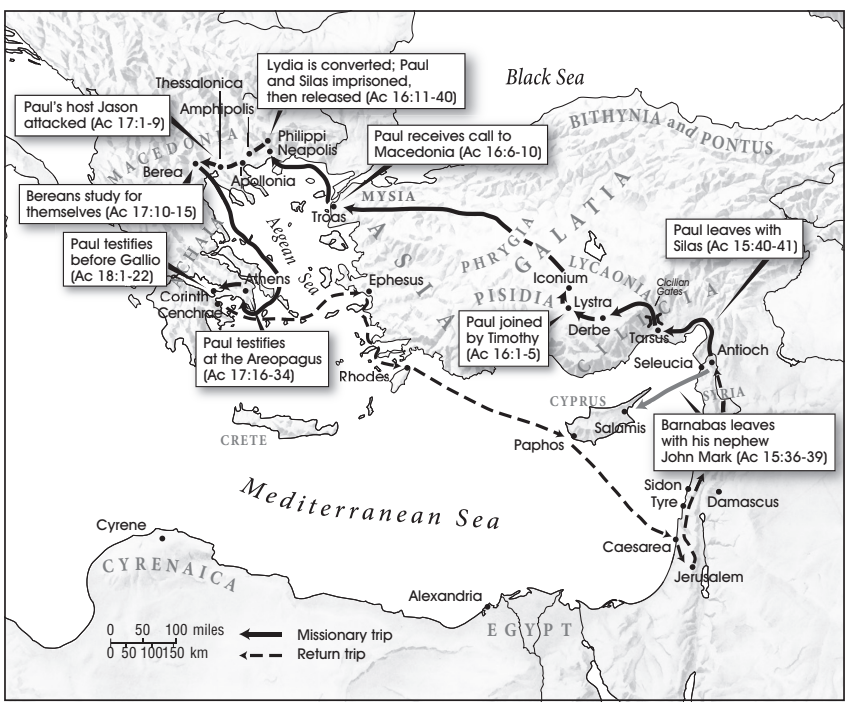
The Divided Kingdom



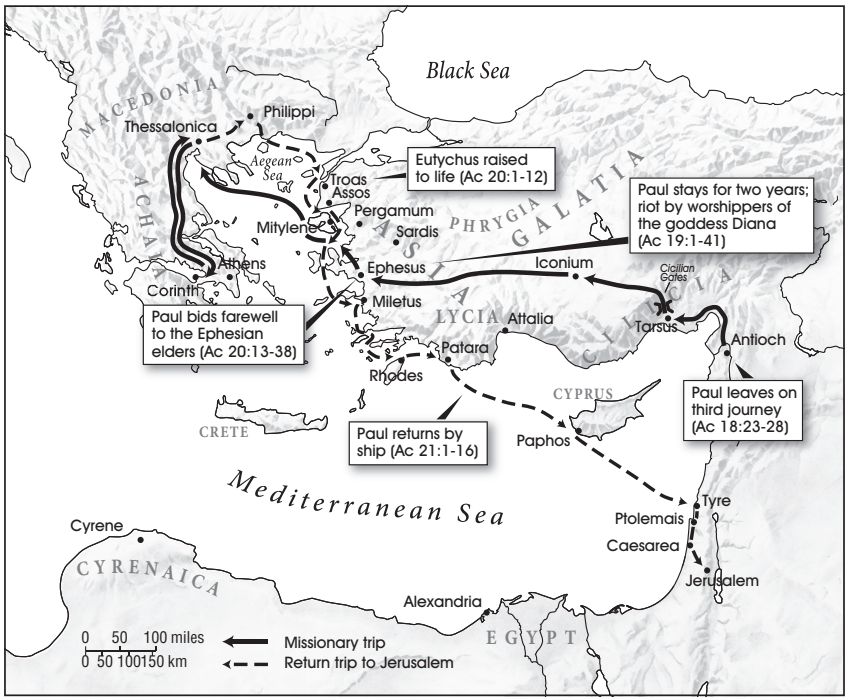
Jerusalem in New Testament Times



Paul's First Missionary Journey



Paul's Second Missionary Journey



Paul's Third Missionary Journey