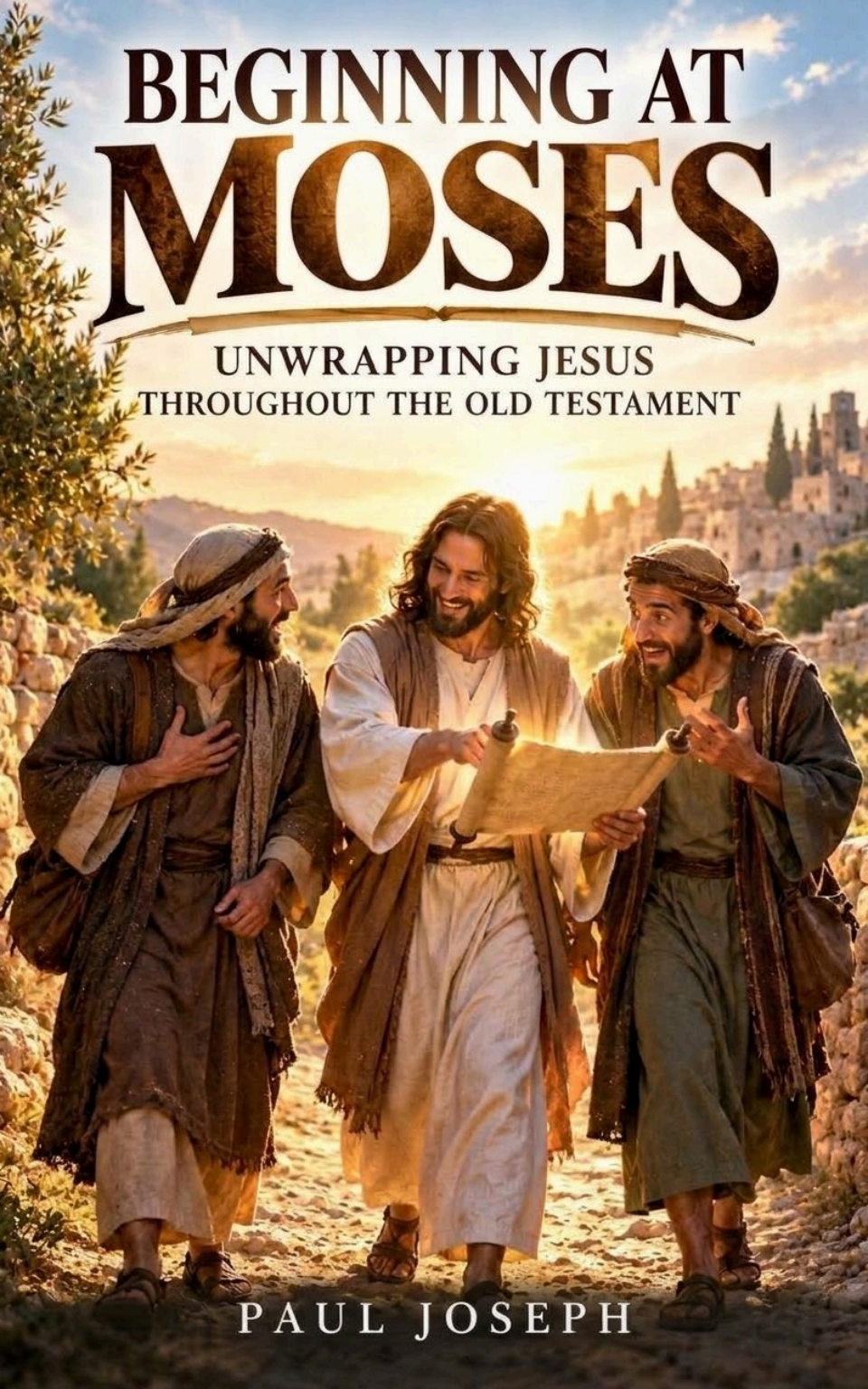
# BEGINNING AT MOSES

## UNWRAPPING JESUS THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT



PAUL JOSEPH

# Beginning at Moses

*Unwrapping Jesus Throughout the Old Testament*

PAUL JOSEPH

Faith Without Borders

**Beginning at Moses: Unwrapping Jesus Throughout the Old Testament**

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# Before You Begin

Welcome! I am so glad you picked this up, because you are about to go on the most wonderful walk in the whole Bible.

On the afternoon of the very first Easter Sunday, two broken-hearted followers of Jesus were walking home from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles away. A Stranger fell into step beside them. Before the road was done, He had unwrapped Jesus for them on every page of their Bibles. **"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."** (Luke 24:27)

Here is the part that should make every Bible reader sit up: nobody wrote it down. There is no transcript of that conversation. But Luke tells us where Jesus started, where He went, and what it was all about. And we hold in our hands the very same Scriptures He opened that day.

So that is what this book does. It walks the Emmaus road again, stop by stop. We will start in a garden, with a promise God spoke on the very day we fell. We will stand beside a lamb on an altar, blood on a doorframe, a bronze serpent on a pole, and a tent in the desert laid out in the shape of a cross. We will look inside the Ark, watch the two goats of the Day of Atonement, walk through God's calendar of feasts, and then sit with the prophets, who wrote down the life, death and rising of Jesus centuries before He was born.

You do not need a theology degree to read this book. I have kept the cookies on the lower shelf. All you need is an open Bible and an open heart. Every quotation from Scripture is in bold, from the

New King James Version, so you can find it and read it for yourself.

The book is in four parts. Part One is the road itself. Part Two is Moses. Part Three is the Prophets. Part Four is the burning heart, and what those two men did with it once they knew.

My prayer is simple. I pray that by the last page your heart will burn the way theirs did, and that you will be able to open the Old Testament for somebody else and show them Jesus on every page.

**God was never making it up as He went along. Every page was pointing at one Man.**

PART ONE

# The Road

CHAPTER 1

# Two Men and a Stranger

It is Sunday afternoon, and the worst weekend of their lives is not over yet.

Two men are walking out of Jerusalem on the road west, heading for a village called Emmaus. The sun has passed its height. Behind them is a city still buzzing from a Passover that went horribly wrong. Ahead of them is home, a bed, and nothing left to hope for. Luke sets the scene in one plain sentence: **"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem."** (Luke 24:13).

Seven miles. That is roughly a two-hour walk, and two hours is a long time to be sad out loud.

Because that is what they are doing. They are not walking in silence. They are going over it, and over it, and over it again. **"And they talked together of all these things which had happened."** (Luke 24:14). You have done this. After the funeral, after the diagnosis, after the phone call that changed everything, you replay it all, as if one more pass through the facts might make them come out differently. They never do.

## The Men Nobody Would Have Chosen

One of them is called Cleopas. He was not one of the Twelve. He did not write a book of the Bible. He turns up for this one afternoon and then steps back out of the story.

The other one is not named at all, and I think the silence is deliberate. I have always taken it as a wonderful piece of divine

hospitality. *There is an open seat on that road, and it has your name on it.* Every time you open this book, you are walking where that second disciple walked. Keep that in mind, because the Teacher who is about to join them is very happy to walk with you too.

Here is the moment I want you to see in slow motion. **"So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him."** (Luke 24:15-16).

*Jesus Himself.* Not an angel. Not a messenger with a word from heaven. The risen Lord of glory, three days out of the grave, with the whole universe to run, and where is He on the afternoon of the first Easter? Walking down a dusty road beside two discouraged nobodies who are heading the wrong way.

That tells you everything about Him before He has said a word. He does not wait for us to get our act together and come back to Jerusalem. He comes after us on the road out.

## Explaining the Movie to the Director

Then He asks a question, which is how He so often starts. **"What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"** (Luke 24:17).

He knows perfectly well what they are talking about. He was the subject of it. But He asks, because healing often starts when the thing crushing you is finally spoken out loud to the right Person.

And Cleopas gives one of the most beautifully human answers in the entire Bible: **"Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"** (Luke 24:18).

I love this man. Think about what he has just done. He is telling the Author of the events that He must be the only person in town who has not heard about them. It is the equivalent of explaining a movie to the person who directed it. *You must be the only one*

*who missed it, friend.* Missed it? He was nailed to the middle of it.

And Jesus, with a patience I find almost funny, plays along. **"What things?"** (Luke 24:19).

So they tell Him. And this is where you get to hear what was really going on inside the followers of Jesus that weekend.

**"The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him."** (Luke 24:19-20).

Notice how much they get right. A Prophet, mighty in deed and word. These men had followed Him, listened to Him, watched Him heal. Their facts are in perfect order.

## "We Were Hoping"

Then comes the sentence that breaks my heart every time I read it: **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."** (Luke 24:21).

*We were hoping.* Past tense. That is the sound of a dream that has died. It is the language of a man packing up the spare room after the baby did not come, of a woman returning the wedding dress. *We were hoping.* It is a door closing.

And here is the thing I want you to catch, because the whole book hangs on it. They were not wrong about who He was. They were wrong about what redemption was going to look like.

They wanted a Messiah who would throw out the Romans. God was handing them a Messiah who would throw out death.

They were expecting a King on a throne in Jerusalem. When He was nailed to a cross instead, their whole picture fell off the wall, because in it there was simply no room for a crucified Christ. If He died, He could not be the One. So their hope died with Him.

The tragedy is that the very thing which ended their hope was the thing their own Scriptures had been describing for fifteen hundred years. They were grieving over the fulfillment of the promise. They were walking away from Jerusalem because the plan had worked.

How many of us have done the same? We had a picture of what God would do, and when He did something deeper and harder to understand, we called it failure and started walking home.

## The News They Could Not Hear

Then Cleopas adds a detail that should have stopped them in their tracks. **"Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened."** (Luke 24:21).

The third day. Jesus had told them, plainly and more than once, that He would be killed and raised on the third day. And here is Cleopas, saying the words *the third day* out loud, without hearing them.

It gets better. **"Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive."** (Luke 24:22-23).

Read that again. *Angels who said He was alive.* The resurrection had already been announced to them. The news was in. Earlier in the same chapter Luke tells us how it landed: **"And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."** (Luke 24:11). The first report of the empty tomb was filed under women's chatter, and the men went on being miserable.

And still Cleopas has one more piece of evidence to lay before the Stranger. **"And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."** (Luke 24:24).

So here is where they stand. The tomb is empty. Angels have said He is alive. It is the third day, exactly as He promised. And the

two men walking to Emmaus have every fact they need, and not one ounce of faith to go with them.

*But Him they did not see.* The irony is almost too much to bear, because at the moment Cleopas says it, the One they did not see is walking right beside them.

That is where they are, two hours from home, with their dreams in pieces and the answer to all of it close enough to touch. And the Stranger, who has listened to every word without interrupting once, is about to open His mouth. What He says next will not be a miracle, or a vision, or a blinding flash of light. It will be a Bible class, and it will change everything.

**Their facts were right, their hope was dead, and the answer was walking right beside them.**

CHAPTER 2

# Slow of Heart

The Stranger has listened to the whole sad story without interrupting once. He has heard about the Prophet mighty in deed and word, the trial, the cross, the empty tomb and the women's report of angels. And now, at last, He speaks.

**"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"** (Luke 24:25).

If you were Cleopas, I suspect that would have stung a little. You have just poured out your grief to a man you met twenty minutes ago, and He calls you foolish. But stay with me, because this is the kindest rebuke in Scripture. It is the voice of a doctor who has looked at the X-ray and is about to tell you exactly what is wrong, because He fully intends to fix it.

## Not Ignorant, Slow

Look carefully at what Jesus diagnoses, and what He does not.

He does not say they are ignorant. These men knew their Scriptures. They had grown up hearing the Law read every Sabbath, and they had sat at the feet of the greatest Teacher who ever lived. Information was not their problem.

He says they are *slow of heart.*

Their problem was that the information had never made the journey from their heads to their hearts. They had the verses filed away in the right drawers, and the drawers had never been opened when it mattered. On Friday, when everything went dark, all that knowledge sat there unused, like a fire extinguisher still in its box while the kitchen burns.

That is a diagnosis a lot of us need. You can know the verse and still not believe the verse. You can quote the promise and still walk around like an orphan. You can sing on Sunday that God is in control and lie awake on Monday night convinced that He has lost the plot.

The Bible has always located real belief in the heart. **"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness."** (Romans 10:10). And Solomon warned us to guard that ground above everything else: **"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."** (Proverbs 4:23). The heart is not the soft, sentimental part of you. In Scripture it is the control room, the place where what you know turns into what you actually trust.

Jesus had run into this slowness before. After feeding thousands with a few loaves, He found His disciples fretting about having forgotten to bring bread, and He asked them, **"Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?"** (Mark 8:17). They had watched the miracle with their own eyes. It simply had not reached the place where decisions are made.

Let me tell you about Derek. Derek could have taught a Bible class in his sleep. He knew the books in order, the kings of Israel, the journeys of Paul. When his business went under, he sat in his car in a parking lot for three hours, absolutely certain that God had finished with him. A friend found him there and asked him one question: "Derek, what does Romans 8:28 say?" Derek quoted it word perfect, and then burst into tears, because he realized he had known it for thirty years and never once believed it applied to him.

That is slow of heart. Not a shortage of verses. A blockage between the verse and the man.

## "Ought Not the Christ to Have Suffered?"

Then Jesus asks the question that turns the whole conversation around. **"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things**

**and to enter into His glory?"** (Luke 24:26).

*Ought not.* Not "was it permitted". Not "was it an unfortunate accident that God managed to turn around". *It was required.* The suffering came first and the glory came after, and the one led to the other. The cross was not the plan going wrong. The cross was the plan.

That is the exact point where the two disciples had got stuck. In their thinking, suffering and Messiah could not sit in the same sentence. If He suffered, He failed. If He was crucified, He was cursed. And Jesus is telling them that they have it upside down. If He had *not* suffered, *that* would have been the failure, because the prophets had said He must.

Here is what makes their slowness so striking. He had told them. More than once, and in plain words. **"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."** (Matthew 16:21). And Peter, bless him, took Him aside to correct Him: **"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"** (Matthew 16:22).

Later He spelled it out again, step by step. They would mock Him, spit on Him, scourge Him, kill Him, and on the third day He would rise. And Luke records what happened to that announcement: **"But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken."** (Luke 18:34).

They heard it with their ears and filed it under *things He cannot possibly mean*.

## Not Plan B

I want you to get hold of this, because it will change how you read every page of the Old Testament.

Nothing that happened on that Friday took God by surprise. Peter, who had once tried to talk Jesus out of the cross, later stood up in Jerusalem and preached this: **"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."** (Acts 2:23). *Determined purpose.* The men who drove the nails were guilty, and God was still writing the story.

In fact, it goes back further than Jerusalem, further than Moses, further than the garden. Peter says the Lamb **"was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."** (1 Peter 1:20). Before there was a world to fall, there was a Lamb ready to be slain for it.

So when Paul summed up the gospel, he did not say Christ died and then the apostles found a way to explain it. He said, **"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."** (1 Corinthians 15:3). *According to the Scriptures.* It was written down first. It happened second.

## A Bible Without a Thread

Now, here is why this matters for us, two thousand years later.

There is an idea doing the rounds in some contemporary churches that the Bible is essentially a book of good advice. Be kind. Be generous. Be brave like David, faithful like Daniel, patient like Job. The Old Testament becomes a collection of moral stories, a sort of ancient self-help shelf, and Jesus becomes the best example of a good life.

It is easy to preach and easy to hear. But it has exactly the same problem as Cleopas's theology. It has no room for a cross.

If the Bible is a book of tips, then the cross is an embarrassment, a tragic end to a fine moral teacher. But if the Bible is one long story of a promised Redeemer who *must* suffer and *must* rise, then the cross is the center of everything, the place every page was heading towards.

David is not mainly there to show you how to fight your giants. He is there to point you to the Son of David who fought the giant you could never beat. The Old Testament is not a list of examples. It is a trail of fingerprints, and every one of them belongs to Jesus.

A Bible of moral tips will leave you exactly where it found Cleopas: well informed, trying hard, and heartbroken when life does not go to plan. A Bible with a thread running through it will set your heart on fire.

And that is precisely what the Stranger is about to do. He is not going to leave them with a rebuke. He has diagnosed the problem. Now He is going to treat it, and His medicine is the Scriptures they thought they already knew.

**The cross was never God's plan going wrong; it was God's plan going exactly right.**

CHAPTER 3

# Beginning at Moses and All the Prophets

If I had been the risen Son of God on that road, I know exactly what I would have done. I would have stopped dead in the middle of the path, pulled back my sleeves, and said, "Look at My hands." Problem solved in four seconds. Two hours of misery cured on the spot.

Jesus did not do that.

Instead Luke gives us the sentence this whole book is built on: **"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."** (Luke 24:27).

Read that slowly, because every phrase in it is a treasure.

## Not a Miracle, a Bible Study

The first thing to notice is His method. The risen Lord, with all power in heaven and on earth, chose to cure their broken hearts with a Bible study.

He kept their eyes restrained, and for mile after mile He simply opened the Scriptures and taught. No fireworks. No glowing wounds. No voice from the sky. Just the Word of God, explained by the One it was written about.

Why would He do it that way? Because a sight would have convinced them for an afternoon, but the Scriptures would hold them for a lifetime. Sights fade. You can talk yourself out of what you saw. But once you have seen the same Person on page after page of a book written over fifteen centuries, you cannot unsee it.

Jesus had said something remarkable about this before the cross. In His story about the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man begs for someone to rise from the dead and warn his brothers. And the answer comes back: **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."** (Luke 16:31).

And here He is, risen from the dead, walking beside two men who do not believe it, and what does He reach for? Moses and the prophets. He practiced exactly what He had preached.

That ought to encourage you enormously. Your Bible is not second best. It is not the consolation prize for people who missed the resurrection appearances. It is the very thing Jesus Himself chose to use on resurrection day. The same pages He opened on that road are sitting on your bedside table.

## He Started in Genesis

The second thing to notice is where He began. *Beginning at Moses.*

He did not start with the empty tomb. He did not start with Friday. He did not even start with Isaiah or the Psalms, where the cross is described most vividly. He went right back to the beginning, to the five books of Moses, to Genesis, and walked them forward from there.

Think about what that tells us. To understand what happened on Calvary, you have to understand what happened in Eden. To understand the empty tomb, you need the garden, the altar, the lamb, the doorposts, the tent in the wilderness. The cross does not make sense as a single event floating in history. It makes sense as the ending of a story, and Jesus wanted them to hear the story from the top.

That is why this book starts where He started. In the chapters ahead we will stand in the garden, at Abel's altar, on Mount Moriah, in Egypt on the night of the blood, in the Tabernacle

with its furniture laid out in the shape of a cross. Then we will walk on into the prophets. We are following His route.

And notice the phrase *all the Scriptures*. Not a few favorite proof-texts. He went through the whole lot. Later that same evening, back in Jerusalem, He did it again for the larger group, and Luke tells us how He divided it up: **"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."** (Luke 24:44).

The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. That is the whole Hebrew Bible, in its three great sections. There was no part of it He left out. And then comes the line I pray over myself every time I open my Bible: **"And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."** (Luke 24:45).

## "Moses Wrote About Me"

This was not a new idea Jesus came up with after the resurrection. He had been saying it all along.

Long before the cross, He stood in front of the most dedicated Bible students of His day, men who had memorized whole books, and told them they had missed the point: **"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."** (John 5:39).

*These are they which testify of Me.* The whole Old Testament is a witness box, and every book in it has stepped up to speak about one Man.

Then He went further: **"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:46-47).

*He wrote about Me.* Moses, fifteen centuries earlier, sitting in a tent in the desert with a pen, was writing about Jesus. Not vaguely. Not by accident. On purpose, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles caught this and never let go of it. Peter told a room full of Gentiles, **"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."** (Acts 10:43). And when Paul walked into a synagogue, he did exactly what Jesus had done on the road: **"for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead."** (Acts 17:2-3).

Remember, the only Bible those early believers had was what we call the Old Testament. When Paul told Timothy that **"from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"** (2 Timothy 3:15), he was talking about Moses and the prophets. They preached Jesus from Genesis, because Genesis was full of Him.

## Nobody Grabbed a Pen

Now here is the part that will keep you up at night in the best possible way.

Nobody wrote it down.

There is no transcript. Two men got the single greatest teaching session ever given, from the risen Son of God Himself, on the very afternoon He came out of the grave, and neither of them thought to grab a pen. Luke tells us where He started, where He went and what it was all about, and then he leaves us standing at the side of the road wishing we had been there.

I used to find that frustrating. Now I think it is one of the most generous things God ever did. Because He did not give us a transcript, He gave us the textbook. We have the very same Scriptures He opened. And the New Testament, written by men who heard Him teach this way, tells us again and again which passages He used. *That it might be fulfilled. According to the Scriptures. Moses wrote about Me.* The trail markers are all

there.

So we are not stuck. We can walk that road again, stop by stop, and put together as closely as we can the lesson He taught. And Paul tells us what to expect when we do: **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."** (Romans 15:4).

*Might have hope.* The two disciples had said, "We were hoping." Past tense. The answer to a dead hope turned out to be the old Scriptures, opened by the right Teacher.

So let me tell you what you are about to discover. The Old Testament is not a different religion from the New. It is not a dusty prequel you can skip. It is the same story, told from the beginning, with the same Hero on every page.

**Jesus did not come to start a new religion; He came to finish a story God had been telling since Genesis 3.**

CHAPTER 4

# The Thread

Imagine you are clearing out an old house and up in the attic, under a pile of curtains, you find a large sheet of yellowed paper folded into eight. You open it out on the floor. It is covered in measurements, little sketches, strange numbers, lists of materials. Lengths of fabric. Weights of metal. A few dates in the margin. It makes no sense at all. You nearly put it in the trash.

Then, almost without thinking, you pick it up and hold it to the window. And with the light shining through it, the lines on the front and the lines on the back suddenly line up, and a shape appears. It was never a jumble. It was a blueprint all along, and now you can see the building.

That is what happened to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And that is what this chapter is about.

## Sixty-Six Books, One Story

The Bible is not one book. It is sixty-six books, written by around forty different people over something like fifteen hundred years, in three languages, on three continents. Kings wrote parts of it, and so did shepherds, fishermen, a tax collector, a doctor and a prisoner. Some of them never met. Most of them could not have known what the others would write.

And yet it tells one story with one Hero.

Hold the Old Testament up to the light of the New, and the scattered details form a silhouette. A cross on a desert floor. An empty tomb in a garden. A King on a throne. God was not making it up as He went along. He said as much through Isaiah:

**"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done."** (Isaiah 46:10).

The writer of Hebrews puts it beautifully: **"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."** (Hebrews 1:1-2). Many times, many ways, many voices, and one final Word. All the earlier speaking was leading up to Him.

So let me walk you quickly along the shelf. I am going to pick up a good number of the Old Testament books and give you one line on where Jesus stands in each. We will spend whole chapters on some of these later, so treat this as the view from the hilltop before we walk down into the valley.

## Walking Along the Shelf

In Genesis, Jesus is the Seed of the woman, promised in the garden on the very day it all went wrong.

In Exodus, He is the Passover Lamb, whose blood on the doorposts turned death away from the house.

In Leviticus, He is our Great High Priest, and every sacrifice on every altar is pointing at His.

In Numbers, He is the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole, so that anyone who looks can live.

In Deuteronomy, He is the Prophet like Moses, the One God promised to raise up from among His people.

In Joshua, He is the Commander of the LORD's army, and Joshua even carries His name.

In Ruth, He is the Kinsman-Redeemer, the relative with the right, the means and the will to buy back what was lost.

In 1 and 2 Samuel, He is the true Anointed King, the Son of David with a throne that never ends.

In 1 Kings, He is the One greater than Solomon.

In Job, He is the living Redeemer that a suffering man could see from the bottom of his pit: **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth."** (Job 19:25).

In the Psalms, He is the Good Shepherd: **"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."** (Psalm 23:1). He is also the King, the Priest, and the Sufferer whose hands and feet are pierced.

In Proverbs, He is the Wisdom of God, whom Paul would later call **"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 1:24).

In the Song of Solomon, He is the Bridegroom who loves His bride.

In Isaiah, He is the Suffering Servant, wounded for our transgressions.

In Jeremiah, He is the Righteous Branch: **"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness."** (Jeremiah 23:5).

In Lamentations, written among the ruins of Jerusalem, He is our hope when everything has fallen down.

In Ezekiel, He is the promised Shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep Himself.

In Daniel, He is the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven.

In Jonah, He is the Risen One, three days in the dark and then out into the light.

In Micah, He is the Ruler born in little Bethlehem.

In Haggai, He is the One the prophet calls **"the Desire of All Nations"** (Haggai 2:7).

In Zechariah, He is the Pierced Messiah, the One they will one day look upon and mourn.

And in Malachi, the last page before four hundred years of silence, He is the dawn on the horizon: **"But to you who fear**

**My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."** (Malachi 4:2).

Do you see it? The Old Testament closes with the sun about to rise. The New Testament opens with a baby in Bethlehem.

## Shadow and Substance

Now, how exactly do all these pictures relate to Jesus? The New Testament gives us the key word, and it is *shadow*.

**"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect."** (Hebrews 10:1).

And Paul, writing about the festivals, the new moons and the Sabbaths, says they **"are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."** (Colossians 2:17).

Think about how a shadow works. If you are standing around a corner and a shadow comes along the sidewalk towards you, you can tell a great deal from it. Somebody is coming. You can see roughly how tall they are, which way they are walking, whether they are carrying something. But you cannot shake hands with a shadow. You cannot have a conversation with it. The shadow is real, but it is not the person. It simply tells you the person is on the way.

That is the Old Testament. Every lamb, every altar, every feast, every priest was a real shadow cast by a real Person who had not yet come around the corner. The shadow fell across fifteen hundred years of history. And then one day in Bethlehem, the Person Himself stepped into view.

The tragedy, Paul says, is that it is possible to read the shadows and never see the Person. **"For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ."** (2 Corinthians 3:14). And then the wonderful promise: **"Nevertheless when one turns**

**to the Lord, the veil is taken away."** (2 Corinthians 3:16).

Let me tell you about Hannah. She had tried to read the Bible through three times and given up somewhere in Leviticus every time. "Too many goats," she told me. Then a friend sat down with her one evening and showed her that every one of those goats was pointing at Jesus. She went home and started again at Genesis. She called her friend at eleven o'clock that night, nearly shouting down the phone: "He's everywhere! Why did nobody tell me He was everywhere?"

That is the veil coming off. Same book. Same pages. Different reader, because now she was reading by the light.

Every promise God ever made finds its home in one place. **"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen."** (2 Corinthians 1:20). The shadows were all heading somewhere. They were all heading to Him.

**Hold the Old Testament up to the light, and every line on the page traces the shape of one Man.**

PART TWO

# Moses

CHAPTER 5

# The Promise in the Garden

If Jesus began at Moses, then He almost certainly began here, in the third chapter of the very first book, on the worst day in human history.

Everything had been perfect. A garden God had planted Himself. A man and a woman made in His image, walking with Him, with nothing to hide and nothing to fear. One tree they were told to leave alone, and a whole world of trees they were free to enjoy.

Then a voice in the grass asked a question. **"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"** (Genesis 3:1). That was the first attack on the human race, and notice what it was aimed at. Not their strength. Their trust. The serpent did not start by denying God. He started by making God sound stingy.

You know the rest. They ate. Their eyes were opened, though not in the way they had been promised, and the first thing they saw was their own nakedness. And then they did what every one of us has done since: they hid.

## A Question Before a Sentence

**"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden."** (Genesis 3:8).

What happens next is the first glimpse of the heart of God after the fall. He does not thunder. He does not send fire. He comes looking. **"Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to**

**him, 'Where are you?'"** (Genesis 3:9).

God knew exactly where Adam was. That question was not for information. It was an invitation. It was the voice of a Father calling a child out from behind the sofa. And if that sounds familiar, it should, because it is the very same thing Jesus did on the Emmaus road: drawing near to people walking away from Him and asking a question to get them talking.

Then come the excuses. Adam blames the woman, and with a sideways glance blames God for giving her to him. The woman blames the serpent. The serpent does not get asked.

And then God starts to speak judgment. Here is the detail I want you to catch, because it is one of the most beautiful things in the Bible.

God turns to the serpent first. And in the middle of the serpent's sentence, before He has said a single word to Adam and Eve about the pain and the thorns and the sweat and the dust, He announces the rescue: **"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."** (Genesis 3:15).

Before the consequences were handed out, the cure was announced.

Do you see the order? The first thing Adam and Eve heard from God after they fell was not their sentence. It was the serpent's. And tucked inside the serpent's sentence was their salvation. They walked out of that garden carrying a promise before they ever carried a burden.

That is why this verse has been called the first gospel. The whole plan of salvation, compressed into a single sentence, given on the first day it was needed and roughly four thousand years before it was fulfilled.

## The Seed of the Woman

Now look closely at the wording, because God chose every word with care.

All through the Bible, a family line is traced through the father. It is the seed of the man. The genealogies are lists of who *begot* whom: fathers and sons, generation after generation. That is how the Hebrew mind thought about descent.

But here, God speaks of *her* Seed. The Seed of the woman.

That is a strange phrase, and it is meant to be. It is a signpost hammered into the ground on the very first pages of the Bible, pointing down the road towards a birth that would have no human father. We will come back and stand at that signpost properly later in this book, because the virgin birth turns out to be far more than a miracle for its own sake. For now, simply notice that God was already hinting at it in Eden.

Paul shows us where the signpost was pointing: **"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."** (Galatians 4:4).

*Born of a woman.* Thousands of years after the garden, the promised Seed arrived, right on time. *The fullness of the time.* Not a day early, not a day late. God had been watching the clock since Genesis 3.

And notice the word Seed is singular. Not a crowd of descendants, not a nation, not a movement. One Person. He. **"He shall bruise your head."** (Genesis 3:15). The rescue was always going to come down to one Man.

## A Heel and a Head

Then there is the shape of the battle itself. Two injuries are promised, and they are not the same.

The serpent will bruise the Seed's heel. The Seed will crush the serpent's head.

A heel wound hurts. It can make you limp. It can even bring you to the ground for a while. But you recover from a heel wound. A head wound is a different thing entirely. When you crush a snake's head, it is finished.

So here, in the first gospel, the cross and the resurrection are already sketched in outline. The serpent would strike. The Seed would be wounded, really wounded, nailed to a tree, laid in a tomb. That was the bruised heel. And it looked, for three days, like the serpent had won. That was the very view of things Cleopas was walking home with.

But the heel healed. On the third day the Seed stood up. And the head that struck Him was crushed under the very foot it had bitten.

John tells us plainly why Jesus came: **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."** (1 John 3:8). And Hebrews tells us how He did it, not by avoiding death but by going through it: **"that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Read that carefully. He beat death by dying. The serpent's best strike was the very blow that finished him. Paul describes the cross this way: **"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."** (Colossians 2:15).

## Under Your Feet

And here is where it gets personal.

Paul wrote to ordinary believers in Rome, people with jobs and families and struggles like yours, and he said this: **"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."** (Romans 16:20).

*Under your feet.* Not just under His. The victory promised in the garden is shared with everyone who belongs to the Seed. The head is crushed, and you get to stand on it.

Ruthie spent years feeling as if the enemy had the upper hand in her life. Old shame, old fears, the same old battles every week. When she finally saw Genesis 3:15 for herself, she wrote it on a card and stuck it to her bathroom mirror. Underneath it she wrote: *Heel bruised. Head crushed. Not the other way around.* She told me she read it every morning before she looked at anything else in that mirror.

That is the gospel, and it was preached in a garden before anybody had even left it. God did not wait for us to clean ourselves up. He did not wait for us to ask. On the very day we fell, standing among the trees with two frightened people hiding behind them, He told the enemy exactly how this was going to end.

And then, before He sent them out of the garden, He did something with His own hands that we will look at in the next chapter. Because a promise had been spoken, but somebody still had to bleed.

**On the day we fell, God told the serpent how the story ends.**

CHAPTER 6

# Coats of Skin and Abel's Lamb

Before God ever spoke the promise of the Seed, Adam and Eve had already tried to fix things themselves.

**"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings."** (Genesis 3:7).

I love the honesty of that verse, and I also find it a little bit funny. The first thing the human race did after sinning was start a sewing project. Two people who had just lost paradise sat down among the trees and tried to stitch their way back to respectability.

## Fig Leaves and the Religion of Self-Repair

Fig leaves are man's covering. They are the very first religion: the idea that if I can just put something together with my own hands, something presentable, it will cover what I have done.

And it is still the most popular religion in the world. It does not always look religious. Sometimes it looks like being a good person, or being busy at church, or a reputation, or a perfectly curated family photo. We are all very good at sewing.

But fig leaves have two problems. First, they do not last. Pick a leaf off a tree on a hot day and see how it looks by suppertime. Second, and more seriously, they do not work. The moment Adam heard God walking in the garden, he hid, fig leaves and all. His own covering could not give him the confidence to stand in front of God. Deep down he knew it was not enough.

Isaiah put it bluntly many centuries later: **"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."** (Isaiah 64:6). Notice that it is not our sins that are compared to filthy rags. It is our *righteousnesses*. Our very best efforts at covering ourselves.

Marcus told me he spent fifteen years trying to make up for something he had done in his twenties. He gave to every cause. He volunteered for everything. He was the first to arrive and the last to leave. "I was exhausted," he said, "and I still felt naked." Fig leaves will do that to you.

## What God Made With His Own Hands

Then, after the promise of the Seed and after the consequences had been spoken, God did something remarkable. **"Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them."** (Genesis 3:21).

Older translations call them coats of skin. Either way, stop and think about what that sentence means.

Skin does not grow on trees. For there to be skins, something had to die. For the first time in the history of the world, in a garden that had never known death, blood was shed. An innocent animal that had done nothing wrong lost its life so that two guilty people could be covered.

And notice who did it. *The LORD God made.* Adam did not make these. Eve did not make these. God made them, and God put them on. **"And clothed them."** (Genesis 3:21). They did not even dress themselves.

So here, in the third chapter of the Bible, are two completely different ways of dealing with sin, side by side. Man's covering, made of leaves, sewn by man, costing nothing but effort. And God's covering, made of skin, provided by God, costing a life.

That is the whole difference between religion and the gospel. Religion is fig leaves: what I can do to cover myself. The gospel

is coats of skin: what God has done, at the cost of a life, to cover me. Paul puts it this way: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Isaiah saw it too, and he could not stop singing about it: **"For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."** (Isaiah 61:10). *He* has clothed me. I did not sew a stitch.

The great exchange at the cross is the coats of skin on a cosmic scale: **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Innocent was stripped, so that the guilty could be dressed.

## Two Brothers, Two Altars

Turn the page into Genesis 4 and the lesson is tested straight away, in the very next generation.

**"And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering."** (Genesis 4:3-5).

Why would God accept one and refuse the other? Cain worked hard. Surely a basket of vegetables is a perfectly decent gift?

But look at what each brother brought. Cain brought what his own hands had grown. It was the fig leaves all over again: a nice, bloodless offering, the best of human effort. Abel brought a lamb, a firstborn from the flock. He brought a life.

Abel had surely heard about the coats of skin. He understood that the way back to God goes through a sacrifice that God has shown us, not one we have invented. The writer of Hebrews tells us it was a matter of faith: **"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained**

**witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."** (Hebrews 11:4).

*He being dead still speaks.* Abel's lamb is still preaching. It is saying across all those centuries: you cannot come to God on your own terms. You come by the blood.

That is not an arbitrary rule. It is woven into the fabric of things. **"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls."** (Leviticus 17:11). The wages of sin is death, so a life must be given. And the New Testament puts it plainly: **"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."** (Hebrews 9:22).

Then the story turns dark. Cain, furious, kills his brother. And God says to him, **"The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."** (Genesis 4:10). Abel's blood cried out for justice.

But there is another blood. Hebrews says we have come **"to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."** (Hebrews 12:24). Abel's blood cried, *Punish.* Jesus' blood cries, *Pardon.* The first shouted for vengeance; the second shouts for mercy. And His is the louder voice.

## One Door

A few chapters later the same message comes in a different shape. When judgment fell on the earth in Noah's day, God provided one ark, and He gave Noah one instruction about the entrance: **"and set the door of the ark in its side."** (Genesis 6:16).

One door. Everyone who was saved went in the same way. And when they were in, **"the LORD shut him in"** (Genesis 7:16). Noah did not have to hold the door closed against the flood. God

did that.

Jesus picked up the picture Himself: **"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved."** (John 10:9).

Leaves, or a lamb. Your basket, or His blood. Your own door, or His. From the very first pages of the Bible, God has been showing us that there is only one way to be covered, and it is the way He provides.

And when the last book of the Bible throws open the doors of heaven, the One at the center of all that worship is **"a Lamb as though it had been slain"** (Revelation 5:6). Abel knew what a lamb was for. Heaven has never forgotten.

**Fig leaves are what we make to hide our sin; the Lamb is what God gave to cover it.**

CHAPTER 7

# Abraham, Isaac and the Ram in the Thicket

There is one story in Genesis nobody can read without a lump in the throat, and once you have seen the cross in it, you can never read it the old way again.

It begins with a command that sounds, at first hearing, like the cruelest sentence in the Bible: **"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."** (Genesis 22:2).

Listen to how God piles up the words. Your son. Your only son. Whom you love. God is not being careless with Abraham's heart. He is drawing a picture, because one day He is going to do this Himself.

## Three Days and a Bundle of Wood

Abraham rose early. No bargaining like he did over Sodom. He split the wood, saddled the donkey, and set out. And the journey took three days. For three days, in Abraham's mind, his son was as good as dead. Scripture says, **"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off."** (Genesis 22:4). On the third day, the son under a sentence of death would come back down the mountain alive. It is very hard to be a Christian and read "on the third day" without your ears pricking up.

Then Abraham tells the servants something I love: **"Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship,**

**and we will come back to you."** (Genesis 22:5). We will come back. Not "I will come back." Abraham fully expected to walk down with his boy. How? The New Testament tells us what was in his head: **"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."** (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham did the arithmetic of faith. God had promised the whole future through Isaac. God cannot lie. So if Isaac died on that mountain, God would have to raise him.

Now watch the son. **"So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together."** (Genesis 22:6). The son carries the wood up the hill on his own back. Some two thousand years later, on those same hills, another Son carried the wood: **"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull."** (John 19:17).

And Isaac was no toddler. He could carry enough wood to burn a sacrifice, and Abraham was well over a hundred. If Isaac had not wanted to be bound, an old man could not have bound him. The son went willingly. **"So the two of them went together."** (Genesis 22:8). Father and Son, one mind, one road, one mountain.

## "Where Is the Lamb?"

Halfway up, Isaac asks the question that runs through the whole Old Testament like a heartbeat: **"Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"** (Genesis 22:7).

That is the question of every human being who has ever tried to get right with God. We have the fire of His holiness. We have the wood, the religion, the effort. But where is the lamb that can

actually stand in my place?

And Abraham answers with a sentence that is pure prophecy: **"My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."** (Genesis 22:8).

God will provide. Not Abraham. Not your church attendance or your good week. God will provide the lamb for Himself, out of His own resources, to satisfy His own justice.

At the top Isaac is bound and laid on the wood. The knife is lifted. And heaven shouts: **"Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."** (Genesis 22:12).

Then **"Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns."** (Genesis 22:13). A substitute with thorns around its head, dying in the son's place. Let that sit with you.

Here is the detail that gives me goosebumps. Abraham had promised a lamb. God provided a ram. The lamb was still on order. Abraham named the place **"The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'"** (Genesis 22:14). Shall be. Future tense. For two thousand years that saying told Israel: the real provision is still coming, and it is coming to this mountain.

And where was this mountain? **"Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah."** (2 Chronicles 3:1). Moriah became Jerusalem, and just outside that city, on the same range of hills, God finally sent the Lamb that Abraham had promised. When John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward him, he said, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29). Abraham's order had been delivered.

## What Abraham Saw

Jesus once said: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."** (John 8:56). When did Abraham see it? I believe he saw it on Moriah: a father giving his only son and receiving him back on the third day. He saw the gospel acted out with his own family as the cast.

And here is the difference. On Moriah, God stopped the knife. At Calvary, nobody stopped the hammer. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** (John 3:16). God asked of Abraham what He would never take, then did it Himself. **"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32).

A friend I'll call Trevor, a father himself, always hated this chapter. Then one evening he read it with John 3:16 open beside it. "It isn't about God demanding a son," he told me. "It's about God refusing to take Abraham's, and then giving His own." Exactly.

## The King of Salem and His Bread and Wine

Before we leave Abraham, meet a man who walks onto the page eight chapters earlier, stays three verses, and vanishes. After Abraham rescued Lot from four kings, a stranger came out to meet him: **"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High."** (Genesis 14:18).

A king who is also a priest, two offices Israel kept strictly apart. He comes from Salem, the city that would become Jerusalem. He brings bread and wine, he blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him a tenth of everything.

A thousand years later David, writing about the Messiah, drops his name into a psalm: **"The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of**

**Melchizedek.'"** (Psalm 110:4). And the book of Hebrews explains his name for us: **"first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace.'"** (Hebrews 7:2). No genealogy is recorded for him, no birth, no death, so that he stands in the story **"made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually."** (Hebrews 7:3).

Do you see it? A King of righteousness, a King of peace, from Jerusalem, a priest who never hands his office on to anyone, meeting the father of the faithful with bread and wine. Abraham was being served communion two thousand years early.

So the father of faith met Jesus twice in picture form: once with a priest-king offering bread and wine, and once on a mountain with a ram dying in his son's place. That is the whole gospel, and Abraham saw it.

**On Moriah God stopped a father's hand. At Calvary He did not stop His own.**

CHAPTER 8

# The Bloodline God Protected

If you wanted to prove who you are, you would probably start with your birth certificate. I think that is exactly where Jesus started on the road to Emmaus. Before altars and lambs, He would have shown those two men His family tree, which God had been guarding for four thousand years.

In the garden God promised a Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. That was the widest possible starting point: the Rescuer would be human. Then, generation after generation, God began to narrow it down, like a searchlight in a dark field closing in on one spot.

## One Family, One Tribe, One House

First, out of all the families on earth, one family. God called a man out of Ur and told him, **"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:3). After Moriah He repeated it with a crucial word: **"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."** (Genesis 22:18).

Paul noticed that God chose the singular: **"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ."** (Galatians 3:16). One grammatical letter, and the whole promise points to one Person.

Then, out of that one family, one tribe. Jacob, dying in Egypt, gathered his twelve sons and prophesied over each. When he

came to Judah, he said: **"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people."** (Genesis 49:10).

The scepter is royal authority. Judah would keep it until Shiloh came, a name for the Messiah, the One to whom it belongs. And to Him shall be the obedience of the people: not just Israel, the nations.

Centuries later John stood in heaven weeping because no one could open the scroll, and an elder said, **"Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."** (Revelation 5:5). The Lion of Judah. The scepter had arrived.

Then, out of that one tribe, one household. God made a promise to David with no conditions attached: **"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."** (2 Samuel 7:12-13). And He sealed it: **"Your throne shall be established forever."** (2 Samuel 7:16).

Every royal house in history has ended, and David's line lost its crown within a few centuries. Yet God never retracted the oath: **"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'"** (Psalm 89:3-4).

So when the angel came to a young woman in Nazareth, he did not invent a new promise. He picked up the old one: **"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."** (Luke 1:32-33). That is why Matthew opens the New Testament with a family tree. **"The**

**book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."** (Matthew 1:1). It is not the boring bit you skip. It is the birth certificate.

## A Dot on the Map and a Voice From Eternity

Then the searchlight narrows to one village. Not Jerusalem, the capital. Not Rome. A place so small it hardly rated a dot: **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."** (Micah 5:2).

Read that last phrase twice, because it does something enormous. Micah gives the Messiah a birthplace and an eternal existence in the same breath. He will be born in a particular town, and He has always existed. You cannot have a beginning and be from everlasting, unless you are God stepping into a body.

That is exactly what Isaiah says out loud: **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:6).

A Child is born; that is the human side. A Son is given; you can only give what you already have. The Son existed before the Child was born. And these names are not job titles for a nice religious teacher. Mighty God. Isaiah is not announcing a good man. He is announcing that God is coming in person, and coming to David's chair: **"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom."** (Isaiah 9:7).

## The Question Nobody Could Answer

Jesus knew all of this, and one day He used it in the Temple to silence a room. He asked the Pharisees, **"What do you think**

**about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"** (Matthew 22:42). They said, **"The Son of David."** (Matthew 22:42).

Correct. Then He quoted David himself: **"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"** (Psalm 110:1). And He asked the question that ended the debate: **"If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"** (Matthew 22:45).

In that culture no father calls his descendant "my Lord." So why would King David bow to his own distant grandson? Matthew tells us the result: **"And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."** (Matthew 22:46).

The answer, of course, is that He is both. David's son by birth. David's Lord by nature. The branch on the family tree is also the root it grew from, which is why Revelation calls Him **"the Root and the Offspring of David."** (Revelation 22:16).

My friend Wendell laughed out loud when he first read that. "He set the experts a riddle," he said, "and He was the answer, standing right there."

## The Name He Chose for Himself

There is one more piece. Jesus had many titles available, Messiah, Son of David, Son of God, yet the one He used most often was "the Son of Man." It comes from Daniel's night vision: **"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."** (Daniel 7:13-14).

A human figure, riding the clouds, which in the Old Testament is something only God does, receiving an everlasting kingdom and the worship of every nation. Every time Jesus called Himself the Son of Man, He was quietly laying claim to that throne. And at His trial He said it plainly: **"Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."** (Matthew 26:64). The high priest tore his robes. He understood exactly what had just been claimed.

So here is the searchlight, start to finish. A human Seed. Abraham's family. Judah's tribe. David's house. Bethlehem's streets. A Child who is also Mighty God, David's son who is David's Lord, a Son of Man who rides the clouds. Through famines, exile, wicked kings and near-extinction, God never once lost track of that line.

**Four thousand years of family trees, and every branch was bending toward a manger.**

CHAPTER 9

# Why the Virgin Birth Was Not Optional

Here is a question worth asking honestly: why did it have to happen that way? Was the virgin birth a bit of divine showmanship to make Christmas cards prettier?

Not even slightly. It was structural. Take it out and the whole building falls down. There are three reasons, and the second one is among the most stunning pieces of engineering in the Bible.

## The Sign

The first reason is that God said so, seven hundred years ahead of time. A frightened king named Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, and God gave one anyway: **"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."** (Isaiah 7:14).

A sign has to be signal, not noise. A young woman having a baby is not a sign; it happens every day in every town. A virgin conceiving is a sign. And look at the name. Matthew translates it for us: **"'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"** (Matthew 1:23).

God with us. Not God near us. Not God watching us from a safe distance. God with us, in a body, in a manger, in our mess. The way He arrived was the announcement of who He was.

And remember the very first promise, back in the garden. God spoke of the Seed of the woman. In the Bible, lineage is always counted through the father. Here, from the opening pages, God planted a signpost pointing to a birth with no human father.

Isaiah simply put the address on it.

## The Curse on the Royal Line

Now the second reason. Hold on to your hat. In the last days of the kingdom of Judah, there was a king named Jeconiah, also called Coniah. He was so wicked that God pronounced a sentence on his family line that sounds like a judge banging the gavel three times: **"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.'"** (Jeremiah 22:29-30).

None of his descendants. Ever. That curse dropped like a locked gate across the royal bloodline.

Now see the problem this creates. In the last chapter we watched God swear to David that his throne would last forever, through his seed. The Messiah must have the legal right to David's throne, and that right came down through the royal line of kings, which ran straight through Jeconiah. But the Messiah must not be Jeconiah's physical descendant, or the curse lands on Him.

So He needs the title, but He cannot have the blood. It looks impossible. Watch what God did.

Open Matthew's genealogy, which follows the royal line, and there he is: **"Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon."** (Matthew 1:11). The line runs on down to **"Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."** (Matthew 1:16). Notice how carefully Matthew words it. He does not say Joseph begot Jesus. He says Mary, of whom was born Jesus.

Joseph descended from Jeconiah. So when Joseph took Jesus as his own son, named Him, and raised Him, he handed Him the legal title to David's throne. Adoption was binding. The deed was

signed.

Now open Luke's genealogy, which runs a different route. Luke is careful too: **"being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli."** (Luke 3:23). Many careful readers through the centuries have understood Luke to be tracing the family through Mary, and when you follow his line back you arrive not at Solomon and the kings but at **"the son of Nathan, the son of David."** (Luke 3:31). Nathan was another son of David altogether, a branch that never wore the crown and never came near Jeconiah.

So through Mary, Jesus received David's actual blood, running right around the curse.

Joseph gave Him the throne. Mary gave Him the blood. The curse touched neither. And the only way both could be true at once was a virgin birth. If Joseph had been His natural father, the curse would have landed. If Mary had borne a son with no legal father in the royal line, there would be no title. The virgin birth is the hinge on which the legal claim and the bloodline both swing.

My friend Pete is an accountant, and when I walked him through this he sat back in his chair. "That's not a story," he said. "That's an audit. Somebody planned the paperwork centuries before the client was born." Exactly right. God does not improvise.

## A Drowning Man Cannot Rescue a Drowning Man

And now the third reason, the deepest one.

Every human being born by ordinary descent from Adam inherits Adam's fallen nature. David said it about himself: **"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."** (Psalm 51:5). He was saying he came into the world already bent. Paul explains the family history: **"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."** (Romans 5:12).

Here is the problem in plain words. A drowning man cannot rescue a drowning man. If you are going under, you do not need someone else who is going under; you need someone standing on solid ground with a long arm. A sinner under the sentence of death cannot pay that sentence for another sinner. He owes it himself.

So the Rescuer had to meet two conditions that look like they contradict each other. He had to be truly human, one of us, flesh and blood, able to stand in our place and die our death. **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."** (Hebrews 2:14). And He had to be completely untouched by the fallen nature that runs in the family.

How do you get both? Mary asked the same question: **"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"** (Luke 1:34). And the angel answered: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."** (Luke 1:35).

That Holy One. Born of a woman, so He is truly ours. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, so He is truly clean. Fully man. Fully God. Fully clean.

That is why Peter, who lived with Him for three years, could say of Him what no friend can say of any of us: **"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth."** (1 Peter 2:22). It is why He could be **"in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."** (Hebrews 4:15). And it is why the great exchange works at all: **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Only someone who knew no sin could carry ours without being crushed by His own. A Lamb with a blemish would have been no

use on the altar. So God made sure, from the moment of conception, that this Lamb had none.

Some contemporary churches treat the virgin birth as an optional extra, a lovely legend you can take or leave. I understand why. It is a big thing to believe. But please hear me: it is not decoration on the gospel. It is part of the foundation. Without it you lose the sign, you lose the throne, and you lose a Savior clean enough to save. When the angel told Mary, **"For with God nothing will be impossible."** (Luke 1:37), he was not only talking about her pregnancy. He was talking about your rescue.

**A Savior with no stain of Adam was the only one who could wash the stain off Adam's children.**

CHAPTER 10

# The Blood on the Doorposts

If there is one stop on the Emmaus road I am certain Jesus did not skip, it is this one. Three days earlier He had eaten the Passover with His disciples and then become it. He would have taken Cleopas straight to Exodus 12.

Picture the setting. Israel has been slaves in Egypt for generations. God sends Moses to Pharaoh with a simple message: let My people go. Pharaoh says no. So God sends plague after plague: the Nile turned to blood, frogs, lice, flies, dead livestock, boils, hail, locusts, three days of darkness you could feel. Nine times Egypt is shaken, and nine times Pharaoh hardens his heart.

Then God announces the last plague. At midnight death will pass through the land and the firstborn in every house will die. **"And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD."** (Exodus 12:12).

Every house. Not just the Egyptian ones. Israel was not safe because they were Israel. They were safe only if they did exactly what God said next.

## Chosen, Kept and Inspected

God's instructions are wonderfully specific. **"On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household."** (Exodus 12:3).

Not any lamb. **"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year."** (Exodus 12:5). No limp, no scar, no spot. And it was not killed the day it was chosen: **"Now you shall keep it**

**until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight."** (Exodus 12:6).

Think what that meant. For four days the lamb lived with the family. The children fed it and named it, because children always do. Every morning the father looked it over again: still perfect? Still no flaw? By the fourteenth this was not a lamb. It was their lamb. And it had to die.

Later in this book we will see how Jesus was chosen, examined and declared faultless in Jerusalem during the very days the lambs were being kept. For now, hold on to the picture: a lamb chosen ahead of time, kept, watched, found spotless, and then slain.

## A Beautiful Picture Worth Noticing

Here is something I have to share with you, and I want to share it humbly, as a lovely picture rather than a doctrine to fight over. Exodus itself does not mention it. But there is an old understanding that the chosen lamb was anointed with oil on its feet six days before Passover, and then on its head two days before, as a sign that it had been examined and set apart.

Whatever you make of that tradition, look at what the Gospels record. **"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead."** (John 12:1). And at that supper, **"Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil."** (John 12:3). His feet, six days before Passover.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, **"You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."** (Matthew 26:2). And in Bethany a woman came **"having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil,**

**and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table."** (Matthew 26:7). Mark places it at the same time: **"After two days it was the Passover."** (Mark 14:1). His head, two days before Passover. And Jesus told them what it meant: **"For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial."** (Matthew 26:12).

Two women who almost certainly knew nothing of any tradition about lambs, each pouring out the most expensive thing they owned, on the feet and then on the head of the Lamb of God, on those two days. I hold the tradition loosely. I hold the Gospels firmly. And the picture still takes my breath away.

## The Hyssop

Now watch what the family does with the blood. **"And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it."** (Exodus 12:7).

And God tells them how: **"And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning."** (Exodus 12:22).

Hyssop is a scrubby little plant, nothing to look at. But it carried the blood of the lamb to the door. Picture it: blood across the top, blood down both sides. Every Israelite home that night was marked with a shape that pointed to a cross nobody had yet imagined.

Now go to Calvary. Jesus has been on the cross for hours. **"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!' Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It**

**is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."** (John 19:28-30).

On hyssop. Of all the sticks lying around Golgotha, John records that it was hyssop that was lifted to the Lamb. The same plant that carried the blood to the doors of Egypt touched the lips of the Lamb of God as His blood was being shed. David knew what hyssop meant when he prayed, **"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."** (Psalm 51:7).

There was one more rule about the lamb. **"Nor shall you break one of its bones."** (Exodus 12:46).

At a crucifixion the soldiers broke the legs of the condemned to hurry death along, so the bodies would be down before the Sabbath. They broke the legs of the two thieves. When they came to Jesus, He was already dead. Instead, a spear opened His side. And John, who was standing there, writes: **"For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken.'"** (John 19:36). Roman soldiers, who had never read Exodus, kept the Passover rules to the letter.

## When I See the Blood

And now the sentence that holds the whole night together: **"Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."** (Exodus 12:13).

When I see the blood. Not when I see how good your family is. Not when I see how well you understand the ritual or how strong your faith felt that evening. Some Israelites inside those houses were trembling all night, unsure it would work. Others were calm. Both were equally safe, because safety was never in the feeling inside the house. It was in the blood on the door.

My friend Alison spent years trying to feel forgiven. Some weeks she did, most weeks she didn't, and she assumed God's opinion of

her went up and down with her mood. When she finally saw Exodus 12:13, she copied it onto the first page of her journal. "God isn't looking at my feelings," she told me. "He's looking at the blood."

Paul draws the line for us: **"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."** (1 Corinthians 5:7). And Peter tells us what it cost: **"knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."** (1 Peter 1:18-19).

**Death never checked the family's record that night. It only checked the doorframe.**

CHAPTER 11

# Manna, the Rock and the Bronze Serpent

Israel walked out of Egypt under the blood and through the sea, and three days later they were complaining. I find that strangely comforting. If God could carry a nation of grumblers for forty years, He can carry me through a Tuesday.

But here is what I want you to see. Every time Israel hit a crisis in that wilderness, hunger, thirst, death, God's answer turned out to be a picture of His Son. The desert was a picture gallery, and Jesus walked those two men down the corridor.

## Bread From Heaven

They were hungry, and they said so loudly. God answered: **"Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you."** (Exodus 16:4). The next morning the ground was covered with something small and white, like frost. **"So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.'"** (Exodus 16:15).

"What is it?" in Hebrew is roughly "man hu," and the name stuck. For forty years a nation ate a question mark for breakfast. It came every morning, enough for that day, and **"when the sun became hot, it melted."** (Exodus 16:21). Nobody could farm it, earn it or store it up. They could only receive it, fresh, every day.

Fifteen centuries later a crowd that had just been fed by Jesus came back wanting more, and they threw manna at Him as a challenge: **"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"** (John

6:31).

Jesus answered: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."** (John 6:32-33). They said, **"Lord, give us this bread always."** (John 6:34). And He said, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."** (John 6:35).

The manna was the shadow. He is the substance. It came down from the sky; He came down from heaven. It kept bodies alive for a day; He gives life to the world. And just like the manna, He is received, not earned, and He is meant to be gathered fresh every morning.

## The Rock That Was Struck Once

Then came thirst, which in a desert is far more frightening than hunger. At Rephidim the people were ready to stone Moses. God told him: **"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."** (Exodus 17:6).

Picture it. God Himself standing on the rock, and Moses bringing down the rod of judgment, the same rod that struck the Nile, onto that rock. And out of the struck rock comes water enough for a nation.

We don't have to guess what that meant. Paul tells us: **"and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."** (1 Corinthians 10:4). That Rock was Christ. Struck by the rod of judgment, and from His wounds flows life. At the cross, **"one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."** (John 19:34). And Jesus stood up at a feast and shouted, **"If anyone thirsts, let him**

**come to Me and drink."** (John 7:37).

Now here is the part that puzzles people. Nearly forty years later, at a place called Kadesh, the water ran out again. This time God gave Moses different instructions: **"Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water."** (Numbers 20:8).

Speak to it. Not strike it. But Moses was angry and worn out. **"Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly."** (Numbers 20:11). The water still flowed, because God was gracious to His thirsty people. But God said to Moses, **"Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."** (Numbers 20:12).

Lose your temper once and miss the Promised Land? I wondered about that for years, until I saw the picture. The Rock was Christ, and Christ was to be struck only once. **"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many."** (Hebrews 9:28). After that, you do not strike Him again. You speak to Him. Moses, without meaning to, had spoiled the picture God was painting, and God guards His pictures because they are about His Son.

I'll tell you what that means for you. You do not need Jesus crucified again every time you fail. He was struck once and the water is still flowing. Speak to the Rock.

## Look and Live

Later still, the people grumbled against God again, and this time the consequence was deadly. Fiery serpents came into the camp, and people were bitten and dying. They begged Moses to pray. And God gave the strangest cure in the whole Bible: **"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he**

**looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."** (Numbers 21:8-9).

A bronze snake. The very image of the thing that was killing them, lifted up high on a pole. Bronze, the metal of judgment. And the only thing a dying man had to do was look.

Not climb the pole. Not understand how it worked. Just look. A man too weak to stand could do it from his bed, if somebody turned his head.

Jesus chose this picture Himself, talking to a religious leader at night: **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:14-15).

Why a serpent? Because on the cross Jesus took on Himself the very thing that was killing us. He who knew no sin was made sin, lifted up high, judgment falling on Him. And the cure is still the same simple thing. **"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!"** (Isaiah 45:22).

A woman I'll call Grace once told me she had spent twenty years trying to understand salvation before she would accept it. "I wanted to read the manual first," she laughed. Then one night she realized the people in the camp didn't understand bronze or poles or poison. They just looked. So she did. That was the night she was saved.

## The Prophet Like Moses

And there is one more picture in the wilderness, and it is Moses himself. Before he died, Moses told the people: **"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear."** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

A Prophet like Moses: a deliverer, a lawgiver, a mediator who speaks to God face to face and brings God's word to the people. Israel waited for Him for centuries. When the crowd ate the bread Jesus multiplied, they said, **"This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."** (John 6:14). And Peter, preaching in the Temple, said it plainly: **"For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.'"** (Acts 3:22).

Moses fed them, watered them, and lifted the serpent. But Moses himself was pointing past himself the whole time.

**Every time Israel was dying in the desert, God saved them with a picture of His Son.**

CHAPTER 12

# The Architecture of Grace: The Outer Court

Now we come to my favorite stop on the whole road. This is where the Old Testament stops being a list of predictions and becomes a building you can walk through.

At Sinai God gave Moses detailed instructions for a portable tent called the Tabernacle. Creation gets two chapters; the Tabernacle gets dozens. When God spends that much ink on something, it is worth slowing down.

Here is what most people never notice. The Tabernacle had six pieces of furniture, and if you could fly a drone over the camp and look straight down, you would see that their positions form a cross on the desert floor. The altar at the foot, the laver above it, the lampstand and the table as the arms, the incense altar at the center, the Ark at the head. Before anybody had ever heard of crucifixion, God laid out His house in the shape of a cross and had a nation camp around it for forty years.

And the whole thing is a map of how a sinner comes home to God. In this chapter we stand in the courtyard. Then we will go inside.

## One Way In

The Tabernacle stood inside a fenced courtyard of white linen curtains, about seven and a half feet high, too high to peer over. White linen speaks of perfect righteousness. Standing outside, all you could see was a wall of holiness that you could not climb.

And in that whole fence there was one gate. Not a gate on each side for convenience. One. It faced east, toward the tribe of Judah, and it was wide, about thirty feet across, woven in blue, purple and scarlet. One gate, but wide enough for anyone.

Jesus said, **"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."** (John 10:9). And again, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6).

People sometimes call that narrow. I call it kind. If you are lost in the desert at night and somebody tells you there is exactly one way into the camp, you do not complain about the lack of options. You thank him and go through it.

As soon as you step through that gate, you notice the metal. Everything in the courtyard is bronze. Bronze is forged in fierce heat, and all through Scripture it speaks of judgment. The serpent on the pole was bronze. The courtyard is where sin gets judged. Nobody gets to the gold inside without first passing the bronze outside.

## The Brazen Altar

The first thing you meet is the biggest thing in the courtyard: the Brazen Altar. **"You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar shall be square—and its height shall be three cubits."** (Exodus 27:1). It was overlaid with bronze, with a horn on each corner.

You could not miss it and you could not go around it. Before the lampstand, before the bread, before the incense, before anything beautiful, there was an altar with blood on it.

The fire on that altar was not lit with a match. When the Tabernacle was dedicated, **"fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar."** (Leviticus 9:24). Fire from heaven. And God commanded that it never be allowed to die: **"A fire shall always be burning**

**on the altar; it shall never go out."** (Leviticus 6:13). God's holiness does not go off duty.

Now watch what happened there. A man brought an animal, spotless, from his own flock. And before it was killed, he did something very personal: **"Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him."** (Leviticus 1:4).

The hand on the head. That was the transfer. "This animal is standing where I should be standing." Then the innocent animal died and the guilty man walked home free. Nobody who did that forgot it: the warmth of the animal under your hand, and then watching it die because of you.

That altar is the cross. **"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate."** (Hebrews 13:10-12).

At the cross God did not shrug at our sin or sweep it under a rug. He judged it, fully, on His own Son. **"Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness."** (Romans 3:25). And Peter, who once tried to talk Jesus out of the cross, wrote: **"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."** (1 Peter 2:24).

The innocent died for the guilty. That is the first thing God puts in front of anyone who walks through the gate.

## The Laver Made of Mirrors

A few steps on, between the altar and the tent, stood a large bronze basin full of water: the Laver. The priests had already

been accepted at the altar, but they could not go into the Holy Place without washing their hands and feet here first. **"When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die."** (Exodus 30:20).

Now here are two details I absolutely love. First, where the bronze came from: **"He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting."** (Exodus 38:8). The women gave up their mirrors. So as a priest bent over that basin, he saw his own face in the very thing that was about to clean him.

That is exactly what the Word of God does. **"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."** (James 1:23-25). The Word shows you the smudge and then washes it off.

Second detail: God gave exact measurements for every piece of furniture in the Tabernacle except one. The Laver has no dimensions. No height, no width, no capacity. That is not an oversight. The cleansing has no stated limit because it has no limit.

The night before the cross, Jesus knelt with a basin and a towel. Peter protested, and Jesus said, **"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."** (John 13:8). Peter swung the other way and asked for a full bath, and Jesus said, **"He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean."** (John 13:10).

That is the altar and the laver in one conversation. You are bathed once, completely, at the altar. But you walk through a

dusty world and your feet pick things up. Paul says Christ cleanses His church **"with the washing of water by the word."** (Ephesians 5:26). **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9).

My friend Clive used to get saved again at every altar call, just in case. He told me it was like rebuilding the foundation of his house every time the kitchen floor got muddy. When he saw the laver, he laughed with relief. We don't get re-saved every day at the altar, but we wash our feet daily at the laver.

**The first thing God puts in front of a sinner is not a rulebook. It is an altar.**

CHAPTER 13

# Stepping Through the Veil: The Holy Place

We left the priest standing at the laver with wet hands and clean feet. The altar has dealt with his guilt. The water has dealt with the dust. Now he reaches for the heavy curtain at the door of the tent, pulls it back, and steps inside.

And everything changes.

Out in the court there was blazing desert sun, sand underfoot, the smell of smoke and the noise of people. Inside the tent, all of that is gone. The sunlight is not dimmed; it is shut out. No windows, no cracks. The earth has been closed off behind you.

Look up and you see a ceiling of fine linen woven in blue, purple and scarlet, with cherubim worked into the fabric. Look around and every wall glitters with gold. The bronze has disappeared. Everything in this room is gold laid over acacia wood.

I love that combination. Acacia was the hard desert tree that refused to rot, a picture of a true humanity that would not see corruption. Gold is the metal of heaven. Real wood and real gold, joined in one object: humanity and deity in one piece of furniture. You are looking at Jesus.

The outer court was about how you get saved. This room is about how you live once you are, and three pieces of furniture stand in it.

## The Only Light in the Room

On your left, on the south side, stands the golden lampstand. Every other piece in this room is wood covered with gold, but not this one. God told Moses, **"You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work."** (Exodus 25:31). And how much gold? **"It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils."** (Exodus 25:39). One talent, around seventy-five pounds of gold, hammered into shape. No joints, no welds. One piece.

A craftsman hammered that gold until a central shaft rose up and six branches curved out from it, three on each side, with cups shaped like almond blossoms. It was beaten into its beauty, and the One it pictures was beaten too.

And remember: no windows. That lampstand was the only light in the room. If it went out, the priest would be standing in total darkness, unable to find anything at all.

Jesus stood in the temple and said, **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."** (John 8:12). Not *a* light. *The* light. In the room of fellowship with God, there is no other source. Without Him you are feeling for the furniture in the dark.

But look closer at the shape. The six branches did not stand on their own. They grew out of the central shaft and drew everything they had from it. Where have we heard that before? **"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5).

A branch broken off the shaft does not become an independent lamp. It becomes scrap gold on the floor. That is the honest picture of a Christian trying to shine on willpower.

And what kept the lamps burning? Oil. God told Moses that Israel was to bring **"pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually."** (Leviticus 24:2). All through Scripture, oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. When God

encouraged Zerubbabel, rebuilding the temple with a handful of discouraged people, He showed him a golden lampstand fed by olive trees, and the message was this: **"'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts."** (Zechariah 4:6).

So here is the lampstand in one breath: the light is Jesus, the branches are us, and the oil is the Spirit. Jesus also said, **"You are the light of the world."** (Matthew 5:14). He can say that about you only because you are attached to Him. We do not generate light. We carry His.

## A Seat at God's Table

Turn to your right, to the north side, and you see the table of showbread. Acacia wood overlaid with gold, with a little crown of gold running around its edge. On it were twelve loaves of bread in two rows of six, with pure frankincense placed along them. Every Sabbath the priests set out fresh loaves, and the old ones were eaten by the priests, right there in the holy place.

The Hebrew name is the "bread of the presence", literally the bread of the face. Twelve loaves, one for every tribe of Israel, lying before the face of God week in and week out. The message was unmistakable: *every one of My people has a place at My table.* Not just the impressive tribes or the well-behaved ones. Nobody was left off.

Bread on a table is not a ceremony; it is a meal, and in the ancient world a shared meal meant friendship. God furnished His house with a dining table because He wanted company.

Then Jesus stood up in Galilee and said, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."** (John 6:35). He is not only the One who invites you to the table. He is what is on it.

Paul takes us one step further. **"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The**

**bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."** (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Every time you take communion, you are standing at the golden table, and the person beside you has a loaf with their name on it too.

## The Altar That Never Went Cold

Now walk straight ahead, right up to the inner veil. Standing against it is the golden altar of incense. It was small, with a horn at each corner. Every morning and evening, when the priest trimmed the lamps, he burned a sacred blend of sweet spices on it, and a fragrant cloud rose toward the veil.

Do not miss this: that altar stood directly in line with the Ark on the other side of the curtain. The priest could not see the Ark, but the smoke went exactly where it was. The prayer went straight to the throne.

What does incense mean in Scripture? David tells us: **"Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."** (Psalm 141:2). And in heaven John saw it with his own eyes: an angel with a golden censer **"was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand."** (Revelation 8:3-4). Not one prayer of yours has gone missing.

But the golden altar points first to Someone else's prayers. **"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."** (Hebrews 7:25).

Read that slowly. *He always lives.* Paul asks who could possibly condemn you, and answers: **"It is Christ who died, and**

**furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."** (Romans 8:34).

A friend of mine named Priya went through a season of grief so heavy she could not pray at all. She would open her mouth and nothing came, and she felt like a failure on top of everything else. I read her Hebrews 7:25, and she sat very still and said, "So when I can't, He still is." Exactly. Right now, while you are reading this, He is speaking to the Father about you. By name.

The lamp is lit. The bread is on the table. The incense is rising.

**You were never meant to live in the courtyard; the Light, the Bread and the Prayer are waiting inside.**

CHAPTER 14

# Behind the Veil: The Holy of Holies

We are standing in the Holy Place, in the soft gold light of the lampstand, with the smell of incense in the air. In front of us, a few steps past the golden altar, hangs a curtain.

It is no light drape. It is a heavy veil woven from blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine twisted linen, with cherubim embroidered all over it. And every priest who ever served in that room knew one thing about it: you do not go through.

Have you ever noticed where else cherubim stand guard in the Bible? Right at the beginning. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, God **"placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."** (Genesis 3:24). Ever since, the way back into God's presence had been guarded. And here in the Tabernacle, God stitched the guards right into the fabric. Every time a priest looked at that veil, it was saying what the angel's sword had said: *not this way, not yet, not like this.*

## One Man, One Day

Behind that curtain was the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies. It was a perfect cube, ten cubits each way, and it had no lamp at all. If there was light in there, it was the light of God Himself.

Who could go in? Hebrews tells us plainly: **"But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance."** (Hebrews 9:7).

Count the restrictions. One man out of the whole nation. One day out of the whole year. And never empty-handed. Even Aaron, the brother of Moses, the man God Himself had chosen and anointed, was warned: **"Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat."** (Leviticus 16:2).

*Lest he die.* We have become so casual about God that we barely feel the weight of that. A whole nation camped around that tent, and almost every one of them lived their whole life on the wrong side of that curtain.

And in that room there was only one piece of furniture.

## The Box and the Throne

The Ark of the Covenant was a chest about four feet long and a little over two feet wide and high. God told Moses exactly how to make it: acacia wood, and then **"you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it."** (Exodus 25:11).

Inside and out. Not gold paint on the surface. Wood completely enveloped in gold, every surface you could see and every surface you could not.

Here is Jesus again, and here more clearly than anywhere. The acacia wood is His true humanity. He was born, He grew, He got hungry and tired, He wept at a friend's grave. The gold is His full deity. And the two are not mixed into some third thing. The wood stays wood. The gold stays gold. One Ark. As Paul put it, **"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."** (Colossians 2:9). Not some of it. All of it, in a body.

The Ark also had gold rings on its sides and two poles slid through them, and God commanded that the poles were never to be removed. That box was always ready to move. The presence of God was not fixed to a mountain. It traveled with His people wherever they went. Keep that in mind; it is about to matter.

On top of the Ark sat a lid, and that lid had a name: the Mercy Seat. It was not wood at all. It was solid gold, one piece, and out of the same piece of gold rose two cherubim, one at each end, facing each other, their wings stretched up and over, their faces looking down at the lid.

And there, between the wings of the cherubim, above the Mercy Seat, God said He would be. **"And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony."** (Exodus 25:22). Israel called that radiant presence the glory, the Shekinah, the dwelling. The Ark was the footstool of the throne of the King of the universe, sitting in a tent in the desert.

Now listen to how John begins his Gospel. **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14). The word John chose for "dwelt" literally means *pitched His tent*. He tabernacled among us. The glory that used to hover between the cherubim, hidden behind a curtain where only one man saw it once a year, put on human skin and walked the roads of Galilee, where fishermen and tax collectors and children could look straight at it.

That is the traveling presence. The poles were never removed because one day God was going to walk right out of that box and into the street.

## Torn From the Top

Now come with me to a Friday afternoon outside Jerusalem.

By then the Tabernacle had become a stone temple, and the veil had grown with it. Jewish tradition describes it as enormous, many times the height of a man and as thick as the width of a hand. Two strong men could not have torn it if they tried. It was a wall made of cloth.

On the hill outside the city, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. And at that same moment, inside the temple, **"the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split."** (Matthew 27:51).

From top to bottom. A human tear starts at the bottom, where hands can reach. This one started at the top, from the God side, and ran downward. Heaven tore the curtain. The God who had stitched the guards into the fabric ripped the fabric apart.

Hebrews tells us what that torn curtain really was. **"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."** (Hebrews 10:19-22).

*Through the veil, that is, His flesh.* The curtain in the temple was a picture of His body. When His body was torn on the cross, the barrier came down. The way into the presence of God is now a Person, and He has been opened up for you.

Boldness. Draw near. Full assurance. That is not the language of a nervous priest tiptoeing in once a year. It is the language of a child walking into his father's study without knocking.

I have a friend named Lewis who came to faith in his forties, and for years afterwards he prayed like a man standing in a corridor outside a closed office door. He always opened with an apology for bothering God. One day we read Hebrews 10 together, and I asked him, "Lewis, which side of the curtain do you think you are standing on?" He went quiet. Then he said, "I have been praying from the courtyard for twenty years, haven't I?" He had. A lot of us do. We have been told the door is open and we still talk to God through the keyhole.

The guards are gone. The sword has been put away. The room that only one man could enter once a year is open every hour of every day to every person who comes through Jesus.

**That curtain was torn from God's side, and He has never sewn it back.**

CHAPTER 15

# The Three Secrets Inside the Ark

Now that the curtain is open, let's do something no Israelite would ever have dared to do. Let's look inside the box.

The writer of Hebrews lifts the lid for us. He describes the Holy of Holies, **"which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant."** (Hebrews 9:4).

A jar of bread, a walking stick and two slabs of stone. If you found them in your grandmother's attic, you would not look twice. But every one of them was put in that box for a reason, and here is the secret that changed the way I see the whole Tabernacle: each of those three things is a receipt. Each one is evidence from a time humanity looked God in the face and said no.

## The Jar: We Rejected His Provision

Start with the golden pot of manna.

God had just brought Israel out of slavery. He had split the sea. And then, in a desert where nothing grows, He fed them. Every morning, six days a week, bread from heaven lay on the ground around the camp like frost. They did not plant it, did not harvest it, did not pay for it. They just stepped outside and picked up breakfast.

How long did the gratitude last? Not long. Before the miracle was even routine they were complaining that they had been better off as slaves in Egypt, eating meat by the pot. A little later they

were moaning, **"There is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"** (Numbers 11:6). Later still they said it outright: **"Our soul loathes this worthless bread."** (Numbers 21:5).

Worthless bread. They got tired of the miracle. Before we shake our heads, let's admit how quickly we get bored with blessings we prayed for.

So, at God's command, Moses told Aaron, **"Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations."** (Exodus 16:33). Receipt number one: *we rejected God's provision.*

But here is the wonder. Ordinary manna could not be kept. When people tried to hoard it overnight, **"it bred worms and stank."** (Exodus 16:20). Yet the manna in that golden pot never went bad. It sat there, year after year, generation after generation, incorruptible.

Jesus picked up that very thread in Capernaum: **"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."** (John 6:49-51). The bread that never spoils is a Person. We rejected the provision, and God sent the Provision Himself.

## The Rod: We Rejected His Mediator

Next is Aaron's rod.

In Numbers 16, a Levite named Korah gathered two hundred and fifty leaders of Israel and confronted Moses and Aaron. Their complaint sounds very modern: **"You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"** (Numbers 16:3). In other words, *who made you the priest? We can*

*approach God our own way.* It was an outright rejection of the mediator God had chosen. The ground opened and swallowed the ringleaders, and still the grumbling went on.

So God settled the question once and for all. The leader of each tribe brought his staff, twelve dead sticks of wood, with a name written on each, and Moses laid them before the Ark overnight. Dead as a doornail.

Next morning, Moses went in, **"and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds."** (Numbers 17:8).

Buds, blossoms and fruit on a dead stick, in one night. That is not a plant. That is a resurrection. And God told Moses to put the rod back before the Ark **"to be kept as a sign against the rebels"** (Numbers 17:10). Receipt number two: *we rejected God's mediator.*

Do you see how God settled the argument about who His priest was? He brought life out of death. And that is exactly how He settled the argument about Jesus. The religious leaders rejected Him, condemned Him, and buried Him. Then on the third morning the dead wood blossomed. Paul says Jesus was **"declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."** (Romans 1:4). Hebrews says He is our High Priest, **"not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life."** (Hebrews 7:16). The empty tomb is Aaron's rod in full bloom.

## The Stones: We Rejected His Standard

The third object is the two tablets of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God.

You know the story. While Moses was on the mountain receiving them, the people at the bottom were melting down their earrings

and dancing around a golden calf. Before the first set of tablets had even reached the camp, Israel had already broken the first commandment. Moses smashed the stones at the foot of the mountain.

God wrote them again. And He said of the second set, **"you shall put them in the ark."** (Deuteronomy 10:2). Receipt number three: *we rejected God's standard.* Those tablets sat in that box as a permanent record of a law that no one had kept.

No one, that is, until Jesus. He is the only human being who could ever say, and mean every word: **"I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."** (Psalm 40:8). He told the crowds, **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."** (Matthew 5:17). He kept every line of it, in thought, word and deed, so that Paul could write, **"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."** (Romans 10:4).

## What God Saw When He Looked Down

Step back and look at that box. Inside sat the three-count indictment of the human race. We refused His bread. We refused His priest. We refused His law. If God had looked straight into that chest, all He would have seen was the evidence against us.

But God did not look into the chest. Remember what sat on top of it: the Mercy Seat. And on the Day of Atonement, the high priest brought blood from the altar and sprinkled it there. **"He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times."** (Leviticus 16:14).

God, enthroned between the cherubim, looks down. Between Him and the evidence is a lid of gold, and on that lid is blood. He does not see the rebellion. He sees the blood covering the

rebellion. The record was not deleted. It was covered by a life given in its place.

A woman named Bernadette once told me she was sure God kept a file on her, and that every time she prayed He pulled it out and read it again. I asked her to picture the Ark. "Your file is in the box," I said. "But God is not looking in the box. He is looking at the lid." She laughed and cried at the same time.

Here is the part that takes my breath away. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the word used for the Mercy Seat was *hilasterion*. And that is the exact word Paul uses for Jesus: **"whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith."** (Romans 3:25). Jesus is not only near the Mercy Seat. He is it. The whole transaction happens inside one Person.

**Jesus is the Priest who carries the blood, the Sacrifice whose blood it is, and the Mercy Seat where it lands.**

CHAPTER 16

# The Day of Atonement

Of all the days in Israel's year, one stood alone. On the tenth day of the seventh month, nobody worked. Nobody ate. The whole nation fasted and waited, because on that day one man would walk behind the veil and come out again, or not.

God explained what was at stake: **"For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD."** (Leviticus 16:30). All your sins. Not some of them. A whole year of a whole nation's failures, dealt with in a single day.

Leviticus 16 lays out that day step by step, and every step is a portrait of Jesus.

## The Priest Who Took Off His Glory

On every other day of the year, the high priest was the most dazzling man in Israel. He wore a blue robe with golden bells and pomegranates around the hem. Over it was an embroidered ephod in gold, blue, purple and scarlet, and a breastplate set with twelve precious stones, one for each tribe. On his forehead was a gold plate engraved *Holiness to the LORD*. When he walked past, people noticed.

But on the Day of Atonement, he took all of it off. God's instruction was precise: **"He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on."** (Leviticus 16:4).

Plain white linen. No gold, no bells. On the most important day of the year, the greatest man in Israel dressed like a servant. He laid his glory aside before he could go in.

Does that sound familiar? Paul describes the Son of God, **"who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus did not stop being God, but He laid aside heaven's visible glory and walked among us in plain clothes. The carpenter's son from Nazareth was the High Priest of the universe in His linen garments.

## The Step Jesus Skipped

Before Aaron could do anything for the nation, he had a problem of his own to deal with. **"Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house."** (Leviticus 16:6).

The man going in to plead for everyone else had to start with his own sin. He was a sinner sent to help sinners.

Jesus never needed that bull. **"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."** (Hebrews 7:26-27). There was nothing in Him that needed covering. That is precisely why He could cover us.

Then came the incense. Aaron took a censer full of coals from the altar and two handfuls of sweet incense, and went behind the veil. **"And he shall put the incense on the fire before the**

**LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die."** (Leviticus 16:13).

Do you see what that cloud was for? It was to hide him. Even the high priest, on the holiest day, had to be shielded from the full glory, or it would kill him.

Now hear the contrast. The old way got one man in by hiding him. The new way gets all of us in by welcoming us. **"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** (Hebrews 4:16). No smoke screen. Boldly.

## Two Goats, One Salvation

And now we come to the part of the day I love most.

Aaron took two goats from the people, as alike as he could find, and brought them before the Lord. **"Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat."** (Leviticus 16:8).

The first goat, the Lord's goat, was killed as a sin offering, and its blood was carried behind the veil to the Mercy Seat. That goat dealt with the debt. Sin earns death, and a life was given. The theological word is *propitiation*: justice satisfied, the judgment of a holy God fully met. **"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."** (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus is that goat, but far more. **"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."** (Hebrews 9:12). And look at what His blood reaches that animal blood never could: **"how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"** (Hebrews 9:14). Not just the record. The conscience.

But God did not stop at one goat, because forgiveness has two halves.

The second goat was kept alive. **"Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness."** (Leviticus 16:21-22).

Picture the crowd watching that goat led out past the tents to the edge of the desert, smaller and smaller until it disappeared over a ridge, carrying away everything they had confessed. That is *expiation*: sin removed. The first goat dealt with the penalty. The second dealt with the presence. Your sin is not only paid for; it is carried off somewhere you will never run into it again.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming, he cried out, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29). *Takes away.* That is scapegoat language. Isaiah saw it too: **"And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."** (Isaiah 53:6).

## As Far as the East Is From the West

How far away does God carry it? David tells us. **"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."** (Psalm 103:12).

Notice he did not say north and south. If you travel north long enough, you hit the pole and start heading south. North and south meet. But east and west never do. You can travel east forever and you will never once be going west. The distance was chosen on purpose.

Micah adds another picture: **"You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."** (Micah 7:19). Not the shallows, where you

could wade out and fish them back. The depths.

I knew a man named Colin who carried one particular failure from his twenties for thirty years. He had confessed it more times than he could count. Every time, he felt forgiven for about a day, and then it would come limping back into camp. One evening I read him Leviticus 16 and asked him, "Colin, does the second goat ever come back?" He said, "No." I said, "Exactly. God never sends it back. You keep going out to the wilderness to fetch it." He told me later that was the night he stopped.

The Lord's goat says the debt is paid. The scapegoat says the sin is gone.

**One goat paid for your sin, and the other made sure you would never meet it again.**

CHAPTER 17

# No Chairs in the Tabernacle

Let me ask you to do a little inventory with me. We have walked the whole Tabernacle now, from the gate to the Mercy Seat. So let's list the furniture.

In the outer court: a bronze altar and a bronze laver. In the Holy Place: a golden lampstand, a golden table and a golden altar of incense. Behind the veil: the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat on top.

Six pieces. God gave Moses the measurements for nearly every one of them, down to the width of a hand. He specified the wood, the metal, the colors of the thread, the number of rings and the shape of the almond blossoms.

Now tell me what is missing.

There is no chair. Not one. No bench by the altar. No stool beside the lampstand. Nowhere in the whole complex for a priest to sit down. And the Mercy Seat does not count, because no man ever sat on it; it was the throne of God.

That is not an oversight. A God who specified the number of loops on a curtain did not forget the furniture. There were no chairs because there was no rest. The work of the priest was never, ever finished.

## Always Standing

Think about the life of a priest in Israel. Morning sacrifice, evening sacrifice, every single day. On top of that, a steady stream of people bringing sin offerings, guilt offerings, peace offerings, thank offerings. Sabbaths and new moons and feasts.

And then once a year the Day of Atonement, when the high priest went behind the veil, came out alive, and everybody breathed again.

And the next year? Same day, same goats, same blood, same veil. The whole thing all over again.

Hebrews puts it plainly: **"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."** (Hebrews 10:11).

Look at the three phrases in that verse. *Stands. Daily. Repeatedly.* A priest standing because he could never sit, offering every day because yesterday's offering had not finished the job, repeating the same thing because it could never actually take sin away. Hebrews says it outright a few verses earlier: **"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."** (Hebrews 10:4). The animals covered sin for a season. They could not remove it. So the priest kept standing.

## He Sat Down

And then comes the word "but", and it is one of the most beautiful buts in the Bible.

**"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."** (Hebrews 10:12-14).

*He sat down.*

And read the last line again. *Perfected forever.* Not perfected until your next bad week. Not perfected on the condition that you keep the momentum up. One offering, and the people it was made for are complete in God's sight for good.

Why did He sit? For the same reason you sit down after you have finished painting the last wall. Because there was nothing left to do. Hebrews opens the whole letter with this picture: **"when He**

**had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."** (Hebrews 1:3). Purged, then sat. Done, then rest.

You can hear the same thing from the cross. **"So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."** (John 19:30).

In the original language, "It is finished" is a single word: *Tetelestai*. It was an everyday word in the marketplace. When a merchant's bill had been settled, the word could be written across it: *paid in full*. Not "paid in part". Not "paid, pending further installments". Paid. In. Full.

Now put the two covenants side by side and see the difference that one word makes.

The old high priest went into an earthly tent built by human hands. Jesus went into the real thing: **"For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."** (Hebrews 9:24).

The old high priest carried the blood of bulls and goats. Jesus carried His own blood, and **"obtained eternal redemption"** (Hebrews 9:12).

The old offering was made every year without end. His was made one time, and it was enough: **"By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** (Hebrews 10:10).

And under the old arrangement, one man, once a year, for a few minutes, went near to God, while everyone else stayed outside. Under the new one, the veil is torn and every believer is invited in, every day, any hour.

## Standing Up in a Seated Room

Here is where this gets personal.

It is possible to believe every word of that and still live like an Old Testament priest. You were saved by grace, and then somewhere along the way you quietly picked up a job. Read enough. Pray enough. Serve enough. Feel guilty enough. And because enough never comes, you never sit down.

Some contemporary churches, without ever meaning to, teach exactly that. The message from the front is *grace*, but the message in the air is *try harder*. People leave every Sunday with a new list of things to do to stay in God's good books, and the list never gets shorter. That is religion's treadmill. It always feels like progress, and you never get anywhere.

Paul had to deal with this in Galatia, and he did not soften it: **"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"** (Galatians 3:3). And to the Ephesians he wrote, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

A friend of mine named Stan was the most faithful man in his church. First in, last out, on every schedule, at every prayer meeting. And he was exhausted, not in his body but in his soul. One day he admitted to me, "I am always afraid that if I stop, God will stop too." Stan was standing up in the Tabernacle, offering the same sacrifices every day, and wondering why they never took away the guilt.

We read Hebrews 10:12 together, and I asked him what Jesus was doing right now. "Sitting," he said. And then, after a long pause, "So why am I still standing?"

Here is the best news in the whole chapter. Paul says God **"raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 2:6). You are not only allowed to stop striving. You have already been given a seat, next to Him.

That does not make you lazy. Stan still serves; he just serves from rest now instead of for it. **"For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."** (Hebrews 4:10). The work you do for God becomes the fruit of a finished salvation, never the price of an unfinished one.

Jesus still says it today: **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28).

So whatever you have been trying to prove to God this month, put it down.

**If you are still trying to earn what He already finished, you are standing up in a room where He has already taken a seat.**

CHAPTER 18

# God's Calendar: The Spring Feasts

We have spent several chapters walking through a building. Now I want to show you that God did not only draw Jesus in architecture. He wrote Him into the calendar.

In Leviticus 23, God gave Israel a list of annual feasts, and He introduced them like this: **"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'"** (Leviticus 23:2).

Two words in that verse are worth slowing down for. The Hebrew word translated "feasts" is *moedim*, and it means appointed times. Fixed appointments. Dates in God's calendar. And the phrase "holy convocations" carries the idea of a gathering called together for a reading, a rehearsal. These were not simply holidays. They were rehearsals.

Think about that. Year after year, the whole nation acted out the same scenes on the same dates, in the same order. For fifteen hundred years a nation practiced a play without knowing they were in it. And then one spring, around AD 30 to 33, the Lead walked on stage, and every scene they had rehearsed came true, in order, on the right day.

There are seven feasts. Four fall in the spring, and those four were fulfilled at His first coming. Let's walk through them.

## Passover: The Lamb Inspected

The first appointment is Passover. **"On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover."**

(Leviticus 23:5).

You know the story of that first night in Egypt, so let's look at something else: the timing. God told Israel that on the tenth day of the month each household was to take a lamb, and then: **"Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month."** (Exodus 12:6). Why keep it for four days? To watch it. To make sure it really was without blemish. A lamb with a limp or a sore did not get to be the Passover.

Now look at the last week of Jesus' life. He rode into Jerusalem at the start of that week, around the very time the families were choosing their lambs. And for the next days, He was inspected. The chief priests questioned His authority. The Pharisees tried to trap Him about taxes. The Sadducees tested Him on the resurrection. A lawyer quizzed Him on the greatest commandment. Matthew 21 to 23 reads like four days of examination, and at the end of it nobody could find a flaw.

Then the final inspector gave the verdict. Pilate stood before the crowd and said, **"Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."** (John 19:4). The Lamb had passed inspection.

And watch the clock on the day He died. Mark tells us, **"Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him."** (Mark 15:25). The third hour is nine in the morning, the hour of the morning sacrifice in the Temple. Then, **"at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice"** (Mark 15:34), three in the afternoon, the hour when the evening sacrifice was offered and the Passover lambs were being slain. While the knives were busy in the Temple courts, the true Lamb was dying outside the city wall.

Paul does not leave us guessing: **"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."** (1 Corinthians 5:7).

## Unleavened Bread: No Corruption

The very next day began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, seven days with no yeast in the house. Before the feast, families swept every corner and searched with lamps to find even a crumb of leaven and get it out.

All through Scripture, leaven pictures sin, the little bit of corruption that spreads quietly until it has worked through the whole lump. Paul picks that up in the same breath as Passover: **"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."** (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Jesus was laid in the tomb as this feast began. And because there was no leaven in Him, no sin at all, there was nothing in Him for death to work on. David had written it a thousand years earlier: **"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."** (Psalm 16:10). His body lay in the grave, but it did not decay. Death had no leaven to feed on.

And here is a detail that never fails to move me. Look closely at the flat unleavened bread, the matzah, and you will see rows of stripes where it has been baked, and lines of little holes where it has been pierced to stop it rising. Striped and pierced. **"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:5). And Zechariah: **"Then they will look on Me whom they pierced."** (Zechariah 12:10). They were holding a picture of Him in their hands at every Passover table.

## Firstfruits: The Receipt for Yours

The third appointment is the one that makes me want to stand up and shout. God told Israel that when they reaped their harvest, they were to bring the first sheaf to the priest: **"He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."** (Leviticus

23:11).

The day after the Sabbath. That is Sunday.

The first sheaf of barley was the down payment. It said, *the rest of the harvest is coming.* You did not wave one sheaf and then go home empty. The firstfruits was God's guarantee of the whole field.

On that Sunday morning, while the priest was waving the first sheaf in the Temple, the women were standing at an empty tomb. Paul draws the line for us: **"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."** (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

His resurrection is not only a wonderful thing that happened to Him. It is the receipt for yours. If you belong to Him, you are part of the harvest that first sheaf guaranteed.

## Pentecost: Two Loaves and Three Thousand

Then Israel counted fifty days. **"Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven."** (Leviticus 23:16-17).

Baked with leaven. In a calendar where leaven was swept out of every house, here are two loaves deliberately made with it. Why? Because these loaves are not a picture of Christ. They are a picture of us. Two loaves, Jew and Gentile, both still with flaws in them, presented together to God. **"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation."** (Ephesians 2:14).

And on that exact day, **"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."** (Acts 2:1). The Spirit fell, and the church was born.

Jewish tradition remembered this feast as the time the Law was given at Sinai. Now compare the two days. At Sinai, after the golden calf, **"about three thousand men of the people fell that day."** (Exodus 32:28). At Pentecost, **"that day about three thousand souls were added to them."** (Acts 2:41). Three thousand died when the law came on stone. Three thousand lived when the Spirit came on hearts. **"For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."** (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Four appointments. Four fulfillments. On the right days, in the right order.

**Fifteen centuries of rehearsal, and on opening night He hit every mark.**

CHAPTER 19

# The Summer Gap and the Autumn Feasts

We left the calendar at Pentecost, with the Spirit poured out, three thousand people saved and two leavened loaves waved before the Lord. Four appointments kept, four out of four, each one landing on its own day. And then, if you keep turning the pages of Leviticus 23, something strange happens.

Nothing.

After Pentecost there is no feast for about four months. The long, hot summer runs on with no holy convocation, no trumpet, no special sacrifice on the calendar. The farmers are out in the fields. The wheat is being brought in, sheaf after sheaf, row after row. And God, who has been so particular about every date so far, says nothing at all until the seventh month.

I used to think that gap was just a quiet stretch in the farming year. Then I read what Jesus said beside a well in Samaria.

## Four Months and Then Comes the Harvest

**"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"** (John 4:35).

Four months. Those are His words, not mine. The disciples were thinking about grain, and Jesus was looking past them at a crowd of Samaritans walking out of town toward Him. The harvest season had already begun, and it was a harvest of people.

That is where you and I live. We are standing in the summer gap. The spring feasts are behind us, fulfilled to the day at His first

coming. The autumn feasts are still ahead. And in between lies the long season of the harvest, when the good news goes out to every nation, every tribe and every street, one person at a time.

Notice what the harvest season is not. It is not a waiting room. Nobody on a farm sits on the porch through August waiting for the autumn festival to start. August is the busiest month of the year. Jesus said, **"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."** (Matthew 9:37-38).

I know a woman I will call Maureen who spent years of her Christian life reading every book she could find on the end times. She had charts on her fridge. One evening her teenage grandson asked her, quite simply, how he could know God, and she realized she had no idea where to begin. She told me later, laughing at herself, "I knew everything about the last trumpet and nothing about the next conversation." She put the charts away and started a Bible study in her kitchen. That is somebody who understood what season she was in.

Every day of summer is mercy. Every day the trumpet has not yet sounded is another day for somebody you love to come in from the field.

## The Trumpet

Then the seventh month arrives, and the last three feasts come quickly, one after another, in a matter of a few weeks.

The first is Trumpets. **"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation."** (Leviticus 23:24). In the wilderness, God had told Moses to make silver trumpets for two jobs: to call the whole congregation together and to tell the camp it was time to move (Numbers 10:2). The trumpet meant gather, and the trumpet meant go.

Now listen to Paul. **"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Gather and go. The people of God gathered from every corner, and the whole camp moving, once and for all, into His presence. Paul says it again to the Corinthians: **"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."** (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Now I want to be careful, because this is where many a good Bible teacher has run off the road. Every few years somebody does the math and announces the day, the day comes and goes, and the gospel gets laughed at. Jesus closed that door Himself: **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."** (Matthew 24:36). If the angels do not know, I am not going to guess. The feast tells us what will happen and in what order. It does not hand us a date.

## A Nation Looks Up, and God Moves In

Ten days after Trumpets came the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day in Israel's year. We have already walked through what the high priest did on it. Now see where the prophets say that day is pointing.

Zechariah writes, **"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** (Zechariah 12:10).

Read that slowly. It is God speaking, and He says they will look on *Me* whom they pierced. A nation that has walked for centuries without recognizing its Messiah finally looks up and sees the wounds. The mourning is deep, the grief is real, and the very next thing Zechariah says is this: **"In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."** (Zechariah 13:1). Mourning, then cleansing. That is the Day of Atonement on a national scale. Paul saw it coming too: **"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.'"** (Romans 11:26).

And five days after that came the happiest feast of all, Tabernacles. For a week the whole nation moved out of their houses and lived in shelters made of branches, remembering the years when God had lived among them in a tent in the desert. It was harvest home. On the last great day of that feast Jesus stood up and shouted, **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."** (John 7:37). He was telling them who the feast was about.

The prophets saw Tabernacles kept by the whole world: **"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."** (Zechariah 14:16). And John, at the very end of the Bible, heard the final fulfillment announced from heaven: **"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."** (Revelation 21:3).

That is where the whole calendar is heading. Not to a chart on a fridge. To a home where God lives with His people and **"there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying."** (Revelation 21:4).

So how do we know the last three will come true? The same way you trust a friend who has never once been late. He died on Passover. He lay in the tomb on Unleavened Bread. He rose on Firstfruits. He poured out His Spirit on Pentecost.

**He kept the first four appointments to the hour. That is your evidence for what He will do with the last three.**

CHAPTER 20

# Prophet, Priest and King

There were three kinds of people in ancient Israel who had oil poured on their heads. Prophets were anointed to speak for God. Priests were anointed to stand before God for the people. Kings were anointed to rule the people under God. Three offices, three anointings, and God kept them strictly apart.

He meant it, too. When King Saul got impatient waiting for Samuel and offered the burnt offering himself, it cost him his kingdom (1 Samuel 13:13-14). When King Uzziah, a good king with a long reign, walked into the temple to burn incense on the golden altar, the priests stood in his way, and he walked out with leprosy on his forehead (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). A king could not be a priest. A priest could not crown himself king. Each man held one piece of the job.

Now here is the word you need. The Hebrew for "anointed one" is *Mashiach*, Messiah. The Greek is *Christos*, Christ. When we say Jesus Christ, we are saying Jesus the Anointed One. And the Old Testament had been quietly promising for centuries that one day a single Man would carry all three anointings at once.

## One Man, Three Anointings

Start with the Prophet. Moses told Israel, **"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear."** (Deuteronomy 18:15). *Him you shall hear.* On the Mount of Transfiguration, with Moses himself standing there, the Father's voice came out of the cloud and said almost the same words: **"This is My beloved**

**Son. Hear Him!"** (Mark 9:7). But Jesus was more than another prophet passing on a message. **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** (John 1:1). The other prophets carried the word. He is the Word.

Then the Priest. David wrote a strange line in Psalm 110: **"The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'"** (Psalm 110:4). David was a king from the tribe of Judah, and priests came from Levi. Yet here was a royal Son who would also be a priest, forever, in an older order than Aaron's. That is Jesus. **"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Then the King. **"And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."** (Revelation 19:16).

And Zechariah put all of it together in one sentence that would have got Uzziah's attention: **"He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne."** (Zechariah 6:13). A priest on a throne. What God kept apart for a thousand years, He joined in one Person.

Why does this matter on a Tuesday? Because you need all three. You need a Prophet, because you do not know the truth on your own. You need a Priest, because you cannot get to God on your own. You need a King, because you cannot run your own life, though heaven knows we all try. A friend of mine I will call Owen told me he had spent years treating Jesus as a wise teacher he quoted at dinner parties. "I had the Prophet," he said. "I had never let Him be my Priest, and I certainly had not let Him be my

King." The day he did, the quoting stopped and the following started.

## Portraits in the History Books

The offices are not the only place He shows up. The history books of the Old Testament are a gallery of portraits, real men and women whose stories God shaped so that they would rhyme with His Son's. Let me walk you down the corridor.

Joseph. Loved by his father, hated by his brothers, stripped of his coat, sold for silver, counted as dead, falsely accused, thrown into prison, and then lifted to the right hand of the throne of Egypt. When famine came, the very brothers who had sold him came bowing for bread, and they did not recognize him. When they finally did, he said, **"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."** (Genesis 50:20). Rejected by his own, exalted by God, and then the savior of the people who rejected him. If that does not sound familiar, read Acts 2 again.

Joshua. Moses could bring the people out of Egypt, but he could not bring them into the land. That job went to a man named Joshua, *Yehoshua*, meaning "the LORD saves." It is the same name as Jesus. Before the walls of Jericho, Joshua met a Man with a drawn sword and asked whose side He was on. **"No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."** (Joshua 5:14). Joshua fell on his face and worshiped, and the Commander did not stop him. He told him instead, **"Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy."** (Joshua 5:15). Angels refuse worship. This One accepted it. Hebrews calls Jesus **"the captain of their salvation"** (Hebrews 2:10), the One who takes us into what the law could only look at from the other side of the river.

Ruth and Boaz. Under the law, if you lost your land or your family name, a close relative could buy it back. He was called the

kinsman-redeemer, and he had to meet three conditions. He had to be related. He had to be able to pay. And he had to be willing. In the book of Ruth the nearer relative was related but said, **"I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance."** (Ruth 4:6). Boaz was related, able and willing, and he bought back everything and married the foreign widow besides. Now look at Jesus. Related: **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same."** (Hebrews 2:14). Able: sinless, with a life worth more than all of ours. Willing: **"who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross."** (Hebrews 12:2). Related, able and willing. That is your Redeemer.

## Greater Than Jonah, Greater Than Solomon

And then two men Jesus named Himself. When the religious leaders asked Him for a sign, He gave them one: **"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."** (Matthew 12:40). A prophet swallowed by death and given back alive, and a pagan city brought to repentance by his preaching. And in the very next breath: **"The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."** (Matthew 12:42).

Greater than Jonah. Greater than Solomon. Greater than Joseph, Joshua and Boaz. Every one of them was a sketch drawn in pencil. He is the finished portrait in full color. Every anointed man in Israel held part of the job for a little while, and then laid it down at the graveside.

**Israel needed three men to hold the job. Heaven sent one Man to hold it forever.**

PART THREE

# The Prophets

CHAPTER 21

# Isaiah's Suffering Servant

If Jesus took those two men to only one chapter of the prophets that afternoon, I am convinced it was this one. Isaiah 53 reads less like a prophecy and more like an eyewitness account, filed about seven hundred years before the event. A complete scroll of Isaiah was found in the caves near the Dead Sea, copied out generations before Jesus was born, and the chapter is all there. Nobody wrote it after the fact. It was sitting on the shelf, waiting.

The passage actually begins three verses early, at Isaiah 52:13, and it starts at the end of the story: **"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high."** (Isaiah 52:13). God tells you the ending first, so that when you read what comes next you do not lose heart. Because the very next line is this: **"So His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men."** (Isaiah 52:14). Exalted and marred. Lifted up and torn apart. Isaiah holds both in his hands and does not let go of either.

## Despised, Rejected and Silent

Then the chapter opens with a question that ought to sting: **"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"** (Isaiah 53:1). The arm of the Lord is God's own strength, coming in person to rescue. And Isaiah's question is, will anybody recognize it when it comes?

The answer is no. **"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that**

**we should desire Him."** (Isaiah 53:2). A green shoot in a dry field, from a carpenter's workshop in a town people made jokes about. No halo. Nothing to make a crowd turn its head.

**"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."** (Isaiah 53:3).

Notice who is talking. *We* hid our faces. *We* did not esteem Him. Isaiah is not pointing at somebody else's sin. He puts himself in the crowd, and he puts you and me there too.

And then the silence. **"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."** (Isaiah 53:7). Stand in Pilate's hall and watch it happen. The chief priests pile up their accusations, and Matthew tells us Jesus **"answered nothing"** (Matthew 27:12). Pilate is amazed. Every other prisoner who ever stood in front of him begged, argued or bargained. This One said nothing, because He had not come to be acquitted. He had come to be the lamb.

## The Little Word "For"

Now we come to the heart of the chapter, and to the most important little word in it.

**"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Look at the word *for*. Wounded *for* our transgressions. Bruised *for* our iniquities. That word is the language of substitution. Someone standing in someone else's place, taking what was addressed to another. The people watching thought He was being punished for His own crimes, smitten by God. Isaiah says no.

The wounds had our names on them.

And look at the trade being made. He takes the wounds; we take the healing. He takes the chastisement; we take the peace. That is not a fair exchange, and it was never meant to be. It is a rescue. Paul says the same thing in one breath: **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). And Peter, who watched it happen, quotes Isaiah straight back: **"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."** (1 Peter 2:24).

Then Isaiah tells us why it was needed. **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."** (Isaiah 53:6). The verse begins with *all* and ends with *all*. All of us went astray, and all of it was laid on Him. You go in at one end as a lost sheep, and you come out the other end with your iniquity on somebody else's shoulders.

A woman I will call Felicity told me she had read that verse for twenty years as a piece of poetry. One morning she read it with her own name in it: Felicity has turned to her own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of Felicity. She said she sat in her car outside work and could not go in for ten minutes. The words had not changed. The pronoun had.

## A Rich Man's Grave and a Living Seed

Isaiah does not stop at the death. He gets the burial right too, and it is the kind of detail nobody could arrange. **"And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth."** (Isaiah 53:9).

Think about that. A man executed between two criminals would normally be thrown into a criminal's grave. The rich do not lend

their tombs to crucified men. But **"there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus."** (Matthew 27:57). He laid the body **"in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock"** (Matthew 27:60). Assigned with the wicked, buried with the rich. A contradiction, and Isaiah wrote it down anyway.

And then the line that should make every reader sit up: **"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand."** (Isaiah 53:10).

He dies as an offering, and then *He shall see His seed* and *prolong His days*. How does a dead man see his children and live a long life? There is only one way. The resurrection is sitting in the same chapter as the cross. **"He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied."** (Isaiah 53:11). You are part of the labor of His soul. When He looks at you, He is satisfied. The chapter ends with Him praying for the very people killing Him: He **"made intercession for the transgressors"** (Isaiah 53:12), which is exactly what He did on the cross: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."** (Luke 23:34).

Years later a government official from Ethiopia was riding home in his chariot, reading this very chapter out loud and getting nowhere with it. Philip ran up and asked, **"Do you understand what you are reading?"** (Acts 8:30). The man said, **"How can I, unless someone guides me?"** (Acts 8:31). Then he asked the question everybody should ask of Isaiah 53: **"I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"** (Acts 8:34). And Luke tells us, **"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him."** (Acts 8:35).

*Beginning at this Scripture.* It is the Emmaus road all over again, with Philip doing for one man what Jesus did for two. That is

what this chapter is for. Open it for someone, and let it tell them whose wounds those were.

**Seven hundred years before the cross, Isaiah wrote your name into the word "for".**

CHAPTER 22

# David's Cross

I want you to sit with the timing on this one before we read a word of it. Psalm 22 was written by King David roughly a thousand years before Jesus was born. Rome did not exist. Nobody in Israel had ever seen a crucifixion, and the method would not be used for centuries. David was a king writing songs in Jerusalem. He had seen men die by sword and spear. He had never seen a man nailed to a tree.

And yet he wrote this psalm.

## A Cry That Was a Citation

It opens with a scream. **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?"** (Psalm 22:1).

A thousand years later, at the ninth hour on a Friday afternoon, after three hours of darkness over the land, **"Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"** (Matthew 27:46).

Here is something that will change how you hear that cry. In those days the Scriptures had no chapter numbers and no verse numbers. If you wanted to point someone to a psalm, you quoted its first line. Saying "My God, My God" was like saying "Psalm 22." So when Jesus cried those words from the cross, He was doing two things at once. He was telling the truth about what was happening to Him, because in that moment He was bearing the sin of the world and the Father's face was turned away. And He

was pointing every scribe and priest standing at the foot of that cross to a psalm they all knew by heart. *Go home and read it. You are standing in it.*

And the psalm itself says why the Father was silent: **"But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel."** (Psalm 22:3). The forsaking was not God being cruel. It was God being holy, while His Son carried what holiness cannot look at.

## Written From the Foot of the Cross

Now walk through the psalm with the Gospels open beside it. It reads as if David were standing on Golgotha taking notes.

The mockers first. **"All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'"** (Psalm 22:7-8). And Matthew: **"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads."** (Matthew 27:39). Then the chief priests, men who knew the Psalms better than anyone alive, said almost word for word what David had written: **"He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"** (Matthew 27:43). They quoted Psalm 22 at Him without realizing it. The prophecy was fulfilled by the very people who should have recognized it.

Then the body. **"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death."** (Psalm 22:14-15).

That is a medical description of crucifixion. A man hanging by his arms has his joints pulled apart by his own weight, and the loss of blood leaves the heart laboring and the mouth bone dry. And John tells us, **"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled,**

**said, 'I thirst!'"** (John 19:28). *That the Scripture might be fulfilled.* Even in agony, He was keeping track of the psalm.

Then the line that makes skeptics go quiet. **"For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet."** (Psalm 22:16). Dogs was what Jews called Gentiles, and it was Gentile soldiers who drove the nails. Pierced hands and feet, written down before anybody had thought of doing such a thing to a human being. Days later the risen Jesus would say to Thomas, **"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands."** (John 20:27).

Then the next verse: **"I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me."** (Psalm 22:17). Stripped, stretched and stared at. Luke says simply, **"And the people stood looking on."** (Luke 23:35).

And then the strangest detail of all, because it is so small and so specific that nobody would invent it. **"They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."** (Psalm 22:18).

Two different actions. The garments divided, the clothing gambled for. John, who was standing right there, tells us exactly how it happened: **"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled."** (John 19:23-24).

Four Roman soldiers who had never read a psalm in their lives, playing dice at the foot of a cross to pass the time, and reciting David word for word with their hands. Nobody hanging on a cross gets to choose what happens to his clothes.

And there is one more thing the soldiers did not do. We saw at the Passover that they left His legs unbroken. David had sung the

same promise over the righteous man: **"He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken."** (Psalm 34:20). The Law said it of the lamb, the psalm said it of the righteous One, and the soldiers kept both without knowing either.

## The Psalm Does Not End at the Cross

Here is what most people miss, and what I believe Jesus wanted every listener to find when they went home and read it. Psalm 22 does not end in darkness. Halfway through, at verse 21, the whole psalm turns, like a man who has gone under the water and come up again.

**"I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You."** (Psalm 22:22). The One who was forsaken is now standing among His brothers, singing. Hebrews puts those exact words in the mouth of the risen Jesus (Hebrews 2:11-12). **"For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard."** (Psalm 22:24). The cry of verse one was answered.

Then the psalm goes global: **"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You."** (Psalm 22:27). A crucified Jew becoming the hope of every nation on earth. That is the summer harvest we live in.

And the last line of the psalm: **"They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this."** (Psalm 22:31). The psalm that begins with a cry of abandonment ends with *He has done this*. It opens with one cry from the cross and closes with another: **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30).

David also saw beyond the grave. Peter stood up at Pentecost and quoted another of his psalms: **"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see**

**corruption."** (Psalm 16:10). Then Peter pointed out that David was dead and buried and his tomb was just down the road, so he could not have been talking about himself. **"He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption."** (Acts 2:31).

Nails, dice and an empty tomb, all set down a thousand years early, about a death David had never seen.

**David wrote the cry, the soldiers threw the dice, and Jesus finished the psalm.**

CHAPTER 23

# Daniel's Timetable and Zechariah's Silver

Some prophecies are big and sweeping, and you can imagine a determined man trying to live up to them. But scattered through the prophets are smaller prophecies, oddly specific ones, and they are the ones I love most, because nobody could arrange them. You cannot choose the century you are born in. You cannot set your own price at your own betrayal. You cannot tell the priests what to buy with the money.

Let me show you a handful of them.

## A Calendar Given to Daniel

Daniel was an old man in Babylon, praying about the ruins of Jerusalem, when the angel Gabriel came to him with a timetable. **"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."** (Daniel 9:24).

Look at that list. Make an end of sins. Make reconciliation for iniquity. Bring in everlasting righteousness. That is not a building program. That is the work of the Messiah.

Then Gabriel gives the starting gun and the finishing line: **"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah**

**shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary."** (Daniel 9:25-26).

The word "weeks" here means sevens, and most readers through the centuries have taken them as sevens of years. Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks make sixty-nine sevens, which is 483 years. Count forward from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, issued by a Persian king a little over four hundred and fifty years before Christ, and you land in the early decades of the first century, in the years of Jesus' public life.

Let me be straight with you, because people get carried away here. There is more than one decree that could be the starting point, and more than one way to reckon the years, so careful students come out at slightly different dates. I am not going to hand you a day and an hour. But every honest reckoning lands in the same neighborhood, and that neighborhood is the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.

And here is the part nobody can argue about. Gabriel said the Messiah would be cut off *before* the city and the sanctuary were destroyed. In AD 70 the Roman legions burned Jerusalem and pulled the temple down stone by stone. It has never been rebuilt. Which means that if Daniel was right, the Messiah had to come, and had to be cut off, before AD 70. The window has been shut for nearly two thousand years. Only one candidate walked through it.

A friend I will call Rajesh, an engineer by trade, told me Daniel 9 was what finally got him to take the Bible seriously. "I did not need the math to come out to the exact day," he said. "What got me was that the prophecy has an expiration date, and the only Man who fits it was crucified a generation before it ran out."

And notice the four words that explain the whole thing: *but not for Himself*. Messiah would be cut off, and not for anything He had done. He had done nothing. He was cut off for what we had

done.

Jesus held His people accountable for this calendar. Weeping over Jerusalem, He said its ruin would come **"because you did not know the time of your visitation"** (Luke 19:44). They had the timetable. They did not read the clock. **"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son."** (Galatians 4:4).

## A Donkey, a Friend and Thirty Pieces of Silver

Five hundred years before Palm Sunday, Zechariah told Jerusalem how her King would arrive. **"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."** (Zechariah 9:9).

Conquerors rode war horses. This King came on a borrowed colt, and the crowds shouted, **"Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!"** (Matthew 21:9). Matthew tells us plainly, **"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet."** (Matthew 21:4).

A skeptic will say a man who knew his Bible could arrange to ride a donkey. I will grant him that one. But what happened a few days later was not in Jesus' hands.

David had written, **"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."** (Psalm 41:9). At the Last Supper Jesus quoted it about the man sitting at His own table: **"He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me."** (John 13:18). Not an enemy. A friend.

Then the price. Zechariah, acting out the part of a shepherd rejected by his flock, asked for his wages: **"So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—that princely price they set on**

**me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter."** (Zechariah 11:12-13).

Thirty pieces of silver was not a random sum. Under the law of Moses, it was the compensation paid when an ox gored a slave to death (Exodus 21:32). *That princely price*, God says, with heavy irony. The value they put on the Shepherd of Israel was the price of a dead slave.

And watch every detail come true. Judas went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him, **"And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver."** (Matthew 26:15). Then, sick with guilt, **"he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed."** (Matthew 27:5). The priests would not put blood money into the treasury, so **"they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in."** (Matthew 27:7).

The exact sum. Thrown down. In the house of the Lord. Spent on a potter's field. Four details, written five centuries earlier, and every one of them carried out by men who wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

## The Forerunner, the Region and the Works

There are others in this family of small, unarrangeable prophecies.

Isaiah said someone would come first to clear the road: **"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"** (Isaiah 40:3). That was John the Baptist, preaching by the Jordan.

Isaiah even named the region where the light would first shine. Not Jerusalem, the holy city, but the despised north, **"the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali ... in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."** (Isaiah 9:1-2). Jesus made His home in Capernaum, right in that territory, and Matthew points to the verse (Matthew 4:13-16).

And Isaiah described what the Messiah's ministry would look like: **"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing."** (Isaiah 35:5-6). When John the Baptist sat in prison wondering whether Jesus really was the One, Jesus did not send him an argument. He sent him Isaiah: **"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."** (Matthew 11:4-5).

A window that slammed shut in AD 70. A traitor at the table. A price, a temple floor and a field.

**A man can borrow a donkey. Only God can set the price, the traitor and the calendar.**

CHAPTER 24

# How Many Prophecies?

Whenever I talk about this, somebody always asks the obvious question. If Genesis 3 and Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 and Daniel 9 and Zechariah 11 are all pointing at Jesus, how many of these things are there?

Let me give you the honest answer, because the honest answer is more impressive than the tidy one.

## It Depends Who Is Counting

There is no single agreed number, and anybody who hands you one without telling you whose count it is has skipped a step. The figure depends entirely on how strictly you define the word "prophecy". Do you count only flat predictions, the kind that say "this will happen in that town"? Or do you include the types and shadows, the Passover lamb and the bronze serpent and the scapegoat, that the New Testament itself treats as pointing forward?

Depending on where a careful student draws that line, the published counts run all the way from 2 at the very strictest to 456 at the most generous. The strictest reading of all accepts only a couple of passages, such as Daniel's seventy weeks, as predictions that can mean nobody but the Messiah. Other careful counts land at sixty-five, or seventy-three, passages of direct prediction.

The number you have probably heard from a pulpit is "over 300", and it sits comfortably in the middle of the range. It is entirely defensible. One well-known list puts it at 301. One careful count

of strictly predictive prophecies, every one of them a plain forecast rather than a picture, lands at 127, of which 103 are direct. The same count finds 191 passages with a personal reference to Christ.

And the largest figure, 456, comes from a nineteenth-century scholar who did something rather clever. He did not ask which verses Christians apply to Jesus. He went through the ancient Jewish writings and cataloged every Old Testament passage that *the rabbis themselves* applied to the Messiah or to the days of the Messiah. Seventy-five from the books of Moses, two hundred and forty-three from the Prophets, one hundred and thirty-eight from the Psalms and the other Writings, supported by more than five hundred quotations from the rabbis.

I want you to notice why that is stronger than it first looks. That 456 is not a Christian claiming a verse. It is a record of what Jewish teachers, long before the argument was about Jesus, already expected their Messiah to be. The bar was not invented afterwards to fit Him. The bar was already standing, and it was set higher than most Christians realize. And the man who compiled it added a lovely piece of humility: he doubted his list was complete.

So when somebody tells you "there are exactly 353 prophecies", smile and ask whose count it is. Then tell them the range. You lose nothing by being accurate. Jesus is not helped by our exaggeration.

## Twenty-Nine in a Single Day

Here is the detail that tends to stop a room. A great many of these prophecies cluster around one event, the betrayal, the trial, the cross and the burial. One well-known survey counts twenty-nine of them fulfilled in a single day, between Thursday night and Friday evening.

Let me walk you through that day in one breath. He was betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9), sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12), the money thrown down in the house of God (Zechariah 11:13) and spent on a potter's field (Zechariah 11:13). His disciples forsook Him (Zechariah 13:7). He was accused by false witnesses (Psalm 35:11) and stood silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7). He was wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5), struck and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6), and mocked (Psalm 22:7-8). His strength failed under the cross (Psalm 109:24-25). His hands and feet were pierced (Psalm 22:16). He was crucified with criminals (Isaiah 53:12) and prayed for the men who did it (Isaiah 53:12). He was rejected by His own people (Isaiah 53:3) and hated without a cause (Psalm 69:4). His friends stood far off (Psalm 38:11). The crowd shook their heads at Him (Psalm 109:25) and stared at Him (Psalm 22:17). His garments were divided and lots were cast for His clothing (Psalm 22:18). He suffered thirst (Psalm 69:21) and was offered gall and vinegar (Psalm 69:21). He cried out the forsaken cry (Psalm 22:1) and committed His spirit into His Father's hands (Psalm 31:5). Not one of His bones was broken (Psalm 34:20). His heart was broken (Psalm 22:14). His side was pierced (Zechariah 12:10). Darkness covered the land at noon (Amos 8:9). And He was buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

Twenty-nine. Written by different men, in different centuries, in different books, and every one of them came true inside twenty-four hours.

And here is what makes it unanswerable: most of that list is made of things a man cannot arrange for himself. You could, at a stretch, ride into a city on a donkey on purpose. You cannot arrange what a soldier does with your coat. You cannot arrange for your executioners to leave your legs alone. You cannot arrange to be executed as a criminal and then buried in a rich man's grave. Those two do not belong in the same sentence, unless God is the one writing it.

## About Those Odds

You may have heard the probability argument. A mathematician once set out to estimate the chance of any one man in history fulfilling just eight of these prophecies by accident. He put it at one in ten to the seventeenth power, a one with seventeen zeros after it.

He offered a picture to help. Cover the whole state of Texas in silver dollars, two feet deep. Mark one coin with a cross, stir it into the pile, blindfold a man, and let him walk wherever he likes and bend down once. The chance that he picks up the marked coin is the chance he calculated for eight prophecies. For forty-eight prophecies he put it at one in ten to the one hundred and fifty-seventh.

Those numbers are staggering, and I will use them. But let me be straight with you about what they are. The probabilities rest on estimates the man assigned himself. How likely is it, by chance, that a man is born in Bethlehem? One in a thousand? One in ten thousand? He had to pick a number for each, and somebody else could pick a different one. The odds illustrate the point; they do not prove it.

A friend of mine I will call Nigel learned this the hard way. He quoted the Texas silver dollars to a colleague who happened to be a statistician, and she took the argument apart in about four minutes. Nigel came to me rather deflated. "I made the whole thing sound like a magic trick," he said. A month later he went back to her, admitted the numbers were estimates, and simply opened Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 side by side with the Gospels and let her read. She did not become a believer that afternoon, but she told him it was the first time a Christian had ever made her think.

So here is my rule, and I hold myself to it. If you quote the odds, say out loud that they are estimates. Sow exaggeration and you reap suspicion. Sow honesty and people will trust everything else you say more, because you were careful with that one thing. An

honest smaller argument beats an oversold big one every time. Peter put it this way: **"And always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."** (1 Peter 3:15).

The real weight was never in the arithmetic. It is in the specificity. A price, a field, a coat, a tomb. A window of history that closed in AD 70. Written down centuries early, by men who never met Him, and fulfilled by people who did not want Him.

**Count them strictly or count them generously; the record still fits only one Man.**

CHAPTER 25

# Half a Sentence

We have walked a long way together on this road, and we have counted the prophecies honestly. Now I want to show you something Jesus did with His own mouth, in His own hometown, that ties the whole lot together. It is a sermon that lasted one sentence. Actually, it lasted half of one.

## The Hometown Sermon

Luke takes us to Nazareth near the start of His ministry: **"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read."** (Luke 4:16).

Picture the room. These are the people who watched Him grow up. The boys He played with in the street are in there, now with beards of their own. Some of them probably have a table at home that He built. To them He is the carpenter's son, gone off preaching around Galilee and getting talked about.

And somebody hands Him the scroll. **"And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written."** (Luke 4:17).

Notice the word *found*. He did not open it at random. He rolled that long scroll to a particular place on purpose, the way you would flip straight to a page you know by heart. It was Isaiah 61, and He read it out:

**"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives**

**and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."** (Luke 4:18-19).

Everyone in that room knew this was the job description of the Anointed One, and *Messiah* means exactly that: the Anointed.

Then Luke slows the camera right down: **"Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him."** (Luke 4:20).

You could have heard a pin drop. And into that silence He said the shortest sermon ever preached: **"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** (Luke 4:21).

Not *one day*. Not *I hope*. Today. The One Isaiah wrote about is standing in your synagogue, and you know His mother.

## Where He Stopped

Now here is the part almost everybody reads straight past, and once you see it you will never unsee it.

Go back to Isaiah and read what He was reading. The prophet wrote: **"To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn."** (Isaiah 61:2).

Do you see it? Jesus stopped in the middle. He read *to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD* and then He closed the book. He did not read *and the day of vengeance of our God*. In our Bibles there is only a comma between those two phrases. In the scroll there was not even that. He stopped mid-sentence, rolled it up, handed it back and sat down.

That was not a man who lost his place. The One who inspired Isaiah to write that sentence knew exactly where it went next. He was announcing which half He had come to fulfill that day, and He was quietly telling the room that the other half was still on the calendar.

The acceptable year of the LORD is the season of favor, of open doors, of good news to the poor, of chains coming off and blind eyes opening. The day of vengeance is judgment, the day when everything wrong is finally put right and every enemy of God is dealt with. Both are true. Both are coming. But they were never meant to arrive on the same day.

At His first coming He came to save. At His second coming He comes to judge and to reign. Between the two halves of that sentence there is a comma, and you and I are living inside it.

Paul says the same thing with a trumpet blast: **"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (2 Corinthians 6:2). We are in the half of the sentence Jesus read out loud. That is good news, and it has a clock on it.

## Two-Thirds Done, One-Third Coming

This is where the counting we did earlier pays off. When you sort the messianic prophecies, they do not divide into the ones that came true and the ones that failed. There are no failed ones. They divide into the ones for His first coming and the ones for His second.

Everything about His birth, His ministry, His death and His resurrection belongs to the first coming, and all of it is finished. The bloodline, the village, the healings, the donkey, the silver, the cross, the borrowed tomb, the empty grave. Done. Stamped. Filed.

But there is a whole second body of prophecy that has not happened yet. Very roughly, about two-thirds of messianic prophecy landed at His first coming, and about a third is still ahead. Let me show you a little of what is on that list.

He is coming back the same way He left. The angels told the disciples as they stood staring at the sky: **"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."** (Acts 1:11).

He is coming back to a particular hill. **"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east."** (Zechariah 14:4). The same hill He ascended from.

Nobody will miss it. **"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him."** (Revelation 1:7).

Every argument about Him will be settled. **"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** (Philippians 2:10-11). Some will bow in worship and some will bow because they have no choice left, but every knee will bend.

And the thing that went wrong in the garden will be put right. **"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him."** (Revelation 22:3). The curse that started in Genesis 3 ends in the last chapter of the Book. God does not leave stories unfinished.

## Why He Is Waiting

Somebody always asks: if the second half is coming, why is it taking so long? Two thousand years is a very long comma.

Peter answers that: **"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9).

The delay is not forgetfulness. It is mercy. Every day the second half of that sentence does not arrive is another day the first half is still being proclaimed. Another day for your neighbor. Another day for your son. Another day for the person who has not been told yet.

And here is how I know you can trust the half that has not happened. Look at the track record on the half that has. Hundreds

of details, landed to the day and to the hour, on things no man could stage: a town, a tribe, a price in silver, a coat and a dice game, a rich man's grave for an executed criminal. God has never once been late and never once been wrong. The same Author wrote both halves of that sentence with the same pen.

So when somebody asks whether the promises about His return are real, just point back to Nazareth, to a carpenter who rolled up a scroll in the middle of a line, sat down, and then went out and fulfilled every word He had just read.

**The first half of that sentence has already come true. That is your evidence for the second.**

CHAPTER 26

# A Completely Different Agreement

Everything we have walked through on this road so far has been shadow. The altar, the goats, the feasts, the blood on the doorposts. Beautiful shadows, drawn with a steady hand. But a shadow is only there because something solid is standing in the light. Now I want to show you the solid thing, and I want you to see that it is not a patched-up version of the old arrangement. It is a different agreement entirely.

## Not According To

Around six hundred years before Jesus, in one of the darkest seasons of Israel's history, with Babylon at the gates and the Temple about to be flattened, God gave Jeremiah a promise that must have sounded impossible:

**"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD."** (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

Look at three little words: *not according to*. God is not saying, "I will give the old covenant a fresh coat of paint." He is saying, "I am going to make one that is not like the first one at all."

When your old car has finally died, you do not buy it new air fresheners. You get a new car. Not an upgrade. A replacement.

And Hebrews, looking back, draws exactly that conclusion: **"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete."** (Hebrews 8:13). Not evil, just finished with its job. The old covenant was a tutor that walked us to the school gate. Then the Teacher Himself came out to meet us.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus picked up a cup and said the words Jeremiah had been waiting six centuries to hear: **"This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."** (Luke 22:20). The new agreement was signed, and it was signed in red.

## Written on the Inside

So what is actually different? Jeremiah gives us the details, and the first is the location:

**"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."** (Jeremiah 31:33).

The old law was carved in stone and hung over you from the outside. It told you exactly what was right, and it was perfectly true, and it could not lift a finger to help you do it. A stone tablet is a wonderful mirror and a useless engine.

The new law is written on the inside, on the one surface that actually drives your behavior. God is not shouting instructions at you from the top of a mountain anymore. He has moved in.

Then the second difference, and this is the one that makes me want to stand on a chair: **"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."** (Jeremiah 31:34).

Under the old arrangement, the yearly sacrifice was, by design, a reminder. Hebrews says it plainly: **"But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year."** (Hebrews 10:3). Every year, the same day, the same file pulled out of the same drawer. Here is everything you did. Again.

Under the new arrangement, the file is closed and the record is gone. Hebrews quotes Jeremiah to make the point: **"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."** (Hebrews 10:17). God is not pretending He does not know. He is choosing, as a judge who has seen the debt paid in full, never to bring it up again. If He does not bring it up, you may stop bringing it up too.

Ezekiel, writing in the same era, says the same thing from another angle: **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."** (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Read that last part slowly: *cause you to walk*. Under the old covenant, obedience was demanded from the outside. Under the new one, obedience is produced from the inside. You are not white-knuckling your way towards a standard. You are cooperating with Someone who lives in you. **"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."** (Philippians 2:13).

## The Dead Tree and the Living One

Imagine a man who owns a dead tree. Every morning he goes to the market, buys apples, and ties them onto the bare branches with string. From the road it looks wonderful. Up close it is exhausting, and by Thursday the apples are rotting and he has to start again.

That is religion without the new covenant. Trying to produce from the outside what can only grow from the inside.

Now imagine his neighbor, who plants a living tree, waters it, and gets out of its way. In season the fruit just comes, because fruit is what living trees do. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."** (Galatians 5:22-23). Notice it is called

fruit, not homework.

Some contemporary churches drift back into the string-and-apples business without meaning to, turning the freedom of the new covenant into a longer list of rules. The answer is not to try harder. The answer is a new heart. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5:17).

## Everything Adam Lost

So what was the point of the whole thing? What did He actually come to get back? Let me give you four things Adam dropped in the garden that the Last Adam picked up.

The dominion. Man was made to rule, to carry God's image and look after His world: **"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth."** (Genesis 1:26). We handed the keys away for a piece of fruit. But Paul calls Jesus the Last Adam: **"The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."** (1 Corinthians 15:45). What the first Adam lost, the Last Adam took back, and He shares it: those who receive His grace **"will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."** (Romans 5:17).

The access. For fifteen hundred years a heavy curtain stood between God and everyone. Now the invitation reads: **"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."** (Hebrews 10:22). You do not need an appointment, a go-between or a good week. The room is open.

The victory over death. Isaiah saw it coming: **"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces."** (Isaiah 25:8). Paul picks up that very verse, **"Death is swallowed up in victory"** (1 Corinthians 15:54), and

then shouts at the grave: **"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"** (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death used to be a wall. Now it is a door.

And a family with the doors flung open. God told His Servant: **"I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."** (Isaiah 49:6). Paul tells people like most of us, who were never on the original guest list: **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."** (Ephesians 2:13). Out of two hostile groups He made **"one new man from the two, thus making peace."** (Ephesians 2:15).

**The invitation was never narrow; it was always heading for you.**

PART FOUR

# The Burning Heart

CHAPTER 27

# Known in the Breaking of Bread

Let's go back to the road, because we have nearly arrived.

The sun is low. Two tired men have walked seven miles with a Stranger who has just taken them from Genesis to Malachi and shown them, page after page, that every lamb, every altar, every promise and every prophet was about the Messiah. They still do not know who He is. Luke told us at the start of the walk: **"But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him."** (Luke 24:16). Their hearts are warming and their eyes are still closed. That happens more often than you would think.

## He Waits to Be Asked

Then this: **"Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther."** (Luke 24:28).

I love this verse. The risen Son of God, who has just conquered death and hell, reaches a front gate and makes as though He is walking on. He does not barge in. He does not announce Himself. He has walked the whole seven miles beside them, and now He leaves the next move to them.

That is not a game. That is His manner. He comes close, He walks the whole way with you, and then He lets you decide whether to open the door. Years later He would say it to a whole church: **"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."** (Revelation 3:20). Knocking, not kicking. And look what He wants to do once He is inside.

Dine. Sit at the table.

And these two men, bless them, did not let Him go: **"But they constrained Him, saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.' And He went in to stay with them."** (Luke 24:29).

*Abide with us.* That might be the best prayer anybody prayed that whole weekend. They did not yet know who He was. They only knew that when He talked, something happened inside them, and they did not want it to stop. If you have ever closed your Bible and wanted to open it again straight away, you know exactly how they felt.

## Took, Blessed, Broke, Gave

**"Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."** (Luke 24:30).

Notice who is doing the hosting. He is the guest. They invited Him in. But the moment He sits down, He picks up the bread and takes over the meal. That is what happens when you invite Jesus into anything: the guest becomes the Host.

Four verbs. He took, He blessed, He broke, He gave. If you have read the Gospels, those four words ought to make the hair on your arms stand up. They are the same four He used on the hillside when five thousand people were fed. They are the same four He used three nights earlier in the upper room: **"And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'"** (Luke 22:19).

Maybe it was the way He held the loaf. Maybe it was the words of the blessing, the same ones they had heard Him pray a hundred times. Maybe, as His hands reached across the table, they saw the marks in His hands. Luke does not say. He just says:

**"Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight."** (Luke 24:31).

Seven miles of Bible teaching, and the penny dropped over a piece of bread. And the moment it dropped, He was gone. Not because He had left them, but because they no longer needed to see Him to know He was alive. The Bible class had done its work. The table sealed it.

## Recognition Happens at the Table

Here is something I have noticed over many years of walking with people. Recognition rarely happens in the cathedral. It usually happens at the table.

I do not say that against cathedrals. I love a full church and a great choir. But the moment most people actually recognize Jesus, the moment the thing they have heard a thousand times finally lands, tends to happen somewhere very ordinary. A kitchen. A parking lot. A hospital corridor. A small table with a cup of coffee going cold.

Let me tell you about a young woman I will call Imogen. She grew up in church. She could win any Bible quiz you put in front of her. She knew the books of the Bible in order, forwards and backwards, and could tell you who begat whom. And privately, she assumed God found her a bit of a disappointment. She believed every word about grace and was quite sure it applied to everybody but her.

Nothing changed for her at a conference. It changed on an ordinary weeknight, at her own kitchen table, reading Isaiah for what must have been the fiftieth time. She got to the line **"See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands"** (Isaiah 49:16), and suddenly she was looking at nail-scarred hands, and something she had recited all her life finally landed somewhere below her neck. God was not disappointed in her. Her name was written in His scars. She wept, and she could not really explain to

anybody why. The next Sunday a friend asked her what had happened, and all she could say was, "I think I met Him."

That is Emmaus. That is Luke 24:31 happening at a kitchen table. She had known about Him for twenty years. That night she knew Him.

## Did Not Our Heart Burn?

And now the line the whole book has been walking towards: **"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"** (Luke 24:32).

Look at what they are saying. The burning did not start at the table. It had been going the whole walk. Somewhere between Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 53 their hearts had caught fire, and they had not identified it. Only when they knew Him did they look back and say, "Of course. That was Him. That is what that was."

Jeremiah knew that feeling: **"But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones."** (Jeremiah 20:9). God Himself asked, **"Is not My word like a fire?"** (Jeremiah 23:29).

I know that fire too, because I had my own road to Emmaus.

I was like those two men: sad, disappointed, distraught. Religion had left me disillusioned. Double standards, rules and regulations had hurt me. Worse, I had turned bitter. And bitterness poisons everything. You blame circumstances. You blame other people. You carry a chip on your shoulder and complain nonstop, and from your own point of view it all makes perfect sense. I have been there. For well over two years it cost me my fire, my dedication and my commitment, and I could not pull myself out.

Then a man who had known me back when I was a happy guy, full of faith and enthusiasm, the kind who lights up a room, crossed my path again. He looked at me and said, "Look, Paul, I don't disagree with your complaints. I might agree with ninety percent of them. But you used to be such an inspired person.

Everybody wanted to be around you. You had a fire about you, and now that fire is gone. You're angry about everything. You blame everything on everybody. It has changed your character, your personality. People have to count the cost before they come around you now. Is that really who you want to be?"

That question hit me like a ton of bricks. I had always avoided people like that like the plague, the complainers and murmurers who can never be happy. I did not want to be one of them. So I asked for prayer, a prayer of deliverance. The Bible warns us to be **"looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."** (Hebrews 12:15). Defiled is not a nice word. It means stained. Bitterness marks you. It pollutes your character.

Even after that prayer, it was an uphill fight. My mind had a negative groove worn into it. I had talked so openly about those people and those circumstances that my thoughts ran there by default. I had to force myself to think good thoughts about them, one at a time, to rebuild my habits of mind.

I was living in Chicago then. Every morning I got up at five, grabbed my roller skates, picked up a coffee and sat in the car before sunrise, listening to the older fathers of the faith. I had become hungry to understand divine healing. In all my years as a Christian, nobody had told me you could lay hands on the sick the way Jesus did and expect a miracle right there and then. Now I had heard it was still happening today, and I wanted to know what Paul really meant: **"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance."** (1 Thessalonians 1:5). And again: **"For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power."** (1 Corinthians 4:20).

That morning I was listening to A. W. Tozer preach about the power of the Holy Spirit. All of a sudden I broke into

uncontrollable weeping, my hands went up, and I burst out in tongues. The Lord appeared to me in His resurrected body. The light of love in His eyes flooded my heart and my mind, and every bit of that negativity, that complaining and that bitterness was washed out in an instant. I was filled with light, joy and purpose.

That was my road to Emmaus. The Lord revealed Himself to me, and from then on the Word blazed with wisdom, understanding and light. It was as though the Scriptures had been opened to me for the very first time. I could not stop reading. I hungered for truth and filled page after page with notes.

I wanted to be around people who were bearing fruit, so I went to conference after conference to spend time with believers who were actually living out the gospel. I did not want church as usual anymore. I did not want Christianity as a religion. I wanted the Book of Acts. I wanted to live Acts 29. And I could not stop sharing my faith. I read the Bible as an instruction manual, and it realigned my whole life: away from the zigzags of indecision and wrong turns, away from self-effort and the chase after personal accomplishment. I just wanted to be like Jesus, because I had been with Him. It was exactly what the council saw in Peter and John: **"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."** (Acts 4:13).

That was me. I was bold as a lion because I had been with Jesus. I never wanted to be without Him again, and I wanted everybody to experience Him.

So let me tell you what that warmth is. You have felt it. Maybe even in this book. You are reading along, and suddenly a verse opens up, a piece clicks into place, the lamb in Egypt and the Lamb on the cross line up in front of you, and you cannot sit still. You want to call somebody. You want to read it out loud to the

dog.

People will tell you that is just enthusiasm. A nice feeling. A good teacher on a good day. It is not.

Notice the two things those disciples linked together: *while He talked with us* and *while He opened the Scriptures to us*. The burning came when He was speaking through the Book. It still does. Jesus promised: **"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."** (Matthew 18:20). Two disciples and an open Bible was enough on the Emmaus road. It is enough at your table tonight.

So the next time your heart burns over a page of Scripture, do not shrug it off. Do not explain it away. Do what they did. Say, "Abide with me." Pull out a chair. Let Him take the bread.

**That burning is not enthusiasm. That is Him in the room.**

CHAPTER 28

# Reading the Old Testament With Him

Nobody wrote down what Jesus said on the Emmaus road. But Luke tells us what He did with the eleven a few hours later, and it is the same gift: **"And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."** (Luke 24:45).

He did not just tell them what the Old Testament meant. He opened their understanding so they could read it themselves. That is what I want to do in this chapter. I want to put the cookies on the lowest shelf and hand you a way of reading that you can use tomorrow morning with a cup of coffee and an open Bible. You do not need a degree. You need a question, a little patience, and the Teacher.

## One Question, Four Answers

Here is the question. Ask it of every passage you read in the Old Testament: *Where is Jesus here?*

Not every page will shout it. Some will whisper. But you will be amazed how often He turns up once you start looking. And when He does, He usually shows up in one of four ways. Let me give them to you as four simple words: promise, picture, person and pattern.

A *promise* is a straight prophecy. God says plainly that something will happen, and it does. **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son."** (Isaiah 7:14). Bethlehem in Micah. Thirty pieces of silver in Zechariah. These are the easiest to spot because they are spoken out loud.

A *picture* is a type, a real person, object or event that God designed to look like Jesus before Jesus came. The Passover lamb. The bronze serpent on the pole. The manna. Isaac carrying the wood up the hill. Nobody in the story is pointing and saying "this means the Messiah," but when you hold the picture next to the Gospels, the outline matches perfectly.

A *person* is an appearance, those moments when Someone shows up in the Old Testament who is more than an angel. The Commander of the LORD's army standing in front of Joshua with a drawn sword. The fourth figure walking around in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, where the king said, **"and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."** (Daniel 3:25). Many of us believe these are the Son Himself, making visits before He ever made His home here.

A *pattern* is a principle, the way God does things, repeated so often that you start to recognize His handwriting. The rejected one who becomes the rescuer. Life coming out of death. The younger brother chosen over the elder. The deliverer who is despised by his own people first. When you see those patterns, you are seeing the shape of the cross before the cross.

Promise, picture, person, pattern. Write those four words inside the cover of your Bible.

## Let the New Testament Lead

Now, where do you start? Start where the apostles already did the work for you.

The New Testament is full of cross-references, signs on the road saying, "Look, here He is." Matthew is the master of this. Over and over he writes: **"So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet."** (Matthew 1:22). Every time you see "that it might be fulfilled," turn back and read the Old Testament verse he is pointing at. John does the same: Philip running to Nathanael and saying,

**"We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote."** (John 1:45). And the book of Hebrews is practically a guided tour of the Tabernacle, the priesthood and the sacrifices, with Jesus as the tour guide.

So here is a simple reading plan in plain words. Start by reading Luke 24 and the book of Hebrews, so you know what you are looking for. Then go back to Genesis and read the Old Testament a chapter a day, with a Gospel chapter alongside it. Keep a small notebook. Every time you find Him, write down the reference and one of the four words: promise, picture, person or pattern. In a year you will have a notebook full of Jesus, and you will never read the Old Testament as a dusty book again.

## Four Worked Examples

Let me walk you through a few, so you can see how it goes.

Take Joseph. Ask the question. Where is Jesus here? We met him earlier in the portrait gallery: the beloved son, rejected, sold, exalted, and saving the very brothers who sold him. That is a picture and a pattern at the same time. Now look at the little details. When Egypt was starving, Pharaoh said, **"Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do."** (Genesis 41:55). Centuries later at a wedding in Cana, Mary said of Jesus, **"Whatever He says to you, do it."** (John 2:5). And Joseph's own verdict on his story, that what his brothers meant for evil God meant for good, could be written over Calvary.

Take the Passover. You have already walked through it with me. Ask the question, and it practically answers itself. A lamb without blemish, its blood on the door, judgment passing over. The New Testament seals it: **"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."** (1 Corinthians 5:7). A picture, confirmed in writing.

Take Psalm 23. **"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."** (Psalm 23:1). Where is Jesus here? He tells you Himself:

**"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."** (John 10:11). And look at the three psalms side by side. In Psalm 22 the Shepherd dies for the sheep. In Psalm 23 the Shepherd leads them. In Psalm 24 the King of glory comes through the gates. Cross, care and crown, one after the other. That is a pattern you will never forget once you have seen it.

Take Isaiah 53. When the Ethiopian official read it in his chariot, he asked the exact question I am asking you to ask: **"I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"** (Acts 8:34). Philip's answer is the method of this whole chapter: he started at that very page and showed the man Jesus. That is a promise, as plain as daylight.

## A Word of Caution

Now let me put a fence around this field, because there is a ditch on both sides of the road.

On one side are people who never look for Jesus in the Old Testament at all. They read it as history, or as a collection of moral tips: be bold like Gideon, be loyal like Ruth. Those lessons are fine, but if that is all you get, you have missed the main Character.

On the other side are people who get so excited they start finding Jesus in every tent peg. I once heard someone explain the color of every curtain ring and the number of every goat hair as a secret code. That is not reading the Bible. That is decorating it. **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."** (2 Timothy 2:15).

So here is a simple rule. Let the New Testament lead. Where the apostles draw a line from the Old to Jesus, walk that line boldly. Where they are silent, hold your ideas lightly and say "this might be a picture" rather than "this is the hidden code." An honest picture is a gift. A fanciful one makes people distrust the true

ones.

And before you open the book, pray the best Bible-study prayer there is: **"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law."** (Psalm 119:18). That is what happened on the road. That is what still happens when you ask.

**Ask every page the same question, and the same Face keeps looking back.**

CHAPTER 29

# Seven Miles Back in the Dark

We have come to the end of the road, and the road turns out to have a second half.

**"So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together."** (Luke 24:33).

Stop and feel what that sentence costs. It is night. These two men have already walked seven miles today, on legs that had been carrying grief since Friday. The road back to Jerusalem is dark, rocky and not remotely safe; bandits worked those hills. Only an hour or so earlier they had begged the Stranger to stay *because* the day was far spent. And now, with the bread still on the table, they get up and walk the entire seven miles back.

## Nobody Told Them To Go

Here is what gets me every time. Nobody told them to. There was no command, no assignment, no schedule pinned to the synagogue door. Jesus did not vanish with a final instruction to report back to headquarters. He just vanished.

*The revelation itself produced the journey.*

That is the difference between information and encounter. Information can sit in a notebook for years. Encounter gets up from the table. When you have truly seen Him, you cannot keep it to yourself. Peter and John said it later in front of the very council that had condemned Jesus: **"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."** (Acts 4:20).

And look what happened when they arrived. Before they could even get their story out, the room met them with news of its own: **"The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"** (Luke 24:34). Then: **"And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."** (Luke 24:35).

That is discipleship in one verse. They received, and then they went and handed it on, the same night, at their own inconvenience, to people who needed it.

And do not miss the very next line: **"Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.'"** (Luke 24:36). While they were telling it, He turned up. That has not changed. When you open your mouth to tell somebody about Him, He has a habit of walking into the middle of the conversation.

I have watched Him do it again and again, often right at our own table.

Let me tell you about Bill. Linda and I used to meet him on our evening walks along the beaches of Baja California at sunset. Bill was homeless. He lived in a tiny beach shed, the kind people use to store chairs and umbrellas, and I am not sure it was long enough for him to lie down full length. Every time we walked the beach, we went looking for Bill and spent time with him. There was something in him we knew the Lord wanted to bring out.

One day he called us. "They're cleaning up the beach, and my house has to go." We went and picked him up. We had no idea where to put him, so we found a hotel room, thankfully a cheap one, and told him to stay put until we could figure something out.

After a week of paying for that room we were getting desperate, and Linda had an idea: make him a room in our garage. We were only using it for storage anyway. From then on, Bill was at our table for every meal.

Linda kept telling him how much God loved him, and Bill kept shaking his head. "God can't love me. You have no idea what I've done. God has no forgiveness for me." It turned out he was a Vietnam veteran who had been hired as a mercenary after the war, and he was deeply ashamed of everything he had done.

So Linda told him the story of Horace Alderman, a hardened rum-runner who had killed Coast Guard men while bootlegging in the Prohibition days, and who was hanged for it in 1929. Sitting in jail, he was visited by a pastor who kept witnessing to him. For a long time he rejected the man and mocked him, until one day he was converted. The change was so dramatic, and he brought so many prisoners to the Lord, that they had to move him from prison to prison across the country, because revival broke out everywhere he went.

That did it. Bill saw there was hope even for him, and he received the Lord. He became so hungry for the Word that every spare moment he was sitting on his bed in the garage, reading his Bible. He lived with us for a few months, until the day we had to take him to the hospital vomiting blood. Within a few hours of arriving, he went to be with the Lord. We cried, not only because we would miss Bill, but because God had chosen our home to be Bill's gate into heaven.

Then there was Brad, a handyman who came to help us for a day. We simply loved on him and told him about the Lord. He had been raised in church, but life had been very hard on him, and we told him to let Jesus take the steering wheel. The love we shared that one day made Brad part of our family. To this day he calls us regularly to thank us for leading him into a new life of love, peace and joy. He could not help saying it himself: "Didn't our hearts burn within us?"

And Jake. He came to us asking for help. He had lost everything and was living in his camper truck. We helped him with some money, and he kept hanging around, wanting to help us in return.

We witnessed to him and led him to the Lord, and his life took a whole new direction, from bummed out about his past to lit up with purpose and mission. All he wanted was to share his joy with everybody he met. He, too, had met a Stranger who fell into step beside him on his road to Emmaus.

We forget that sharing Jesus with someone can change the whole course of a life. It is worth every minute and every ounce of effort. Never accept an excuse for keeping quiet about the Stranger who can light up the life of everyone ping-ponging through life, trying to tell right from wrong and up from down, searching for wisdom and meaning.

All over the world, the human heart is the same. It is always looking for love: a love that lasts, a love that will not vanish, a love that fills the empty space in the heart, the missing piece in the puzzle of life's meaning. That is the peace that brings it all together, in perfect alignment with the will of the Creator.

## Three Notebooks on a Shelf

Now let me be honest with you about the danger of a book like this one.

Let me tell you about a woman I will call Lydia. She spent the best part of a year digging into exactly the things we have covered. She was a wonderful learner. She filled three notebooks with careful diagrams of the Tabernacle, color-coded charts of the feasts, and pages of prophecies with the references neatly written beside each one. Six months later those three notebooks were gathering dust on a shelf, and her everyday life looked almost exactly the same as before.

She had become an educated consumer, but not a disciple.

I do not tell you that to shame her, or you. I tell you because it is the easiest thing in the world to do. You can find all of this fascinating, feel your heart genuinely warm, close the last page, and change absolutely nothing. *Information without*

*transformation leads straight to stagnation.* James put it bluntly: **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** (James 1:22).

And the real tragedy is not that you wasted a few evenings reading. It is that somebody was waiting at the other end of your seven miles and never heard.

## Living in the Harvest Gap

Remember God's calendar? The spring feasts fulfilled to the day, then that long summer stretch with no feasts at all, before the trumpets of autumn. That gap is where we are standing right now. It is harvest season, and Paul tells us what time it is on the clock: **"now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."** (Romans 13:11).

You were not saved to sit in a spiritual waiting room. The trumpet could sound any day, and the fields are full. That gives us a holy urgency. Not panic. Urgency.

So here is your assignment. It is not complicated, and it fits in a week.

First, give one piece away. Not the whole book. One piece. The two goats. The Tabernacle with no chairs. The striped and pierced bread. The curse bypassed by a virgin birth. The half a sentence at Nazareth. Pick the one that made you sit up, and hand it to one person this week over coffee, in a text, on a walk.

Second, stop earning what He finished. Take the one thing you have been trying to prove to God this month and put it down. He sat down. Sit down with Him.

Third, find your Cleopas. Somebody in your life is walking away from Jerusalem right now with a dead dream and a downcast face, saying *we were hoping*. You do not need all the answers. Jesus did not begin by announcing who He was. He began by asking a question and then walking with them. Walk with

somebody.

A man I will call Barry did exactly that. He is not a preacher. He fixes furnaces. After working through these chapters he told a young apprentice in his van, between jobs, about the Passover lamb and the blood on the doorposts. That was all. The young man went quiet, then asked if he could borrow Barry's Bible. Now the two of them read a chapter together every Tuesday at lunch. One piece, given away, in a van.

## A Harvest That Does Not Stop at One Plant

Paul gave Timothy the blueprint for the whole Church: **"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."** (2 Timothy 2:2). Count the generations in that verse. Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others. Four links in one sentence. That is how the gospel got from a road outside Jerusalem to you.

*A disciple who never makes another disciple is a harvest that ends at one plant.*

And please do not tell me you are not qualified. The two on that road were not apostles. They were not famous. One of them does not even have a name in the record. And they became among the very first people on earth to tell the resurrection from personal experience. When the council looked at Peter and John, it saw ordinary men and drew one conclusion: **"And they realized that they had been with Jesus."** (Acts 4:13). That is the only qualification on the form.

You do not have to be qualified. You have to be willing to walk back.

So get up from the table. Leave the bread. The night is dark and the road is long, but you know who is alive, and somebody in Jerusalem needs to hear it. **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19-20). He walked the first seven

miles with them. He will walk your seven miles with you.

Think of what you are carrying now. A promise spoken in a garden. A lamb on the doorposts. A Tabernacle laid out in the shape of a cross. Two goats, one dead and one gone. A calendar kept to the hour. A psalm written a thousand years early. Half a sentence still waiting for its ending. That is not trivia for a quiz night. That is Jesus, unwrapped from Genesis to Malachi, and you know how it ends. We're winning.

The Old Testament spent four thousand years pointing at Jesus. He spent seven miles pointing at Himself.

**And now He has handed the pointing to us.**

CHAPTER 30

# Prayer of Praise and Commitment

Let's go to our King together. Pray this slowly, out loud if you can.

Father, thank You.

Thank You that You did not improvise. Before the foundation of the world You already had the plan, and the moment we fell in the garden You spoke the rescue out loud. Thank You for guarding a bloodline for four thousand years, through Abraham, through Judah, through David, to a little town called Bethlehem, so that Your Son could be born into it, legally entitled to the throne and clean of every curse.

Lord Jesus, I praise You. You are the Seed of the woman who crushed the serpent's head. You are the Lamb Abraham said God would provide. You are my Passover, whose blood on the doorposts of my life means judgment passes over. You are the bread that came down from heaven, the Rock that was struck once, the One lifted up so that whoever looks to You may live.

Thank You for the altar, where the judgment I earned fell on You instead. Thank You for the laver, whose measurements were never written down, because Your cleansing has no limit. Thank You for being the light in the room, the bread on the table, and the voice that never stops speaking to the Father for me.

Thank You that You are the Priest who carries the blood, the Sacrifice whose blood it is, and the Mercy Seat where it lands. Thank You that my failures are covered by Your blood, and that like the scapegoat You carried them away to a country I will never visit. Thank You for tearing the veil from top to bottom, so

I can come all the way in.

And thank You that You sat down. That it is finished. That there is nothing left for me to add and nothing left for me to pay.

Thank You that You kept the first appointments on Your calendar to the hour, and that You will keep the ones still to come. I wait for the trumpet, for the day every eye will see You and every knee will bow.

Father, forgive me for the times I have treated Your Word casually, as a book of tips instead of a book about Your Son. Forgive me where I have been slow of heart, where I have been a consumer and not a contributor, a hearer and not a doer. Today I lay that down.

I do not want only to be moved by this. I want to be changed by it. Take these truths off the page and write them on my heart, the way You promised You would. Where I have been striving, teach me to rest. Where I have been slow, make me quick to believe. Open my eyes every time I open Your Book, and let my heart burn the way theirs did on the road.

Holy Spirit, bring one name to my mind this week, one person walking away with a dead dream, and give me the courage to fall into step beside them and simply walk. Put my feet on the road back to Jerusalem, even in the dark. Make me a disciple who makes disciples. Let what You have given me not stop with me.

Use my life to point to You, the King who died, who rose again, and who is coming back soon.

I love You, Lord. Thank You for the walk.

**In the mighty name of Jesus, the Lamb who sat down and the King who is coming, amen.**

# Other Books by Paul Joseph

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Beyond the Pew

Jesus Beyond Religion

The Discipline of A Disciple

The Discipline of Triumph

The Butterfly Wonder

Power for the Hour

While You Were Busy

Activated Christianity

Every one of them is waiting for you at

**faithwithoutborders.us**

The *Handbook for a Disciple of Jesus* is free to download there too.

# BEGINNING AT MOSES

UNWRAPPING JESUS THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

**Two brokenhearted men. A seven-mile road. And a conversation that changed the way we read the Bible forever.**

On the first Easter Sunday, two disciples walked away from Jerusalem with shattered hopes. A Stranger joined them on the road to Emmaus, opened the Old Testament to them, and showed them Jesus throughout all those books. By the time they reached their door, their grief had turned into a burning fire.

In *Beginning at Moses*, Paul Joseph takes you step-by-step along that very road. Written with warmth, clarity, and deep scriptural insight, this book breaks open the scriptures so anyone can see the master thread running through redemptive history:

- **The Shadows in the Law:** Discover the hidden meaning behind the coats of skin in Genesis, the blood on the Passover doorposts, and why there were no chairs inside the Tabernacle.
- Trace God's prophetic calendar through the Spring and Autumn feasts and see how each one finds its fulfillment in Christ.
- See the cross foretold in David's Psalms, Daniel's precise timetable, and Isaiah's portrait of the Suffering Servant.

You don't need a seminary degree to understand the deep things of God. Grab your Bible, step onto the road to Emmaus, and watch the Old Testament come alive.

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